

Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety:

A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived
Experiences of Anxiety for Elite Egyptian Tennis
Athletes

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the anxiety experiences of elite Egyptian tennis athletes before and during competition. This research proposes an alternative approach that offers a new insight into the notion of anxiety with athletes. It relates existential anxiety to athletes, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to gain a more in-depth view of the phenomena of anxiety for these athletes. Eight elite Egyptian tennis athletes, 2 males and 6 females, between the ages of 18-25 were interviewed on their experiences of anxiety before and during competition. Four themes emerged from the transcript analysis including: the *emotional and physical manifestations* and sensations of anxiety, the *meaning* of competition for these athletes and how *loss* and *identity* are involved, the internal world of athletes with their *expectations*, *over-thinking*, *self-confidence* and their *routines*, and the *inter-relational* world that involves how others influence these athletes' anxiety and how being alone on the court is also part of their anxiety experience. These four themes reveal the complexity, multi-dimensionality and individuality of the anxiety experience for these athletes that opens up the *rite de passage* for incorporating counselling psychology using an existential approach to meet the existential needs of athletes. Its implications and recommendations for further research are also discussed to advocate integrating Existential psychology with Mental Skills Training to work with *athletes as a whole being instead of only just a performer*.

Key Words:

Anxiety, Athletes, Lived Experiences, Physical and Emotional Manifestations, Meaning of Competition, Internal World, Inter-relational World

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Abbreviations

MST Mental Skills Training

CBT Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy

IZOF Individualized Zone of Functioning

MSPE Mindfulness Sports Performance Enhancement

Transcript Notation

[] Additional Material for Context

[...] Omission and/or grouping two sentences together

() Translated Word

Chapter one Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the chapter

“Tennis is the sport in which you talk to yourself. No athletes talk to themselves like tennis players. Pitchers, golfers, goalkeepers, they mutter to themselves, of course, but tennis players talk to themselves — and answer. In the heat of a match, tennis players look like lunatics in a public square, ranting and swearing and conducting Lincoln-Douglas debates with their alter egos. Why? Because tennis is so damned lonely. Only boxers can understand the loneliness of tennis players — and yet boxers have their corner men and managers. Even a boxer's opponent provides a kind of companionship, someone he can grapple with and grunt at. In tennis you stand face-to-face with the enemy, trade blows with him, but never touch him or talk to him, or anyone else. The rules forbid a tennis player from even talking to his coach while on the court. People sometimes mention the track-and-field runner as a comparably lonely figure, but I have to laugh. At least the runner can feel and smell his opponents. They're inches away. In tennis you're on an island. Of all the games men and women play, tennis is the closest to solitary confinement” (Agassi, 2009, p. 8 &9).

Playing competitive tennis and winning can be thrilling and exciting, giving a sense of glory and achievement, but it also requires constant training, hard work, dedication and sacrifice. Such discipline, sacrifice, endurance and long training hours require that the tennis athlete learns how to be with themselves both on and off-court. This in turn can influence the athletes’ lived anxiety experience. Nadal (2011) said:

“What I battle hardest to do in a tennis match is to quiet the voices in my head, to shut everything out of my mind but the contest itself and concentrate every atom of my being on the point I am playing.” (p.1)

This research focuses on the experiences of anxiety for elite Egyptian tennis athletes before and during competition. Corlett (1996) considered that there had been a lack of understanding of players’ anxiety before and during competition from a multidimensional perspective. He suggested that looking into how other areas of an athlete’s life might affect their performance could help them understand who they are.

The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of anxiety for athletes by dwelling deeply on the phenomenon during and before competition. It examines anxiety holistically through the athletes’ lens rather than the proposed notion of

performance anxiety, putting aside the assumption that anxiety is always pathological. Some scholars believe that anxiety may not only be negative or uncomfortable (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015), but rather may be beneficial before and during performance.

Ravizza (2002) suggested that anxiety was a normal experience for athletes, describing it as an obstacle that athletes needed to learn to go through. It is an experience similar to other challenges in the athletes' sporting journey. Through their journeys, athletes should be regarded as whole beings and not just performers (Nesti, 2011), with choices, responsibilities and limitations (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015) that influence their anxiety experience. Billie Jean King (QuoteTab, 2019) said:

"Tennis taught me so many lessons in life. One of the things it taught me is that every ball that comes to me, I have to make a decision. I have to accept responsibility for the consequences every time I hit a ball."

It is hoped that through this research, I may propose alternative ways of helping athletes comprehend their anxiety experience and support the idea that counselling psychology using the existential approach may contribute to the field of sports psychology. In addition to this, the research proposes ways to work more effectively with athletes. The rest of this chapter presents the research question and the rationale behind this study. The second chapter reviews the literature about anxiety looking at how it had been studied and explained for athletes and how it could be explored differently through the existential approach. Chapter three discusses the methodology used in this research and chapter four presents the main results and data analysis. Following this, chapter five offers a discussion of findings in relation to the research question and the reviewed literature. Finally, the last chapter concludes the study, providing recommendations for future research and practice.

1.2. Research Question

The key research question is:

What are the lived experiences of anxiety for elite Egyptian tennis athletes before and during competition?

1.3. Rationale and Researcher's Background

The rationale behind this study involves several factors that have affected me as an ex-competitive tennis player, a mother of two young tennis players, a trainee counselling psychologist and an existential psychotherapist, and a person who is very interested in athletes' experiences in general. This research, in fact, is a way to study how competitive athletes exist in the world, aiming at working with them and helping them grow.

1.3.1. Self as a Competitive Tennis Player

I remember I started playing tennis at the age of six. Since then, it became a huge part of my life. In my first experience of playing competitively, I reached the semi-finals for the under 12s but I did not care so much about losing. However, after entering the Egyptian National Tennis Team, around the age of 14, I became very anxious about performing. The idea of not doing well enough haunted me as I strived to succeed and was expected to always do well in both sports and academics.

I was told that I was a talented player but I knew my fear and anxiety greatly hindered my performance during competition. Although I was still competing and performing well, I could have done much better at an international level. The anxiety I struggled with was overwhelming. It affected how I perceived myself as a tennis player. It was as if my whole life was about this sport: my self-esteem, social life, physical surroundings were outdoors in

the sun, and even my trips, which were to camps and tournaments. I even used to pray passionately before the matches. It seemed that this sport influenced me on all of the physical, personal, social and spiritual dimensions (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011).

I continued playing tennis competitively until I went to university. I placed either first, second or third at the junior national and Arab level. I had to reduce my training to keep up with my university studies. I found it difficult to lose to younger players. I realized that I clearly had a problem with losing, so when I had to undergo surgery because of an injury, I used it as an excuse to stop competing.

It took me a while to come to terms with the idea of losing who I was. I have become very interested in researching this topic, partly because I have always identified myself as a tennis player and an athlete. Being an athlete is an important part of one's self-identity (Law & Birgisdóttir, 2014).

1.3.2. Self as a Tennis Player's Mother

Currently, I have two boys, who play tennis. My elder son has struggled at different times when competing. I always wondered what is on his mind, yet I do not want to equate his experiences with mine. My younger son finds it very difficult to lose. We have discussed at different times what he finds difficult in losing, but it is difficult for both of them sometimes to express what they struggle with. However, as a psychologist, it occurs to me that my sons must have many feelings and thoughts going on that they do not share. This makes me curious about how they feel before, during, and even after their matches. In general, I became interested in the anxiety other players experience and how that experience affects their performance and life in general.

1.3.3. Self as an Existential Psychotherapist and becoming a Counselling Psychologist

As a student studying counselling psychology and a practitioner who uses existential therapy with clients, I have a philosophical stance at how I look at human existence and their lived experiences when trying to understand how they are. I have learned that humans exist within four worlds, in which we exist within a physical, personal, social and spiritual world (Van Deurzen, 2010). These worlds are related to each other and each person exists in these worlds differently, which will be further discussed in 2.11 (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). I have learned to place these worlds as a framework for my work when looking at experiences to help open up questions and discussions that may help clients learn more about their relationship with themselves, others and the world (Van Deurzen, 2010). Similarly, when I was thinking of exploring the experiences of anxiety for athletes, I had this framework in mind, especially that when I reflect on my experiences of being an athlete, I relate to how being a tennis player influenced me in all these dimensions. I also found the movie '*Chasing Mavericks*' enlightening and relating to this concept (See Plate 1). The movie portrayed the story of 'Jay Moriarity' who surfed the most dangerous wave at the age of 15. The movie revolved around the relationship Jay had with his coach and how he was trained. What was interesting for me were the four pillars of human foundation that the coach introduced and used to train him. He mentioned the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual pillars as essential for any human being. The physical pillar mainly includes the strength and physicality required to surf the wave; the mental is concerned with the mental preparation and calculations required for the wave; the emotional is concerned with how Jay handles and deals with his emotions and understanding what he is mostly fearful; and the spiritual is

concerned with understanding and finding the bigger purpose in life. Using these pillars to coach Jay resembled how I viewed athletes and their being in the world, and how they could be coached and counselled throughout their athletic journey. In addition, the way Jay related with his coach also involved the social dimension that I consider vital in the athlete's world (*Chasing Mavericks*, 2012). This laid the foundation for integrating an existential approach when working with athletes. This would add to my skills as a counselling psychologist when integrating my existential framework and training with cognitive-behavioural methods and other mind-body interventions used for athletes, helping me become a more rounded counselling psychologist.



Plate 1 Young Jay Surfing Chasing Mavericks

1.3.4. My Goal in Working with Athletes

My experiences, as a tennis player, a tennis player's mother, and a counselling psychologist-to be and an existential psychotherapist had inspired me to carry out this study. I intend to use the findings of this research and the conclusions obtained to help other athletes, who experience anxiety while competing. There are not many people working in the field of sports psychology in Egypt, which further motivates me to conduct this research and work in this field. For those who work with athletes, they tend to use coaching models and mental skills training. I intend to integrate counselling psychology using an existential approach to work with athletes in a different way that considers them as whole beings and not just as performers as this research indicates. This is not within the UK practice at present and considered as extremely innovative in Egypt.

The next chapter discusses the literature review related to the notion of performance anxiety and how athletes' anxiety maybe viewed existentially.

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.1. Introduction of the Chapter

This chapter provides a review of the past and current literature on anxiety within the sports psychology field proposing a focus on existential anxiety and an alternative way of working with athletes. Mark Nesti's (2004) book, *Existential Psychology and Sport: Theory and Application*, proposed a fundamental alternative to cognitive-behavioural approach in the field of sports. The book presents a theoretical and practical implementation of existential psychology. It explores the notion of anxiety and how anxiety in sports can be viewed within an existential phenomenological approach, suggesting that it has been difficult to understand how athletes experienced anxiety. He called for using a phenomenological approach based on self-report. Then he introduced how existential counselling would benefit athletes, staying with the athletes' experiences rather than giving them skills, as counselling psychology is not used often in the field of sports yet can help athletes reach their potential. This book was a good starting point for exploring the topic and continuing Nesti's work.

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

Predominantly a Scopus search on key terms “anxiety and sports”, “performance anxiety and sports” and “anxiety and competitive sports” in *Google Scholar*, *Psych Info*, *Jstor* and *Summon* showed a large number of articles on the topic. Due to the novelty of the field and lack of articles on existential psychology with tennis athletes, a wider search strategy was used to look at existentialism/existential psychology and/or with athletes/sports. A more detailed search using the key terms “anxiety and tennis”, “phenomenology and sports”, “existential anxiety and sports”, “qualitative research in sports psychology”, “IPA in sports psychology”, and “phenomenology in sports psychology” also yielded a few results.

The literature search included three phases: the first phase used the above terminologies during the first stages of the research, the second explored the themes that came up from the data analysis while writing the discussion and the third was another review of the collected literature looking at recent research published in 2017/2018/2019 that related to anxiety in sports, phenomenology and existentialism/existential therapy.

My inclusion criteria used the above key terms, within the last fifteen years, using English only text from established peer reviewed journals and some books. However, while searching for anxiety in sports I included research within the last twenty years. My exclusion criteria were research beyond the fifteen years unless it was a seminal key text to the topic, as seen in table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Search Strategy

Key Words	Dates Search	Justification
<i>Anxiety & Sports, Performance anxiety & Sports, Anxiety & Competitive Sports</i>	20 years prior (In addition to articles and books introducing theories of anxiety/arousal and performance)	Needed to comprehend the notion of anxiety in sports from the beginning; explored the history of anxiety in sports psychology
<i>Existential Anxiety, Phenomenological Philosophy</i>	Very early search into existential philosophy	I will be using existential literature as it is my main focus of integration in sport psychology
<i>Existentialism & Sports Psychology, Existential Anxiety & Sports</i>	15 years prior	This is since the introduction of existentialism/existential anxiety in sport psychology
<i>Qualitative Research & Sports Psychology; Phenomenology & Sports Psychology</i>	15 years prior (Except for seminal research such as Dale, 1996)	Wanted to explore the trend of research in sports psychology and the use of qualitative research

The structuring and selection of the headings and sub-headings for the literature review appeared to flow naturally. I started by first looking into the definition of anxiety in sports psychology, defining the key terms and concepts, then moving on to looking into the different theories that explained anxiety in sports and performance. I then moved to the different factors and components influencing anxiety with athletes, using the sub-headings according to the different factors. The next main heading explored the different approaches working with athletes, using sub-headings related to each approach. The logical flow after that was to move to existentialism, reviewing what has been lacking with some athletes and illustrating an

alternative/integrative way to look at anxiety. While researching existentialism in sports psychology, I came across several research exploring some existential notions, even if not directly related to athletes' anxiety. I moved to clarify some of the key notions that introduced an existential perspective while working with athletes, using each as a sub-heading. At the end, I narrowed down the topic to tennis athletes and offered the framework I work with as a counselling psychologist, thus I introduced the four worlds and their relationship to being a tennis athlete, using each world as a sub-heading.

2.3. Definition and Terms

According to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2016) a *sport* is defined as an activity that requires physical effort and certain skills, involving individuals or teams, who compete against each other. Sports may have various definitions and may include different sorts of activities, but the main common characteristics between all of them are that they have structure and a set of rules for players on how to play and perform fairly, based on certain ethics (Fortin, 2000). These rules are set in order to reach the end point with a winner; however, these rules may be broken at times, which may result in a penalty for the athlete (Mcfee, 2004). There has been criticism on how the goal of winning in sports is promoting violation of moral ethics, and how athletes are focused on winning at all cost, unlike sports ethics, which is based on sportsmanship and morality (Watson & White, 2007).

Sports may be categorized into dynamic and static with different intensities: high, moderate or low; for example, tennis is a high dynamic sport (Mitchell, Haskell & Raven, 1994). In this thesis, the literature refers to the different sports played in the Olympics, which range from track and field, to ball sports, aquatic sports and racket sports (Fortin, 2000). Likewise, athletes can be categorised into amateurs and elite, but the focus of this thesis is on elite athletes, who commit to a certain level of hard work and discipline to push themselves

beyond their limit and strive for success (Fortin, 2000).

McDougall, Nesti & Richardson (2015) proposed that the criteria for defining what elite athletes mean might not be very clear. However, Hanin (2010) proposed that for elite athletes, competitive sport is essential. Each competitive sport differs in the physical and psychological demands required from performers (Moran, 2004). Craft, Magyar, Becker & Feltz (2003, p. 44) asserted, “An inherent aspect of competitive athletics is the need for athletes to meet the demands of competition and to perform well under pressure.”

This thesis focuses on the experiences of elite Egyptian athletes, defined as those who play competitively top-level sports on a national, college or international basis. These three categories differ in terms of competitive level. *National* competitions are played nationally in Egypt, while *international* competitions are played internationally around the world with more professional athletes, falling under the International Tennis Federation. By *college tennis*, the term means the American system, which provides athletic scholarships and opportunities for junior tennis athletes to enter colleges in the US and play for the team. The level of the team depends on the school and the division but each team has 8-12 tennis players (Usta.com, 2019). In this research, the term ‘*sport*’ maybe used interchangeably with top-level sports or competitive sports. Tennis, as one type of racket and competitive sport, will be concentrated on throughout the thesis (Fortin, 2000).

2.4. Different Definitions and Conceptualization of Anxiety in Sports

Anxiety in sports especially that felt around competition time has been the main focus of many research studies (Nesti, 2011a). Nicholls, Polman & Levy (2010) stated that the relationship between athletic performance and anxiety was ambiguous. Despite, many attempts of theorists to look at how sports performance was related to anxiety, the link had proved difficult to recognise.

Cheng, Hardy & Markland (2009, p. 271) stated that anxiety was “the most difficult emotion to define and diagnose”. Patel, Omar & Terry (2010) researched the definitions and theories around performance anxiety symptoms with younger athletes. They suggested it was hard to identify sports-related anxiety symptoms, as it required a definition and measurement of the severity of these symptoms. Nevertheless, they were able to break down the process of performance anxiety into sequence of states or stages: pre-competition anxiety, competition anxiety and post-competition anxiety (Patel et al., 2010).

Sports anxiety has been often called performance anxiety, defined as an anxiety or fear that influences athletes negatively while performing (Cheng et al., 2009; Patel et al., 2010). Competitive anxiety is also used to describe anxiety related to sports competition (Patel et al., 2010; Khan, Haider, Ahmad & Khan, 2011). The term has been defined as “a specific negative emotional response to competitive stressors” (Mellalieu, Hanton & Fletcher, 2009, p. 4).

Similarly, Khan et al. (2011) proposed that pre-competitive anxiety, experienced prior to the competition, is related to worry and distress. However, it has not been explored clearly how long this worry and tension are experienced. These definitions assume that performance anxiety influences athletes in a negative way (Nesti, 2004; Patel et al., 2010; McDonough, Hadd, Crocker, Holt, Tamminen, Schonert-Reichl, 2013), looking at it as an uncomfortable pre-competitive emotion (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015).

Nesti (2004) stated that early researchers in sports psychology examined performance anxiety using Spielberger’s definition of trait and state anxiety. Spielberger (1966) defined state anxiety as the immediate emotional reaction and feelings of tension, while trait anxiety is the predisposition to perceive an event as stressful and thus react in state anxiety. Patel et al. (2010), similarly, differentiated between competitive state anxiety and competitive trait anxiety.

Martens, Vealey & Burton (1990) added a more multidimensional definition of anxiety by defining each category of state and trait anxiety into both cognitive and somatic anxiety, examining how thoughts influence feelings and behaviour, and vice versa (Mellalieu et al., 2009; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). They defined somatic anxiety as the physiological emotional part of experiencing anxiety, while cognitive anxiety as the mental cognitions of anxiety with negative expectations.

Martens et al. (1990) developed the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory (CSAI-2) to measure the intensity of anxiety, which was later used by several researchers in the field of sports psychology. However, later researchers criticized the CSAI-2 inventory and its usage in this field, suggesting that by looking at the intensity of anxiety, there is an assumption that anxiety is always negatively hindering performance (Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 1995).

Jones (1995) criticized the inventory, saying it did not focus on how athletes interpret anxiety as debilitating or facilitative. Perry & Williams (1998) also agreed on this point, proposing that the CSAI-2 scale looks at just intensity, not allowing for further knowledge about anxiety. They also called for considering the different skill level of athletes and the influence of gender on anxiety.

Lane, Swell, Terry, Bartram & Nesti (1999) critiqued the reliability of the CSAI-2, as they suggested that some phrases were not accurate in identifying cognitive anxiety, calling for further research to help validate the results and improve the inventory. Craft et al. (2003) and Woodman & Hardy (2003), similarly, critiqued the efficiency of the inventory, stating that anxiety and performance were influenced by many other factors rather than self-confidence alone. Nevertheless, research in the field of sports psychology continued to use the modified version of the CSAI-2 to study the intensity and direction of anxiety (Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 1995; Humara, 1999; Craft et al., 2003; Hanton, Neil, Mellalieu & Fletcher, 2008; Tsopani, Dallas & Skordilis, 2011). The CSAI-2 as an inventory managed to measure the intensity and

direction of anxiety but did not explore other factors rather than self-confidence or the mental apprehension of anxiety that influence athletes' anxiety.

By looking at both direction and intensity, the perception of anxiety in sports psychology altered from being a negative emotion hindering performance to one that may help facilitate it in particular instances (Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 1995; Perry & Williams, 1998; Hanton, Mellalieu & Hall, 2002). There has been a call to re-conceptualize performance anxiety, as research has shown performance anxiety is not always unpleasant and negative and former assumptions oversimplify a notion that is very complex (Cheng et al., 2009). Cheng et al. (2009) argued that the adaptive side of anxiety and how it may help people cope entails a shift in how we regard anxiety in general. They suggested anxiety has a cognitive, physiological and regulatory component, which may better illustrate the relationship between anxiety and performance (Cheng et al., 2009).

It is difficult to try to explore the notion of anxiety with athletes without discussing its relationship with performance. The terms 'performance anxiety' and 'competitive anxiety' remained the most commonly used terms to refer to anxiety in sports; competitive anxiety seemed to incorporate a more multidimensional definition in the literature of sports psychology, suggesting that self-confidence plays a huge role in competitive anxiety and performance. There are several theories and models that explain the relationship between anxiety and performance; these are explored in the next section.

2.5. Anxiety and Performance in Sports Psychology

Different theories have explained the arousal-performance and anxiety-performance relationship that have been used in sports psychology to help athletes understand what happens with their anxiety and help enhance their performance. These theories include: the drive theory,

inverted U-hypothesis, catastrophe model, multidimensional theory, zones of optimum functioning, reversal theory, processing efficiency theory, conscious processing hypothesis and directional interpretation hypothesis that are discussed in this section. The time to event paradigm will also be explored to explore the different time intervals and their influence on anxiety and performance.

2.5.1. Drive Theory

Hull (1943) introduced the drive theory, suggesting that any organism maintains a certain balance through their behaviour. He used the word drive referring to a certain state of arousal or tension that is based on a physiological need. For example, when an organism is thirsty, they will have a drive creating an unpleasant tension that needs to be reduced, thus there will be a drive to fulfil their needs to decrease the unpleasant experience. Organisms in the same manner then will repeat such behaviours over and over to reduce their drives.

The term drive can be equated with arousal too, as suggested in the sports literature (Mellalieu et al., 2009). The drive reduction theory for sports suggested that when an athlete is aroused, they would experience a certain drive, thus would perform better to fulfil this drive. However, this occurs mainly with highly skilled athletes. On the other hand, when the athlete is not skilled enough and experiences of high arousal will make their performance decline. Mellalieu et al. (2009) proposed that drive or arousal had a linear relationship with performance: when drive increases performance will increase, helping athletes execute their skills more. They also suggested that drive theory was focused on the relationship between performance and state anxiety, as state anxiety was a high arousal state.

Mellalieu et al. (2009) stated that drive theory was used to isolate the principles of behaviours into a set of conditions, but they criticized that isolating the behaviours did not help understand the whole system. They also suggested that the drive theory was criticized for its

inability to explain why highly skilled athletes might perform badly under pressure. This theory was also accused of reducing the explanation and relationship of performance to pure physiological arousal or tension, excluding any other socio-psychological factors. The drive theory seems to be very primitive in its description of how arousal/tension may influence the athlete's performance level, looking at purely physiological sensations, removing the mind/brain-body connection within the athlete besides any other social or psychological factors that may influence the athlete as a whole. The drive theory also does not depict or explain how performance may vary even if these athletes still experience this unpleasant experience or drive, especially if the athletes are equally skilled.

2.5.2. Inverted U-Hypothesis

The inverted U-Hypothesis is another model that has been used to explain the relationship between arousal and performance for athletes. Yerkes & Dodson (1908) first introduced the inverted U-Hypothesis based on a lab experiment with mice, which was later applied to different human situations. The inverted U-Hypothesis suggests that performance enhances and becomes optimal when arousal increases up to a certain level. After this level of arousal any increase of arousal leads to a drop in performance, See Figure 2.1.

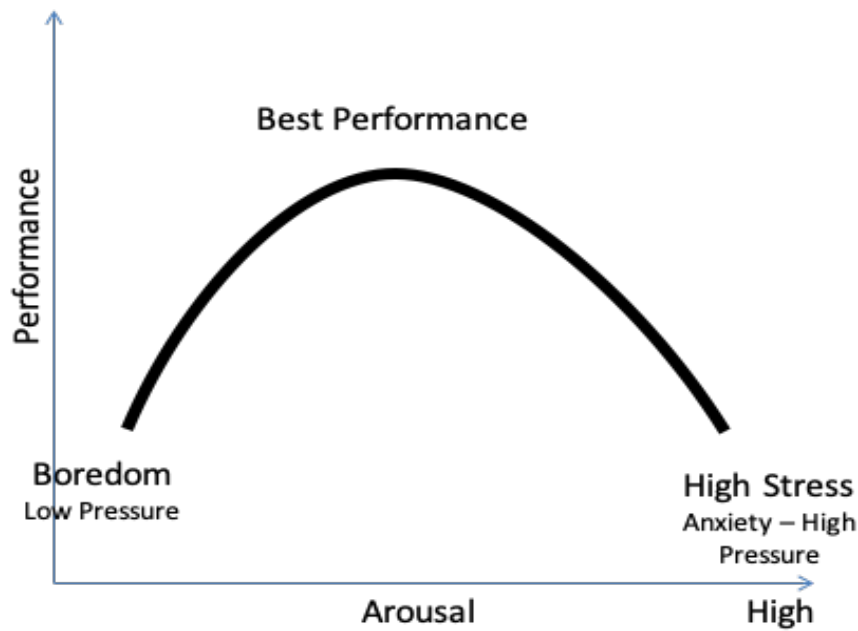


Figure 2.1 Relationship between Somatic Anxiety and Performance

This model explains the relationship between arousal and performance as a shape of an inverted U. This proposed that performance is at its best when the arousal level is at moderate levels. This model suggests that when arousal is very high or very low it may impair performance. Thus, some excitement and stress may improve performance, however, too much stress will debilitate performance. On the other hand, Kerr (1985) stated that optimum arousal levels might influence performance less when the tasks were more complicated. In addition, with beginner athletes, high arousal may make them more distracted and may decrease their level of performance. Kerr (1985) focused on the different definitions of arousal and how they were associated with physical sensations, however, it was difficult to explain how high or low arousal occurred. He later suggested that this hypothesis overtook the drive theory to explain the relationship between arousal and performance, but that this hypothesis was still very limited.

Arent & Landers (2003) proposed that the inverted U-Hypothesis was still used until

recently to explain the relationship between arousal and performance. They suggested that the curvilinear (inverted U) shape might skew to the right or to the left depending on the characteristics of the athletes, such as their skills. As a result, they suggested that there might be a better way to look at performance rather than the inverted U-Hypothesis (without directly abandoning this model) by refining the model. Humara (1999) also stated that the inverted U-Hypothesis suggested that self-confidence allowed athletes to perform better even when they were stressed, while their performance would drop if they doubted themselves. He proposed that this model did not really look at the differences of the performances for athletes, who faced the same level of stressors.

Mellalieu et al. (2009), however, suggested that both drive theory and the inverted U-Hypothesis viewed the relationship between arousal and performance in a very simplistic way and did not depict the relationship well. McNally (2002) criticized the inverted U-Hypothesis model for being too simplistic suggesting new theories and models to measure and conceptualize competitive anxiety. Kerr (1985) looked at the different definitions of arousal and its association with physical sensations showing the difficulty to explain how low or high arousal occurred.

The inverted U-Hypothesis then explains the relationship between arousal and performance focusing on the intensity of arousal. However, it does not really depict how to understand what high, intermediate or low levels of arousal for each athlete is, and what that means for the athletes and how it influences their anxiety. Arent & Landers (2003) suggests looking at this model in a different way since it excludes the psychosocial factors and the differences between athletes and their contexts, and its influence to performance.

2.5.3. Reversal Theory

Apter (1982) proposed that the reversal theory is a phenomenological theory. It focuses on the motivation of individual experiences suggesting that experiences are essential. This theory provides a structure to how individuals may experience motivation in relation to the cognitive and emotional factors. The principles of reversal theory suggest that the interpretation of an individual's experience through their emotions and cognitions is essential, as well as the idea that the behaviour of this individual may not always show consistency over a period of time.

Kerr (1987) suggested that motivation is something that is pleasant in the experience of high arousal, which was essential for sports activities. Kerr (1993) stated that motivation was influenced when there was change or reversals between four paired alternate meta-motivational states. These meta-motivational states are the states in which an individual interprets their motivation, and the states the individuals are in for a given time. There are four sets of meta-motivational states: telic-paratelic, negativism-mastery, autocentric-allocentric, and sympathy-mastery. These meta-motivational states are paired in opposites. The changes of meta-motivational states between the pairs are called reversal, which is the basis of the reversal theory.

Kerr (1985) stated that the telic-paratelic pair are the most commonly used to explain athletes and performance. In the telic state, the individual is serious, usually plans ahead, prefers low arousal, and is more future-oriented. On the other hand, in the paratelic state, the individual is more spontaneous, more in the present, and prefers high arousal. Those in the telic state prefer to stay in telic more and vice versa, thus they may remain more dominant in one of the states. There are four words that are used to explain the experiences of high and low arousal felt in the telic-paratelic state: excitement, anxiety, boredom, and relaxation. In the telic state high physiological arousal is perceived as anxiety, while in the paratelic state high

physiological arousal maybe perceived as excitement. Reversal theory suggests that equilibrium will occur in the meta-motivational state when there are minimal differences between what the individual arousal state is and what they prefer it to be.

Apter (1982) stated that the differences observed between successful and unsuccessful athletes might be the result of their cognitive interpretation of their anxiety states. In telic states athletes are focused on a goal and thus interpret their arousal as anxiety. However, in paratelic states performers are focused on their behaviour and therefore interpret their arousal as excitement. Individuals can flip from one state to another quickly and therefore change their interpretation of the arousal that they experience which in turn affects their performance.

(Kerr, 1985) proposed that reversal theory suggests that reducing arousal is not the only thing that can work with athletes, athletes can also work on changing or reinterpreting arousal level. As in paratelic state low level arousal maybe experienced as boredom, so their arousal needs to increase to excitement, by using biofeedback for example, causing a meta-motivational reversal. In low arousal states, athletes may try to increase the low arousal that is not pleasant causing a reversal to reinterpret from paratelic to telic. High arousal state may need to use interventions to decrease unpleasant sensations, which may cause a different re-interpretation of unpleasant sensations by trying to reach a meta-motivational reversal from telic to paratelic. What works for the telic individual may not work for the paratelic individual. It is important before the event to look when inappropriate meta-motivations states operate. This also gives more space for different cognitive interventions to be used. Interventions based on lowering arousal may be beneficial for some athletes but not for everyone to control their anxiety. Nevertheless, the main assumptions of sports psychology are that athletes should work on controlling the arousal level, to reach an optimum arousal to enhance their performance.

Woodman and Hardy (2001) proposed that even though reversal theory have shown to explain the affective experience of competition and how it is positive for athletes, it does not explain why and how anxiety that changes through the different arousal states may influence the performance. Reversal theory then attempts to incorporate both physiological and cognitive factors in its explanation of the relationship between performance and anxiety but fails to explain their relationship with performance adequately. Unlike the inverted-U hypothesis, high levels of physiological or felt arousal may not automatically drop the performance level, sometimes it can be useful for athletes.

2.5.4. Multidimensional Theory

The multidimensional theory focuses on several components of anxiety that influences performance. Martens et al, (1990) considered cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence, as components that conceptualize the notion of competitive anxiety in a multidimensional approach, using cognitive and trait psychology as discussed in 2.4. This theory considers somatic anxiety and cognitive anxiety as two components that influence performance differently and independently. The multidimensional theory explains that somatic anxiety has an inverted U relationship with performance; similar to the inverted U-hypothesis. It maintains that the more the performance increases, the more somatic anxiety increases up to a certain level, then performance drops. On the other hand, cognitive anxiety has a negative linear relationship with performance; the more cognitive anxiety increases the more performance will decrease.

Self-confidence was added as a component that influences performance suggesting that it has a positive relationship with performance. The more self-confidence increases the more

performance enhances. Vealey & Chase (2008, p. 66) defined self-confidence as “the belief that one has the internal resources, particularly abilities, to achieve success”, mainly relating it to the beliefs and expectations about one’s abilities and success.

McNally (2002) stated that the multidimensional theory looks at a three dimensional relationship between cognitive and somatic anxiety with performance, together with self-confidence but in two different dimensional relationships. It separates the influence of cognitive anxiety on performance and somatic anxiety on performance. McNally (2002) proposed that the multidimensional theory of anxiety looks at somatic anxiety and physiological arousal as two different things. Self-confidence, somatic and cognitive anxiety may all predict performance; better performance is related to higher levels of somatic anxiety and self-confidence (Taylor, 1987; Jones, Hanton & Swain 1994; Jones, 1995; Perry & Williams, 1998). As discussed in 2.4. the multidimensional conceptualization of anxiety used the CSAI-2 inventory to measure anxiety. Craft et al. (2003) stated that the relationship between the components of the multidimensional anxiety and performance were not strong.

The multidimensional dimensional theory then added another component that they viewed influenced performance. Even though their main idea was that the three components (somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety and self-confidence) are independent of each other, which added more depth to the explanation of the influence of anxiety to performance, it might not still be enough, as it excluded other factors that might influence performance too. The theory did not also depict the differences between athletes either.

2.5.5. The Directional Interpretation Hypothesis

The directional interpretation hypothesis originated as a dissatisfaction from the earlier work of the measurement of intensity alone model, and as a continuation to the multidimensional theory (Jones, 1995). As discussed in 2.4. competitive anxiety can be understood

more by looking at the dimension of anxiety and not only on the intensity of anxiety. Jones (1991) suggested that researchers should look at how athletes perceive their anxiety symptoms and its influence on performance. This theory states that anxiety cannot be measured through considering intensity alone; there is a directional perception of anxiety. This theory looks into the nature of the interpretation of the anxiety symptoms (negative or positive) in relationship to performance. Jones and Swain (1992) tried to examine the differences between the intensity and direction of competitive state anxiety. Those within the highly competitive group perceived cognitive anxiety as more facilitative for their performance and perceived their self-confidence as more facilitative than the lower competitive group. This supports the idea that sports athletes' directional perceptions of their anxiety symptom may explain the competitive state-anxiety response. They stated thus that anxiety is not only negative and can be helpful for performance. However, they suggested that positive anxiety may not be considered anxiety at all. Positive states may possibly be perceived as arousal, excitement, or motivation.

Similarly, Jones, Hanton & Swain (1994) proposed that few research references showed how the differences between individuals that may mediate or change the individual's interpretations of their anxiety states. This research focused on the direction and intensity of anxiety symptoms in the context of sports responses considering the individual differences between skill levels or intensity anxiety. They looked at elite and non-elite competitive swimmers during pre-race. Elite performers would interpret anxiety as more facilitative than non-elite performers, with higher self-confidence too. This study supports the idea of the difference between the intensity and direction of competitive state anxiety symptom, it also focuses on the difference of skill levels on individuals and the differences in their responses accordingly. The intensity of cognitive and somatic anxiety did not differ in both, but the interpretations of these responses differed between elite and non-elite performers. Jones et al.

(1994) questioned whether the difference is a cause or a result of being at a higher competitive level, which may be difficult to research. They also called for studying how elite athletes acquired more cognitive skills and coping mechanisms to handle pressure more. However, they suggested that on a more conceptual level facilitative interpretation may not be considered as anxiety at all. They also suggested that the intensity of sports differed with the anxiety interpretation too. In high intensity sports, anxiety maybe perceived as facilitative for shorter sports duration, while considered debilitating for those with fine controlled skills.

Several researchers studied elite and non-elite athletes to explore anxiety, proposing that both types of athletes have the same level of somatic anxiety, however, elite athletes have better cognitive skills and higher levels of self-confidence that enable them to handle pressure and interpret anxiety as more helpful to their performance (Jones, Swain & Hardy, 1993; Jones, 1995; Perry & William, 1998; Woodman & Hardy, 2003; Hanton, Thomas & Maynard, 2004). However, Perry & William (1998) did not take in to account those athletes who reported anxiety to be both facilitative and debilitating. This may have reduced anxiety into a binary division: either positive or negative, failing to account for those who experience it as both.

Jones (1995) proposed that there is a need to challenge the conceptual definition of competitive anxiety and its measurement and that anxiety can be something positive. He wanted to examine the feeling states experienced by performers before competition and the directional interpretation of both cognitive and perceived physiological symptoms. Those who thought anxiety is facilitative had more positive feeling states. He also looked at swimmers in the preparation before competition and called for a need to have a measurement of cognitive and somatic anxiety that would separate both, as some athletes labelled some emotions as happy or excited but also experience anxiety and other negative emotions at the same time. Jones and Swain (1992) stated that CSAI-2 measures the intensity of anxiety and it does not measure the directional perceptions of the symptoms. Jones et al. (1993) and Jones

et al. (1994) suggested a better measurement for looking at the relationship between anxiety and performance, as they critiqued the CSAI-2 as a measurement as discussed in 2.4.

Jones and Hanton (2001) referred to individual differences in terms of anxiety interpretations, as males reported anxiety to be more facilitative than females and that the interpretation directions differed between testing motor skills or sports that are more explosive. Thus, in order to examine the direction of the interpretation it is important to look at the individual differences of the group. This supported the catastrophe model that suggested that higher cognitive anxiety may affect performance in a good or bad way depending on the intensity of the physiological arousal, and that self-confidence maybe like the butterfly effect of the catastrophe model later discussed in 2.5.6. This also related to processing efficiency theory, and how anxiety may have a more motivational influence than a detrimental one (later discussed in 2.5.8).

Davis & Cox (2002) later related the Individual Zone of Optimum Functioning model discussed later in 2.5.7. to the directional perspective, as it was suggested that athletes perform best when in a certain zone, and that athletes in this zone will interpret their anxiety as facilitative. They based their hypothesis on that swimmer's performances with somatic and cognitive anxiety that are in the IZOF are better than those out of the IZOF; and that the directional score of somatic and cognitive anxiety that fall within the IZOF will be more facilitative than those out of the IZOF. Their research did not support the relationship between IZOF model and Jones' concept of anxiety direction. Those who had higher scores that were interpreted as facilitative were not in the ZOF. This was also suggested to be due to the level of skills of athletes. Davis & Cox (2002) questioned the validity of CSAI-2 to measure the anxiety-performance relationship. They suggested a lack of interrelation between the intensity and the direction of the anxiety, which is why it may not be related to the IZOF,

proposing that there needs to be another study that focused on the same level of highly skilled athletes, or possibly use another instrument.

Polman and Borkoles (2011) argued that Jones and colleagues' work in the 1990s work may not be very supported, especially that the CSAI-2 has been debated to not be adequate enough to assess anxiety (Craft et al., 2003; Woodman & Hardy, 2003) and its validity questioned, as discussed in 2.4. They stated that the lack of a transparent relationship between CSAI-2 and performance that initiated the directional anxiety framework, is to be questioned, as there is little validity to this measurement. There needs to be an addition of a facilitative-debilitative scale too to measure the direction. They argued that the emotion that can be viewed as optimum for a certain performance state maybe a different emotion for a different state and not an interpretation for the same emotion. They called for assessing a lot of positive and negative emotions to look at a more comprehensive interpretation of the emotion and performance relationship. They called for developing more reliable and valid instruments.

The directional interpretation hypothesis then added the direction of interpretation to the components of competitive anxiety, to not only look at the intensity of cognitive and somatic anxiety but whether these anxiety symptoms are considered helpful or not helpful for athletes. Earlier, it seems that most research had a more binary view of whether anxiety was positive or negative towards performance. This hypothesis opened the space to look at anxiety as a helpful experience, but some questioned whether a helpful anxiety would be considered anxiety at all. However, there was a shift into looking at the facilitative-debilitative perspective as a scale or continuum and how athletes may experience both an experience as helpful but also anxiety provoking. The directional interpretation hypothesis, however, did not really depict the deeper understanding of the direction of the interpretation,

questions like why this experience is considered facilitative and what does it mean to be facilitative is missing.

2.5.6. Catastrophe Model

The catastrophe model is another model that explained the relationship between arousal and performance. Hardy & Fazey (1988) proposed that the catastrophe model used physiological arousal instead of somatic anxiety to examine its relationship with performance. They suggested that arousal had an inverted U relationship with performance, however, only when the individual had low cognitive state anxiety. On the other hand, a catastrophe would occur when an individual had high cognitive anxiety, as physiological arousal would reach a threshold over the cusp of the optimal arousal level. This state is called hysteresis.

Hardy (1996) later explained that cognitive anxiety is a splitting factor and that the physiological arousal is the asymmetrical factor: when cognitive anxiety is low, any changes in the physiological arousal will lead to changes in performance. When cognitive anxiety is high, changes in physiological arousal leads to changes in performance only if the arousal is high or low. This shows how the relationship between performance and anxiety is always in flux.

McNally (2002) stated that the cusp catastrophe was different than the multidimensional anxiety theory as it used physiological arousal rather than somatic anxiety. However, there might not be a difference between physiological arousal and somatic anxiety before an important competition, both influencing performance as Hardy (1996) proposed. Hardy, Parfitt & Pates (1994) proposed that we might influence how physiological arousal could affect performance in two ways, either influencing it directly by changing the cognitive

anxiety/thinking or by altering the physiological experiences of performances. Hardy et al. (1994) suggested that the cusp catastrophe looked at how physiological arousal might influence performance whether directly or indirectly, while the multidimensional theory of anxiety only looked at the possibility of influencing physiological arousal indirectly.

McNally (2002) also proposed that the cusp model looked at how cognitive anxiety and physiological arousal both interacted together affecting performance, however, Hardy (1996) and McNally (2002) suggested that this model did not explain what made cognitive anxiety and physiological arousal interact together to influence performance. They stated that this model suggested that with high cognitive anxiety hysteresis would occur to the point where performance would go from very high to a sudden drop (catastrophic effect), when the physiological arousal increased and vice versa. On the other hand, with low cognitive anxiety hysteresis would not occur, thus changes in performance would be smooth regardless of whether physiological arousal was going up or down.

McNally (2002) differentiated between the catastrophe and the multidimensional models in terms of directions of cognitive anxiety. In the multidimensional theory when cognitive anxiety increases it debilitates performance, while in the cusp the increase of cognitive anxiety will either have a positive or negative effect, depending on the physiological arousal; if arousal is low then the influence is positive and vice versa. The catastrophic influence may be also impacted by self-confidence to help cognitively anxious individuals who got catastrophic decreases in performance regain their level, moderating the influence of cognitive and physiological arousal interaction. He criticized the cusp catastrophe model stating that it should be customized to each individual, to fit each athlete's ability and performance experience .

Cohen, Pargman & Tenenbaum (2003) critiqued the use of physiological arousal, stating that it did not depict the whole meaning of somatic anxiety and that somatic anxiety should be included as a fourth factor in the model. For example, they stated that sometimes arousal can be interpreted as excitement, which is not part of somatic anxiety. Somatic anxiety is not physiological arousal, it is the perception of the physiological arousal. They also criticized Hardy (1996) for looking at a splitting median between cognitive anxiety and physiological arousal. They suggested that other factors should be controlled all the time to focus on motor performance. Their results did not support Hardy's (1996) model. For Hardy, performance should drop as arousal reached 50% and then performance may return when arousal decreased again. They predicted performance would drop when arousal drops to 90%, but there was no drop in performance. The cases of drop were for those who had very high cognitive anxiety but not related to physiological arousal. They critiqued the model for its lack of multidimensionality of anxiety and how it may influence performance. They also suggested that it did not really explain the performance catastrophe drop, as it did not explain the amount or degree of cognitive anxiety that was considered high for each athlete. Other factors maybe influencing and mediating the influence on performance, such as self-confidence, motivation, coping skills, which will be discussed later.

Hardy, Beatti & Woodman (2007) examined Hardy's (1996) model using two experiments, as they suggested that there was a complicated relationship between cognitive anxiety and the level of effort and direction of change of effort rather than of physiological arousal. The first experiment used the levels of trait anxiety with competitive environment to trigger state anxiety. The second experiment used competitive anxiety with social pressure to trigger worry. The effort needed was changed according to the task difficulty. The results of this study proposed a three-way relationship between anxiety, effort required and direction. When following up with tests hysteresis happened with high cognitive anxiety. There were

also drops in performance when levels of task difficulty were increasing. This study then suggested that there is an interaction of physiological arousal in the anxiety performance relationship; however, it does not mean that it is the only interaction that influences performance.

Hardy et al. (2007) agreed more with the processing efficiency theory, as it suggested that there is a potential effect of motivation from cognitive anxiety that happens when participants feel they have a chance of winning, which will be discussed later. In addition, when cognitive anxiety is high, more effort is required, thus the participant's perceptions of having a chance of winning may decrease, so it may stop the effort or decrease their effort. It may also take time for them to feel it is worth the effort again, which supports the idea of hysteresis. This supports an interaction between cognitive anxiety and the amount and direction of effort. The processing efficiency theory is a cognitive theory that also includes emotionality and physical arousal as factors that increase effort but have no role on performance. However, this study does not negate the interaction of physiological arousal but suggests that physiological arousal is not the only factor in the interaction. There may be other factors that may influence performance as well such as self-confidence.

The catastrophe model seems to be similar to inverted U hypothesis as it looks at the relationship between physiological arousal performance and how there is a certain threshold of arousal after which performance drops. However, this model incorporates cognitive anxiety as another component that interacts with physiological arousal, influencing performance and the intensity of its improvement or drop. It is different than the multidimensional theory of anxiety as it looks at physiological arousal rather than somatic anxiety and looks at the interaction of

both components rather than deal with each component and its relationship with performance separately such as the multidimensional theory.

However, the model does not really explain the degree and the meaning of cognitive anxiety and how this may influence performance. It does not seem to integrate many other factors that may influence athletes' performance, in addition to looking at measuring only physiological symptoms rather than look at a more well-rounded experiential embodied experience. As mentioned, this model does seem to be very general and does not look at the individual differences between athletes, the amount, degree or even experience of athletes' anxiety and how this may influence their performance.

2.5.7. Zones of Optimal Functioning (ZOF)

The Zones of Optimal Functioning is another model that explores the relationship between anxiety and performance. Hanin (1986) explored the ZOF model to explain which level of anxiety can help lead to an optimal performance level to help athletes reach a certain zone. He proposed that each athlete has an optimal level of pre-performance anxiety, where performance will be at its best. If the pre- performance anxiety is outside of the IZOF, whether high or low, then performance will drop. IZOFs can be determined by repeatedly measuring anxiety and performance or through athlete's recall of anxiety levels prior to peak performances.

Hardy (1996) stated that this theory might be attractive as it considered the athlete as an individual, accounting for differences between athletes. In addition, Ruiz, Raglin & Hanin

(2015) proposed that most theories used to explain the anxiety-performance relationship were not sports specific, except for the Individualized Zone of Optimum Functioning (IZOF), which focused on the subjective experiences of athletes. It also considered the different psychological factors that might influence optimal emotional levels, looking at the emotions as a biopsychosocial state that was contextual.

Earlier, Krane (1993) suggested that the relationship between anxiety and athletic performance was more curvilinear. This means that there is a certain level of anxiety for optimum performance; if beyond it, performance drops. The ZOF model looked at the different zones of athletes, but the proposition was not curvilinear. Rather, it was more complex showing no one particular level of optimum anxiety that leads to optimum performance, again demonstrating the importance of a multidimensional perspective (Krane, 1993). This model could be argued using later research that stated that the relationship between anxiety and performance might not be as simple as that (Robazza & Bortoli, 2007; Nicholls et al., 2010). Humara (1999) suggested that although the IZOF might better explain the relationship between anxiety and performance than the inverted U hypothesis, it still did not consider or explain the individual differences between performances among athletes.

Robazza, Bortoli & Hanin (2004) and Birrer & Morgan (2010) proposed that very few studies identified the optimum levels of arousal for each individual. Hanin (2010) suggested the IZOF model, which stated that each athlete had positive and negative psychobiological states that could help or debilitate his or her performance. He argued that most approaches were built on group-oriented studies except the IZOF. This model has focused on pre-competitive anxiety and how it influences performance. The study concluded that the best performance was achieved when pre-competitive anxiety was close to the optimal state of the athlete. When the level of anxiety is higher or lower than the IZOF, performance gets worse.

Robazza et al. (2004) used the IZOF, proposing that each athlete has a different content and intensity of anxiety; what is helpful for one athlete may not be helpful for another. Their research focused on a more biopsychosocial model, studying pre-competitive emotions and bodily symptoms when athletes were in and out of the zone. They called for a more holistic approach within the IZOF that included bodily, emotional, motivational, communicational components and sport-specific performance variables, looking in a more multidimensional manner rather than looking at each component solely. They wanted each athlete to gain awareness of their optimal and their dysfunctional state, suggesting that bodily symptoms did not necessarily mean negative emotions.

In fact, Hanin (2010) suggested that anxiety should not be studied on its own without the focus on other emotions, as both comfortable and uncomfortable emotions influence performance. Also, McNally (2002) proposed that this might apply to other emotions besides anxiety and how this may help influence performance. Ruiz et al. also stated that this model was developed from a simple description of how pre-competition anxiety influenced performance to a comprehensive framework that looked at ranges of emotions from positive to negative, physical sensations and personal issues that might influence athlete's performance during and after performance. Thus, they called for developing a new ideographic self-assessment tool, looking not only at anxiety but a variety of emotional and biopsychosocial states. They suggested that there is space for this model to develop.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between anxiety and performance has been ambiguous and competitive anxiety has three components each of which has a different influence on performance. Thus, it seems difficult to find a model that would assess the optimum zone for each athlete without looking closely at each person as a whole being with different emotions, contexts and experiences.

2.5.8 Processing Efficiency Theory

Processing Efficiency Theory (PET) has been one of the theories that have been developed to understand the anxiety-performance relationship. Eysenck & Calvo (1992) introduced the PET using cognitive anxiety as a factor that influences performance based on two principle functions. The first principle is that cognitive anxiety is used in the individual's attentional capacity to perform a task; it decreases the work and storage memory capacity required when the task requires irrelevant cognitive activity and worry, thus affects the processing efficiency. This proposes that worry can influence in a diversion of attention from a certain task. The second principle is that cognitive anxiety looks at the importance of the task and may lead someone to put more energy in the task if the performance is perceived as not good enough, to enhance the performance. Reducing effective capacity then maybe opposed or challenged by an increase in the effort. This is considered a form of coping actively with anxiety. This may explain why a person with higher anxiety may sometimes perform better than someone with lower anxiety. They also suggested that individual variations of trait anxiety relate together with state anxiety and attentional processes to influence performance.

PET has been used and applied in sports psychology (Murray & Janelle, 2007). They suggested that PET was not examined a lot to propose the positive and negative differences in motor performance influenced by anxiety. They stated that it is highly dependent on state anxiety and that humans have limited attentional capacity. They called for considering the individual differences between athletes. They proposed that psychophysiological influences that may relate to decreased efficiency were disregarded, although they may influence the differences in performance. They studied PET within the context of dual-task auto racing

simulation. They wanted to focus on assessing changes of performance in driving tasks, time needed to detect the cues of light and visual pattern search. These related to processing efficiency levels with those of high and low trait anxiety. Participants were asked a dual task both a driving task and a response-time task and told that both tasks are important. This study showed little variation or change in the performance for both groups, but the response time was less for the low anxiety group and higher for the high anxiety group. Thus, when anxiety was higher the processing efficiency was less. This thus supports the PET claims and can help understand sports performance when athletes experience anxiety. The high anxiety group showed a decrease in their resources on the response-time task. This study supports the idea that anxiety may not necessarily influence performance although it may influence the efficiency and that highly anxious people may find other resources to maintain performance. Although this study supported PET, it seemed that this study simulated a whole sports context that may not be fully realistic. Athletes practice for years and years; something that means a lot to them. They do not just practice to perform, thus this study may not be fully accurate in their predictions, as losing a task that may not mean something is completely different than losing a performance or a real event that may mean a lot to one of the athletes. In addition, as suggested by these authors there is a great exclusion to many psychological, social and physiological accounts that may influence anxiety rather than only the cognitive component.

Derakshan & Eysenck (2009) later also suggested that anxiety influences performance when the task is complex and needs attention. They considered this the basis in developing the attentional control theory. Thus, the influence of anxiety is due to the decrease of attention from the task that is relevant. People who are anxious feel threat to their goal so work on reducing their anxiety to reach their goal, thus anxiety can have opposite effects on cognitive performance. However, they suggested that anxiety influences performance mostly

when task is difficult and needs attention. In addition, they differentiated between Anxiety processing efficiency and performance effectiveness as suggested earlier. They wanted to develop PET to an attentional control theory showing that anxiety has a negative influence on the cognitive performance and the task that needs attention, thus influencing attentional control. However, they called for finding better ways to measure attentional processes more precisely and more directly. Again, this research although called for better measurement and examination focused on only one influence of anxiety on athletes and did not focus on the whole experience.

PET, thus, although introduced a new idea to the influence of anxiety on attentional processing and efficiency and tried to focus more on the individual differences in this area, it did not really depict how anxiety influences performance in a deeper sense. PET disregards other factors such as the skill experience or other psycho-social aspects that influence athletes or how they may be influenced physiologically and how this may influence their performance too. In addition, most of the research used quantitative measures that did not help in depicting the whole anxiety experience.

2.5.9. Conscious Processing Hypothesis

Conscious processing hypothesis (CPH) is another hypothesis that was introduced to explain the anxiety-performance relationship. CPH was introduced by Masters (1992). He stated that earlier research suggested that knowledge can be both explicit (facts that we know and are aware of) and implicit (what we know but are not aware of and not able to articulate). In the cognitive phase, knowledge is explicit and performance needs effort; athletes maybe still in the learning phase of the sport and require effort to do the skill/task required. On the other hand, in the autonomous phase, knowledge is implicit and does not need effort, as the

skill become learnt and automatic, which does not require much effort from the athletes to implement. Thus, athletes who move from novice athletes to skilled athletes move from the explicit phase to the automatic implicit. Masters suggested that under pressure when athletes think about what they are doing, they breakdown their skills, the reinvestment of controlled processing in the automatic skills may explain the choking and not coping with pressure. This influences the automatic processing of well-learned motor tasks and leads to impaired performance. This can happen due to inward focus of attention in order to try to perform the skill through conscious processing. CPH suggests that when there is pressure, anxiety increases self-consciousness about succeeding in performance. When someone becomes more self-conscious, they try to control the automated skills, which thus disrupts performance. He also suggested that with early stages of learning conscious control is used to be successful in a task. He used this theory with those learning skills of golf putting using knowledge of the task. Those who learn to putt explicitly showed lower performance under stress, while those who learned implicitly showed no deterioration.

Hardy, Mullen & Martin (2001) wanted to examine the conscious processing effects, testing national female trampolinists. This study supported CPH suggesting that combining task-relevant explicit cues and anxious states trigger conscious processing. These athletes' performance was not influenced in all conditions, but their performance dropped slightly when they were in an anxious state and when they were asked to do shadowing using cues before their performance. Each one did not influence performance alone but together having high state anxiety and being cued may have influenced the attention needed to focus or maintain performance.

Toner & Moran (2011) proposed that when players needed to attend to a specific area of their technique their performance deteriorates due to the dual-task condition (for example putting while listening to cues), as it makes athletes self-conscious of their movement.

However, even though movement may change, performance may not necessarily change. This study looked at different types of conscious processing technical adjustments, changing one movement and conscious monitoring. They used quantitative motion analysis. They concluded that conscious processing may have different influence on expert movement. Different types of conscious processing may have different influences on movement and performance. For skilled golfers it may influence the timing and consistency of automated movement, not necessarily influencing putting proficiency. On the other hand, conscious monitoring may influence performance but not automated movement, but performance may be better when attention is directed to it. Thus, they found that conscious control disrupts the validity of automated movement and timing, interfering with the consistency of the movement. However, still maintaining performance, which was not explained why. However, this theory may yield different results in different sports and may show differences between skilled and not very skilled athletes. It is not clear, however, whether the results of conscious processing would be different between highly skilled athletes and those who are not very skilled, as less skilled athletes will not be so automatic in their movement.

Wilsom, Smith & Holmes (2007) wanted to examine the conflicting suggestions of both PET and CPH with regards to the role of effort in affecting anxiety on golf putting. Both CPH and PET propose that state anxiety is higher when there is increased threat environment and that high anxiety will increase the mental effort. However, CPH will have a reinvestment effect on performance while PET will have a motivational influence on performance. This study again was used with golfers using a quantitative approach and self-report measures. This study supports more the PET than CPH, as performance effectiveness was managed. However, they suggested that with higher anxiety disposition both theories seem to be the same for these individuals. They proposed that it is best is to combine both these theories together, because with higher anxiety disposition, it was not clear whether the decrease in

performance was due to conscious processing or attentional distraction. This study shows how integrating both theories can help understand the individual differences and the difficulty of isolating one's cognitive processes.

Mullen & Hardy (2010) continued with the debate between CPH and how it may challenge PET suggesting that cognitive anxiety with the demands of the task influences the attentional capacity. They suggested that there needs to be design that differentiates and isolates the conscious processing influences from attentional explanations. Focusing on a part of a movement using process goals may interfere with the normal automatic task processes of high skilled, which influences conscious control and influences performance. They suggested that being given a single cue does not necessarily influence performance, however, being given more cues does influence. However, as proposed, it may be difficult to isolate conscious processing from attentional processes. Isolating one component of functioning for athletes maybe very reductionist, implying that the anxiety experience is only one part and not a holistic experience that may influence several areas for the athlete. In CPH as with PET, it seems that there has been a complete disregard to the psychosocial, environmental and physiological influences on athletes' anxiety. Both these theories seem to be very cognitive in nature. It is not clear how both these theories may explain how for example an athlete maybe influenced from external factors such as their coach, an injury they have or any other factor besides the cognitive one.

In an effort to understand the anxiety experiences of athletes and its influence on performance, several models and theories have been proposed to explore this relationship. Some of these theories were not initially intended for athletes, however, were applied to sports psychology. In addition, some of these models such as the drive theory, the inverted U theory, the catastrophe model and reversal theory used arousal as a factor influencing athletes' performance. However, physiological arousal has not been holistic or encompassing enough to

even explain the embodied experience of anxiety, or the mind-body connection and experience. Other theories such as the multidimensional theory and directional interpretation hypothesis look more into the anxiety-performance relationship, while CPH and PET seem to incorporate a more cognitive focus on the relationship between anxiety and performance. Whether there was an incorporation of the three components of competitive anxiety or a focus on one of them more than the other, most of these theories were not enough to really depict the whole experience of anxiety and how it really influences athletes. Most theories measured whether high or low anxiety influenced performance in a debilitating or facilitative way, but none really looked beyond the intensity and direction to try to capture a better understanding of what the anxiety experience is, and how different it maybe from one athlete to the other. Even though, some theories added self-confidence as a mediating factor that helps performance, together with motivational effect, there are many other factors that help performance and influence anxiety as well that will be discussed in 2.6. In addition, these theories have been mainly studied in a quantitative manner lacking a deeper understanding of the meaning and experience of anxiety for different athletes with different skills and different psychosocial contexts.

2.5.10. Time to Event Paradigm

Martens et al. (1990) used the time to event paradigm to examine how the performance of athletes responds to anxiety at different intervals before competition. He used several time intervals before an event such as: 48 hrs, 24 hrs, 2 hrs, and 5 mins and measured the differences of these times and its influence on cognitive and somatic anxiety and on performance. He stated that somatic anxiety increases and peaks before the competition then decreases, while cognitive anxiety and self-confidence remain stable before competition as long as the expectations to perform remained the same. In addition, cognitive anxiety had positive effects on performance before the event when somatic anxiety was low. However, somatic anxiety showed both

negative and positive effects on performance regardless of cognitive anxiety.

Jones & Cale (1989) explored the temporal patterning of the two components of anxiety (cognitive and somatic) that lead up to the sporting event, looking at the dissociation between both components. Cognitive anxiety has been suggested to increase much earlier than somatic anxiety, however, it increased in a more stable way, while somatic anxiety has shown to increase very quick close to the start of the event. The study used CSAI-2, looking at 3 different stages: 2 days, 2hrs and 20 mins before the event. Subjects attended a practice session to familiarize themselves 2 days before the testing session. Each subject was given a trial perceptuo-motor speed and a digit span task before completing the two test trials. They examined the multidimensional anxiety components and performance upon different tasks such both cognitive and motor components, and their influence on performance measure. This study explored the temporal patterning of cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence, supporting the multi-dimensional theory of anxiety. Self-confidence and cognitive anxiety did not change, but somatic anxiety increased from 2 days interval to the 2 hours intervals and again by the 20 mins. In the control group all three components did not change. Cognitive anxiety was also higher in the experimental group across all three stages, while somatic increased mostly 20 minutes before the event for the experimental group.

The time to event paradigm then suggests that the relationship between somatic anxiety and performance is not linear, as there is a threshold beyond which performance will change. Somatic anxiety related in a positive manner to performance but in a negative manner to time span; when somatic anxiety increases very close to the event, attention is directed to the physical sensations, which distracts athletes from the cognitions needed for performance. On the other hand, performance as a whole is better when somatic anxiety is higher rather than

lower.

Parfitt, Jones & Hardy (1990) proposed that the time to event paradigm did not differentiate between positive somatic anxiety and positive interactions between cognitive anxiety and performance. These positive interactions may influence athletes' abilities to improve between critical events. Hardy (1996) proposed that several studies looked at the relationship between performance and anxiety, looking at the mean performance for cognitively anxious people in the days leading to the event, when somatic anxiety or arousal is low. Hardy (1996) suggested a three-dimensional catastrophe model of anxiety and performance when looking at cognitive anxiety, physiological arousal and performance. For Hardy confidence may help athletes tolerate and manage higher levels of physiological arousal even when their cognitive anxiety rises before their event leading to a drop in their performance.

Hardy (1996) looked at the cusp and butterfly catastrophe against Marten's multidimensional model in 1990. He chose 8 male students from the University of Wales, Bangor Golf Club between the ages of 19 and 23. They all had handicaps from 1-6 and were told that they would look at relationship between physiological and psychological parameters and golf performance. These athletes self-reported on cognitive anxiety, somatic anxiety and self-confidence on a scale from 0-27, attending a training session to learn how to self-report. They then completed a modified version of CSAI-2 that explored how they felt before performance, after four days from completing an unmodified CSAI-2, measuring physiological arousal through heart rate. The first results favoured the catastrophe model of anxiety to explain more the variances of performance. He also suggested that adding self-confidence to the multidimensional anxiety theory increased the variance in performance, while adding self-confidence to the catastrophe model did not improve the power of the model. This study

suggested that one way to help athletes perform better was to teach them to physically relax and work on cognitive restructuring.

Wiggin's (1998) also looked at the response of the direction and intensity of anxiety response 24 hours before competition. There was a high increase for somatic anxiety intensity and a decrease of self-confidence, while there was no change for cognitive anxiety before the competition. He stated that when athletes interpreted their sensations related to competitive anxiety to either helpful or unhelpful their interpretation did not change over time close to the match. Hanton et al. (2002) looked at a qualitative study of elite performers' perceptions and beliefs with regards to the temporal experiences of competitive anxiety and symptoms leading to competition. It suggested that performers' interpretations changed close to the time leading to the event. Thus, somatic and cognitive anxieties were both interpreted as helpful before the competition in the preparation phase but unhelpful right before the event in the performance phase (Mellalieu et al. 2003).

Cerin, Szabo & Williams (2000) studied stress with performance longitudinally. The temporal nature shows that the intensity response can be moderated and influenced by several different factors. Temporal changes of pre-competitive emotions may not be very precise, worry for example was higher when it was retrospective than when it was described than momentarily measurement. When use measure that are retrospective, can give a bigger idea of the changes of emotions across time, but in the moment, it may be difficult to measure emotions. Another aim of the study was to have temporal patterns of pre-competitive emotions and cognitions in male Taekwondo. Getting closer to the event increased the negative emotions, cognitive and competitive anxiety. But there may be differences in different sports, thus there is a need to research different sports. This study showed very minimal change in the directional perceptions of somatic and cognitive anxiety as the competition approached.

Mellalieu et al. (2009) stated that research has shown how the athletes' pre-competition anxiety differs in the different times leading to competition. Swain and Jones (1993) stated that the temporal patterning for somatic anxiety and frequency has been consistent showing an increase that progresses near the event. Self-confidence intensity and frequency stays unchanged until 2 days before the event.

Hooi (2008) compared the multi-dimensional state of anxiety of Malaysian sailors before two different levels of sailing competitions through the time to event paradigm. He focused on 8 Malaysian elite sailors using the CSAI-2 tool to measure four different periods before the competition to each competition event. These periods are: 2 weeks, 1 week, 1 day and 1 hour before the competition. The sample consisted of 7 males and 1 female, around the age of 14 years old, who have 3-7 years of experience. The study showed that the anxiety state increased and self-confidence level decreased before the two different levels of competition. Cognitive anxiety also went up over the four different periods. Both states of anxiety increased from the first time (2 weeks) to right before the event. Even though somatic anxiety has been suggested to increase immediately before the competition, in this research somatic anxiety increased slowly since the beginning and not just drastically before the event. On the other hand, self-confidence decreased as the event approached.

Hanton, Thomas et al. (2004) looked at the temporal patterns of 7 days, 48 hours, 24 hours, 2 hours and 30 minutes looking at the skill level too between elite and non-elite. There were differences in the directions only with elite performers, who focused on the helpful and facilitative of cognitive and somatic symptoms through the whole week, but there were temporal changes in the frequency for both groups. Thomas et al. (2004) looked at the differences in competitive state anxiety leading up to competition across the three dimensions. For those who found it facilitating found high intensity of self-confidence, more interpretations

of cognitions and somatic symptoms into positive, more frequency of self-confidence and lower cognitive anxiety symptoms than those who had mixed interpretations or interpretations that limited performance. The time to competition showed that the directional interpretation of somatic and cognitive symptoms increased closer to the event. Thus, those who find anxiety debilitating view their symptoms as negative and think more about these symptoms before the match. They also have lower self-confidence but may think less close to the event.

The time to event paradigm then has been used with several theories (multidimensional anxiety theory and catastrophe model) to measure the intensity of anxiety closer to the event, showing the different levels of anxiety and how they influence athletes' performance. Most theories studied the time to event in relationship to both cognitive and somatic anxiety and not only one of them; however, self-confidence was another factor that was studied using this paradigm too. It seems that mostly somatic anxiety increases tremendously right before the event, which does not influence anxiety a lot if cognitive anxiety is not that high and with higher levels of self-confidence. Even though this paradigm is used to show the differences and changes of anxiety intensity and its influence on performance, it still lacks an exploration of the different experiences of each athlete and how different their performance may be between each event and the event or even between each other. For example, why is it that the anxiety may increase more towards certain events than others.

The next section will introduce the different factors that also play a role in influencing the athletes' anxiety.

2. 6. Different factors Influencing Anxiety in Sports

Research has shown that there are many factors that influence anxiety within the sports context. This thesis will not be able to review all of them. It will instead describe a common list of factors, reflecting how they influence athletes' anxiety.

2.6.1. Self-confidence

Self-confidence, or lack of it, is a key factor that affects competitive anxiety in performance as suggested earlier. Woodman & Hardy (2003) conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship between cognitive anxiety and performance, and self-confidence and performance. They found that self-confidence was associated with sports performance more than cognitive anxiety, however they both do not lie in opposite directions equally. Men and elite athletes showed more confidence than women and less-experienced athletes respectively (Woodman & Hardy, 2003). This research studies both men and women, which could be interesting to explore whether their self-confidence differ and whether it influences their anxiety experiences.

Hanton, Mellalieu & Hall (2004) asked ten elite athletes to explain how they felt before competition and describe situations, where they experience high and low levels of self-confidence. They suggested a cyclical relationship between competitive anxiety, self-confidence and interpreting the anxiety symptoms, saying that self-confidence was a vital factor in an athlete's anxiety experience. They proposed that when athletes felt less confident, they experienced a sense of loss of control, interpreting their anxiety symptoms as hindering their performance (Hanton et al., 2004). This research was qualitative allowing athletes to describe their experience more.

Robazza & Bortoli (2007) proposed that the relationship between performance and self-confidence seems to be positive linear, between somatic anxiety and performance an inverted 'U' shaped (See Figure 2.1) and between cognitive anxiety and performance negative linear. In other words, an inverted 'U' shape between self-confidence, cognitive anxiety and performance, which suggests that a certain amount of anxiety is beneficial for performance, which is present with more self-confidence, while more than that level of anxiety has a negative effect on performance (See Figure 2. 1). This study was a cross-sectional one administered to

197 Rugby players. Rugby is a team sport, which has a different dynamic than an individual sport, thus rugby players may have a different experience of anxiety than tennis players. Still tennis athletes may share some of these experiences.

Even at earlier years of competition, self-confidence influences anxiety and performance. For instance, Tsopani et al. (2011) studied 86 competitive female gymnasts between the ages of 11 and 12 from different clubs through the Greek Gymnastics Federation who competed for 3-5 years. They used the CSAI-2 inventory researching the relationship between self-confidence, competitive state anxiety and gymnastics performance. This study agreed with some of the previously stated research that there was no relationship between somatic and cognitive anxiety and performance but self-confidence was highly related to performance (Tsopani et al., 2011). This article studied young gymnasts, who may have experiences that resemble teenage tennis athletes, who feel that self-confidence may influence their performance, thus, their anxiety experiences.

Koehn (2013) proposed that self-confidence has a direct positive relationship with the flow state of junior tennis players, helping them reach a positive experience. He studied 59 junior tennis players between the ages of 11-16 using the CSAI-2 modified version and the flow state scale-2. He suggested that self-confidence has a moderate influence on anxiety, calling for improving self-confidence to help athletes manage anxiety when it is debilitating (Koehn, 2013). However, his research did not include older, more-experienced tennis athletes for comparison.

Kingston, Lane & Thomas (2010) studied 54 individual elite athletes quantitatively, both males and females between the ages of 18-51, playing different individual sports. They looked at their patterns of self-confidence towards the time of the competition, suggesting that

exploring where the athletes' confidence came from and how any significant change that affected their confidence could affect their performance during competition, gave a deeper understanding of self-confidence. Their findings suggested that athletes depended primarily on demonstrating their physical abilities, preparing physically and mentally, presenting themselves physically, and using more social support, as sources for their self-confidence. Such research, however, requires a more qualitative approach to look at the changes that occur on the athletes' self-confidence and whether and how this influences the athletes' anxiety experience.

2.6.2. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is another factor that influences the level of anxiety and has been used as a theoretical framework in relation to self-confidence (Vealey & Chase, 2008). Self-efficacy is the athlete's awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses (Birrner & Morgan, 2010), and the control of one's physical performance, thought processes and emotional state (Vealey & Chase, 2008).

Nicholls et al. (2010) failed to find research that showed the relationship between state anxiety and coping self-efficacy for athletes; so, they shifted their focus on the relationship between coping self-efficacy and subjective performance, coping self-efficacy and precompetitive anxiety and precompetitive anxiety and subjective performance. They studied 307 athletes within the ages of 16-34, using the Coping Self Efficacy Scale CSEF scale and the CSAI-2R inventory to measure cognitive and somatic anxiety and self-confidence. They found a strong and positive relationship between coping self-efficacy and subjective performance. They proposed that athletes who believed in their abilities and used coping strategies performed better. Coping self-efficacy was also negatively related with somatic and cognitive state anxiety, suggesting that teaching athletes to have more coping self-efficacy skills might help decrease their precompetitive anxiety.

Self-efficacy was also studied from another perspective by Hatzigeorgiadis, Zourbanos, Goltsios, & Theodorakis (2008) who researched how self-talk improved performance. They looked at motivational self-talk and how it related to self-efficacy in young tennis players. They studied 46 young tennis players with an average age of 13, using a forehand drive test to see how many balls would be hit out of ten strokes to measure performance. They also used a self-efficacy scale to measure one's belief in oneself. Players were divided into an experimental group, who were trained to self-talk and a control group. The study showed that self-talk enhanced self-efficacy and performance, which are essential psychological advantages for athletes. Again, their study focused on young tennis athletes, which may not be necessarily generalizable to older athletes.

2.6.3. Competitive Experience

Competitive experience may also influence competitive anxiety and performance in terms of the status of performance, coping skills, and interpreting anxiety symptoms. Hanton et al. (2008) research was one of the few that approached anxiety from a more qualitative approach using in-depth interviews. Besides interviews, they used the Modified Sport Anxiety Scale, CSAI-2 self-confidence subscale and the Coping Function Questionnaire CFQ to study 217 athletes competing in different sports, including tennis. They found that the competitive experience and the status of performance played an important role when looking at anxiety in a more multidimensional view; better coping skills helped athletes interpret their symptoms better when under pressure.

Hanton et al. (2008) also found that current elite athletes reported more emotion-focused and problem-focused coping skills than past and non-experienced athletes, mostly due to their high experience level. They suggested that better coping skills might be related to the higher self-confidence more experienced athletes. They also proposed looking at athletes' reflective and critical experiences and how this might help understand why some athletes

dropped out. Hanton et al. (2008) research was one of the few qualitative studies that tried to understand the experiences of athletes.

2.6.4. Perfectionism

Perfectionism may influence the level of competitive anxiety, as it has shown to increase cognitive and somatic anxiety. Stoeber, Otto, Pescheck, Becker & Stoll (2007) studied the relationship of two dimensions of perfection (positive striving and negative reactions from imperfection) to the level of competitive anxiety. The findings suggested that overall perfectionism was positively correlated with cognitive and somatic anxiety. However, when perfectionism was divided into two components, striving for perfection showed inverse reactions to competitive anxiety especially the cognitive dimension. This suggested that striving for perfection in athletes might decrease negative thinking about failing, decrease bodily symptoms of nervousness, and increase self-confidence. However, the findings were limited to German school and university athletes and female soccer team playing non-professionally, focusing on only two components of perfectionism rather than a multidimensional approach. This research suggested that perfectionism was not always maladaptive as suggested, but only the negative reaction to it was (Stoeber et al., 2007). This study was targeting female players in a team sport who do not play professionally so it may again have a different dynamic than individual tennis athletes. In addition, the research cannot be generalizable, as it only looks at two components of perfectionism.

Another piece of research by Hamidi & Besharat (2010) studied 173 volunteer athletes from different sports, in which participants were asked to fill the Competitive Perfectionism Scale and The Multidimensional Competitive Anxiety Questionnaire. Similar to the previous research striving for perfectionism showed less cognitive and somatic anxiety, as athletes with higher levels of perfectionism believed more in their skills and thus had lower levels of

cognitive and somatic anxiety and higher levels of self-confidence. This research also found that negative reaction to perfectionism showed more cognitive and somatic anxiety and less self-confidence. This suggests that certain dimensions of perfectionism may influence competitive anxiety.

2.6.5. Task or Ego-oriented Approach

Research has shown that the Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) may be used to understand perceived ability, social support and their influence on performance anxiety with athletes (Abrahamsen, Roberts, Pensgaard & Ronglan, 2008). AGT proposes that athletes, who are task oriented, ego oriented or both, usually have a higher predisposition for performance anxiety. Task orientated athletes focus more on mastery learning and assume less performance anxiety, while ego oriented athletes focus on having higher abilities than others and aspire to beating opponents. The study researched five male and five female Norwegian elite handball teams. Abrahamsen et al. (2008) stated that females had higher performance anxiety than males, but they were less ego-oriented and less focused on performance results (performance climate). Although females were more task oriented, they had been reported to worry more, which did not fit the theory. However, males' perceived ability was what mediated their performance climate and anxiety. Thus, ego orientation may not be motivationally debilitating for athletes unless the athletes have lower perceived ability (Abrahamsen et al., 2008a). This relates to self-efficacy and self-confidence, which would be difficult to separate in such a research and difficult to identify, influencing the athletes' anxiety experience.

Similarly, another piece of research explored the AGT, this time predicting the performance of national level elite athletes, looking at gender differences in relation to goal orientations, perceived motivational climates and the interplay between abilities and performance anxiety. In this study, Abrahamsen, Roberts & Pensgaard, (2008). focused on the

“mastery climate”, which they defined as the context for learning and improvement and the ego involved “performance motivational climate”, which is focused on ability in the context of competing with others. They found that national elite level athletes were both high task and ego-oriented regardless of gender. However, females still reported higher performance anxiety, relating to their way of perceiving the performance climate.

Such research provided recommendations for both athletes and coaches (Abrahamsen et al., 2008b). It was found that for both genders, performance climate increased worry but also added concentration disruption for women. Therefore, it was essentially recommended that coaches of women use mastery climate to help them cope better with anxiety in and between competitions. Regardless of the climate, less perceived ability increased performance anxiety, thus the research advised coaches to work on climate and perceived ability, while focusing on mastery ability (Abrahamsen et al., 2008a). They also suggested that adding qualitative research might help understand social support more, as they thought that changes in social support might affect performance anxiety (Abrahamsen et al., 2008b). The past research was quantitative and focused on only one aspect that might influence anxiety, while it was very difficult to isolate only one factor and look at its influence.

2.6.6. Social Support and Others’ Influence

Social support is another factor that may influence anxiety for athletes (Smith, Smoll & Cumming, 2007; Abrahamsen et al., 2008b; O’Rourke, Smith, Smoll & Cumming, 2014). Sharp, Woodcock, Holland, Cumming & Duda (2013) and Smith et al. (2007) suggested that coaches were essential for athletes as they might influence their attitudes, values, goals and relationships. Several research papers showed that communication with coaches affected athletes’ anxiety, in which effective and motivational communication helped athletes manage their anxiety (Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura & Baldes, 2010; Kačúr, 2016; Ramis, Torregrosa, Viladrich & Cruz; 2017).

Ramis et al. (2017) studied 1168 young Spanish athletes between the ages of 9-18, who played tennis, basketball, football, handball and did synchronized swimming. They used quantitative methodology scales to measure anxiety and controlling styles. The findings suggested that the coaches' controlling style increased competitive anxiety. Moreover, coaches were found to control athletes' motivation based on external rewards, showing the great social influence on the emotional experiences of young athletes.

Kačúr (2016) also researched 10 coaches and 161 athletes with the average age of 12 years, dividing the participants into control and experimental groups to assess the effectiveness of a communication training approach on the athletes' pre-competitive anxiety and self-esteem using the CSAI-2 and a self-esteem scale. The coaches in the experimental group were trained to communicate effectively with the athletes for 12 weeks. The results showed lower levels of somatic and cognitive anxiety and better self-esteem.

Smith et al. (2007) also studied the influence of cognitive behavioural interventions for coaches on performance anxiety for athletes. They used a new mastery involving motivational climate called the mastery approach to coaching (MAC). The study involved 37 coaches and 216 young athletes, who played community based basketball. They used the Sports Anxiety Scale (SAS-2), and Motivational Climate Scale for Youth Sports (MCSYS-2) for assessment. Although the study had limitations regarding measurement, the results suggested that by training coaches, young athletes' trait anxiety, both somatic and cognitive, might be influenced (Smith et al., 2007). The findings of the above studies are difficult to generalize as they research younger athletes, who maybe more influenced by coaches than older athletes.

Parents have also been shown to play a major role with athletes. Kaye, Frith & Vosloo (2015) and O'Rourke et al. (2014) stated that there were not enough studies on parents'

influence on athletes, especially those exploring the dynamic between parent and child in relation to the sports experience.

O'Rourke et al. (2014) studied an elite swimming team in the US between the ages of 9-14, who were being prepared for the Olympics to assess the effects of parents and coaches initiated motivational climates. Both climates were related to the three dimensions: trait anxiety, self-esteem and regulations. The findings proposed that parents, who provided a motivational climate for their children had more influence on decreasing competitive anxiety, increasing self-esteem and regulating their children than coaches. As the parents spend more time and interact more with the child inside and outside the sport, their effects become bigger. However, the past study was done on younger athletes, who usually have more parental involvement than older athletes.

Kaye et al. (2015), meanwhile, looked at the influence of parents' achievement goals on the pre-competitive anxiety of their children. They studied 146 young athletes from various sports between the ages of 6-18, focusing on one of their parents. They used the achievement goal questionnaire and sports anxiety scale. They found that parents, who focused on mastery-oriented goals similar to the AGT discussed in 2.6.2, had higher levels of somatic anxiety and had children with higher levels of somatic anxiety, worry and desire to do their best.

Bois, Lalanne & Delforge (2009) studied 201 basketball players with an average age of 14 and 140 tennis players with an average age of 13.5, who participated in local and national tournaments. The research focused on the influence of parental presence on pre-competitive anxiety and the difference across gender. The parents' presence has shown to influence pre-competitive anxiety for girls more than boys and tennis players showed higher levels of pre-competitive anxiety. The study also revealed that parents' involvement had a positive influence on athletes too. However, the results stressed that athletes did not feel less anxious when parents were not involved. This is worth exploring in this research. It is also interesting that most

research done on the influence of parents and coaches studied younger athletes, showing that both had a strong influence on athletes whether they play individual or team sports.

Others were also shown to influence athletes' anxiety. Arruda, Aoki, Paludo & Moreira (2017) stated that athletes may experience more anxiety when they perceived their opponents as challenging or when they performed in front of family and friends. Interpersonal conflicts also interfered greatly with the athletes' performance in several studies (McDonough et al., 2013; Mellalieu, Shearer & Shearer, 2013). Some athletes stated that they felt negative emotions and cognitions, which when not resolved, influenced their performance (Mellalieu et al., 2013). Social interactions, then, were shown to have an influence on anxiety for athletes.

Past literature on anxiety had its limitations as most looked at the relationship between competitive anxiety and performance and the different components that influenced such a relationship. It seems that the main focus of previous research is mainly to measure either the intensity of anxiety or how the different factors such as self-confidence, competitive experience, focusing on tasks or achievements, and/or social support, relate to anxiety positively helping enhance their performance or negatively debilitating their performance. Thus, it mainly used a quantitative approach, which only examined relationships without probing into the experiences of anxiety the athletes experienced, generalizing the experiences rather than looking at the experience. Another limitation was that most of the research focused on young athletes without tackling adult ones.

To sum up, factors such as self-confidence, self-efficacy, competitive experience, perfectionism, task or ego-orientation, the influence of others and social support are all factors that influence the athletes' anxiety and performance, either positively or negatively. There is not much difference between elite and non-elite athletes, who compete with regards to their experiences of cognitive or somatic anxiety. Self-confidence seems to be the only dimension

that differentiates between how anxiety is handled. The next section will introduce some of the approaches that were used with athletes to manage their anxiety.

2.7. Different Approaches Working with Performance Anxiety in Sports Psychology

Having defined and explored the factors that may influence the athletes' anxiety, this section describes the various approaches used to help athletes cope with their anxiety experiences.

Sports psychology has emerged as a field that examines athletic performance. It teaches athletes interpersonal skills and encourages health and exercise. Part of the sports psychologists' role is to study competitive athletic behaviours and to practically help athletes succeed (Moran, 2004). Harmison (2011) stated that sports psychology also teaches athletes to be consistent and to perform at an optimal level. Sports psychologists' main focus has been on competitive anxiety (Hanin 2010; Nesti, 2011a).

2.7.1. Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy & Mental Skills Training

Nesti (2004; 2011a) suggested that over the past 25 years cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) has been the most common approach used in sports psychology to deal with anxiety with a focus on Mental Skills Training (MST) for athletes. Smith et al. (2007) agreed that cognitive behavioural interventions were used to improve the motivational climates of athletes and decrease their anxiety. MST involves several psychological skills such as self-talk, cognitive restructuring, imagery, relaxation techniques and goal setting- all influencing the athlete's performance positively (Mamassis & Doganis, 2004; Birrer & Morgan, 2010; Sharp et al., 2013; Eubank, Nesti & Littlewood, 2017).

The different cognitive and somatic approaches overlap to give athletes a better sense of mastery over their psychological state thus reducing anxiety and providing intrinsic

motivation and attention (Behncke, 2004). Mamassis & Doganis (2004) and Birrer & Morgan (2010) suggested that it was vital to understand each sport's requirements to understand what demands the athletes faced to adapt to the MST intervention accordingly. For example, Mamassis & Doganis (2004) proposed that tennis required very fine and precise movements that were done over a longer time with quick and short times. This entails a lot of thinking skills; hence, players need to learn how to be attentive to their thoughts and manage them when there are critical moments in the competition.

Mamassis & Doganis (2004) researched nine elite Greek junior tennis athletes (five 13 year olds and four 15 year olds) and chose two case studies to get an in-depth understanding of the effect of long-term MST. They proposed that those who were trained using the MST had better interpretation of their pre-competitive anxiety, which helped them perform better especially over a longer period of training on MST. This showed the significance of using MST with tennis players, and its help with managing anxiety and raising self-confidence. This research only studied a few junior athletes, which could be difficult to generalize to other athletes, however, the case studies have shown how MST influenced these athletes' anxiety in more details, revealing how training longer on MST demonstrated the process of managing the athletes' anxiety.

Birrer & Morgan (2010), similarly, studied the influence of Psychological Skills Training (PST), but on athletes who played High Intensity Sports (HIS). HIS require personal development, self-skills, regulating arousal, motivational skills and recovery skills. These authors considered several factors such as training intensity, training duration, training years, psychosocial development, risk of injury and death, proposing a model to systematically identify the psychological demands necessary to decrease arousal, help athletes make choices and take care of themselves. It is interesting that this research illustrates the different

requirements between each sport, which may show the different factors that may influence anxiety with athletes in each sport.

The above studies reveal how MST may help manage anxiety and enhance performance, considering the different demands of each sport, using a more qualitative approach to get a deeper understanding of how MST works.

Studies on mental imagery and self-talk suggested that these tools might be used by athletes to help decrease their maladaptive behaviour, manage arousal, reconstruct negative thinking and improve concentration (Mousavi & Meshkini, 2011). Expressive writing was also researched as a method to help competitive anxiety (Hudson & Day, 2012). Athletes reported that expressive writing helped them evaluate their perceptions, self-develop, manage their emotions and prepare better for competition (Hudson & Day, 2012). Thus, a phenomenological approach may help gain more insight into the athletes' experiences, and understand what athletes regard helpful and what makes meaning for them.

2.7.2. Mindfulness Sports Performance Enhancement

Mindfulness Sports Performance Enhancement (MSPE) has been also used in sports psychology and can be adapted to any sport. It teaches athletes to go from being mindful while still into being mindful while playing the sport. MSPE helped athletes regain the flow of their game (Pineau, Glass & Kaufman, 2014). Lazarus (2000) looked into how both positive and negative emotions can affect performance in competitive sports. Lazarus (2000) proposed that using the dichotomy between positive and negative emotion was excessive and did not represent the relationship between emotions and performing well, suggesting a more multidimensional approach to such a relationship. However, Pineau et. al (2014) found that regulating emotions with mindfulness may help athletes perform better. Mental imagery, self-talk, expressive writing and mindfulness have all been tools used to work on athletes' anxiety.

It calls for accepting all emotions, without labelling them into positive and negative, and teaching athletes to focus on the present moment, which will be discussed later in Section 5.3.1.

To summarize, there have been different approaches and theories in sports psychology working on decreasing anxiety and controlling emotions to help athletes play at their optimum performance. Research has shown that cognitive-behavioural interventions can help improve athletes' performance. However, there has been a call for a more individualized approach for each athlete to understand what their anxiety is about and find what makes it easier or more difficult for them to perform well. There has been a suggestion that anxiety as a sole concept should not be isolated from other emotions, positive or negative. Thus, when looking at anxiety with athletes it is important to explore all the emotional experiences that these athletes may be experiencing, preferably through qualitative research.

2.8. What is Missing in Understanding Anxiety with Athletes?

A lot of the sports psychology literature has forgone how anxiety could be contextual and multi-dimensional, disregarding how deep this experience could be. Mellalieu et al. (2009) suggested that psychologists, who examined the intensity of anxiety and its influence on athletes during performance, did not explore how other areas in the athlete's life might affect anxiety. Harmison (2011) suggested that elite performers were complex and multidimensional requiring psychological, physical, tactical and technical elements integrated together, as they constantly perform within their own context.

Hain (2010) proposed that athletes needed to deal with a multitude of changes whether changes in weather, teams, equipment, or training programs. This, he added, entailed that they faced anxiety in an acute or chronic way sometimes coming out in the form of poor performance or personal struggles. However, psychosocial factors that influence athlete's performance, well-being and other life context experiences have not been regarded in sports psychology (Harmison, 2011; Nesti, Littlewood, O'Halloran, Eubank & Richardson, 2012;

Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014; Devaney, Nesti, Ronkainen, Littlewood & Richardson, 2018).

Walker (2010) found that when counselling athletes, there were a variety of anxiety-provoking issues that might arise such as financial burden, career planning, fear of getting old, getting injured, self-esteem issues, betrayal of training places and others; all of which might influence their performance. On the other hand, McDonough et al. (2013) proposed that some of the anxiety and fear related to competition and stressors might be associated with parents, coaches, comparisons with teammates, or being placed in unfamiliar situations. Some athletes may perceive such factors as exciting and challenging and not necessarily hindering, while it may affect others negatively. This shows that athletes' reactions could be reflected differently, depending on context and their unique experiences.

Nesti (2011a) stated that most sports psychologists felt something more was needed to be done with athletes, as there was a huge gap between theories and practical implementation. He believed that CBT approaches had failed to look deeper into the meaning of anxiety, as it only measured and tried to reduce it (Nesti, 2011a). Similarly, Corlett (1996) opposed the sophist approach that proposed eradicating anxiety without confronting it, while Eubank et al. (2017) criticised MST as only a part of the mental toughness that should be used with athletes. They suggested giving agency and responsibility to athletes, while considering the environment and social context they were training in. Harmison (2011) and Sharp et al. (2013) called for using more qualitative approaches when using MST to delve more into the athlete's needs and self-awareness.

Nesti (2011b) stated that many athletes did not accept support when sports psychologists neglected them as human beings and only focused on them as performers. Devaney et al. (2018) proposed that focusing on performance takes away from the whole experience of athletes. Thompson & Andersen (2012) suggested that athletes sometimes might

want to be held emotionally, heard and supported without attempts to fix their performance. Likewise, Zakrajsek, Steinfeldt, Bodey, Martin & Zizzi (2013) proposed that coaches called sports psychologists to help athletes on a more personal level. Psychosocial, interpersonal, environmental and physiological issues may all influence athletes as a whole, affecting their anxiety while performing. As mentioned, MST or other stress reduction interventions may not address these issues and thus Frey, Laguna & Ravizza (2003) believed that only a qualitative approach could help understand the subjective experience of these athletes. They maintained that the importance of competition, for example, was not the same for all athletes. Thus, the one -fits all approach that is measured quantitatively does not seem to work well. This may open up the door to approach anxiety with athletes in a different manner, looking at it in a more contextual approach, which existentialism may help with. The next section introduces how anxiety is regarded existentially and how this relates to the athletes' experiences of anxiety.

2.9. Existential Anxiety - An Existential Perspective to Anxiety for Athletes

Existentialism considered anxiety as a natural feeling, helping people assess threats (Sanders, Wills & Hallam, 2003). It is part of the human condition and living (Tillich, 1952; Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Existentialism focuses on exploring the things that are unique to human beings such as love, responsibility, choices and knowledge of their own death, differentiating them from other creatures (Nesti, 2004; Nesti, 2010; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015).

Heidegger (1962) proposed that the human nature was characterized by a unique being in the world, which he called '*Dasein*', referring to being aware of our being. With this awareness that we have freedom and choices, there are limitations as we are *thrown into* the world with no choice and control; anxiety is part of this *being-in-the-world*. Existentialism views anxiety as part of the possibilities and freedom associated with being a human being, part of the ontological world (May, 1950; Kierkegaard, Thomte & Anderson, 1980).

Similarly, Van Deurzen (2002) proposed that existential anxiety was the very basic uncomfortable feeling of being aware of ourselves, our vulnerability and the possibility of death. May (1978) suggested that anxiety could be normal and beneficial, stemming out of a conflict from within - mainly the fact that we would die. Yalom (1980, p. 29) similarly stated that “death is a primordial source of anxiety” since everything would fade. He suggested that the awareness of death and the struggle to continue living revealed the most common form of existential anxiety, which could be both destructive and constructive giving meaning to life (Yalom, 1980). Such awareness can make people anxious, keeping them more creative and appreciative to live, which is considered normal anxiety (May, 1978).

May (1950) suggested that normal anxiety is associated with growth, self-awareness, freedom and self-realization as it allows individuals to constructively develop as human beings. It is considered healthy, as we learn and are challenged. Conversely, when the individual cannot deal with these challenges and tries to avoid them, neurotic anxiety emerges (May, 1950). Neurotic anxiety is the repetitive failure to handle normal anxiety, as normal anxiety allows for the possibility of being and becoming (May, 1950). Van Deurzen (2002) stated that when someone was not mindful of living or denying choices, their effort to reduce anxiety could only calm anxiety down for a temporary period of time but would only delay existential anxiety.

The existential approach, thus, does not remove anxiety but motivates people to face it, as the idea of curing anxiety would basically mean removing living (Van Deurzen, 2002). According to existentialism, then, anxiety is part of living as the person understands and accepts what makes them human. Kierkegaard et al. (1980) also believed that existential anxiety could generate growth in people, something that could make them more faithful, free and courageous.

Like existential anxiety sports anxiety can be both joyful and painful (Nesti, 2004; Martin & Horn, 2013; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014; Ronkainen, Tikkanen & Nesti, 2018). Nesti (2007) suggested that part of the athlete's anxiety was due to their *choice*, by placing themselves in such a challenging situation, while in fact they are free and determined. Lundqvist & Sandin (2014) meanwhile stated that many athletes felt that playing competitively made them happy that when forced to stop they sometimes felt depressed and hopeless.

There are several notions of existentialism that were shown to influence athletes generally and how they related to sports particularly. The existential perspective could help researchers gain a deeper understanding of the athletes' experiences of anxiety. These are: meaning making, authenticity, death, inter-relating with others, and spirituality.

2.9.1. Meaning Making

The existential perspective focuses on meaning making when trying to understand anxiety as a human phenomenon. Phenomenology looks at sports anxiety from a humanistic rather than a scientific perspective (Nesti, 2011a). May (1950) and Tillich (1952) suggested that anxiety was experienced when a person perceived a threat to his or her essence. In this sense, understanding how important the sport is for athletes can predict and explain their anxiety.

Likewise, Tamminen, Holt & Neely (2013) suggested that athletes found meaning in their lives when they understood what sports meant to them and experienced growth when they risked losing their sports. In other words, athletes can learn about their values and what is important to them when they understand the meaning of their sport (Braden & Wool, 1993).

Nesti (2011a) proposed that existential ideas could help understand the athlete's experiences of anxiety in a new way through exploring their sense of meaning and identity. Nesti (2011a) and Ronkainen et al. (2018) believed that these ideas might enable athletes to tolerate the challenges and pressures they faced. Frankl (1992, p. 106), building on Nietzsche's

view that a person was in constant search for a meaning of their own, said “man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a secondary realization of instinctual drives”. He added that the meaning a person assigned was usually very specific to that person alone (Frankl, 1992). This idea could help athletes explore how they give meaning to their lives through their sports.

Some researchers looked into meaning making in relation to athletic identity formation. Ronkainen, Kavoura & Ryba (2016) reviewed 18 athletic identity studies that used narrative and discourse analysis. Narrative approaches focused on the individual life story and how the meaning of these athletes’ identity developed through time and transitions, while the discursive approach focused less on the individual agency and more on the socio-cultural constructs. They mainly tried to understand the conceptualization of athletic identity, showing how cultural values influenced the athlete’s identity and how participating in elite sports hindered holistic identity development.

In this meta-study, Ronkainen et al. (2016) found that there was an inclination to base athletes’ identities on performance and body image. Results also showed that athletic identity was culturally constructed with several discourses such as gender, age and class for example. Their research highlighted the influence of the socio-political context on athletic identity as well. In addition, it was found that most athletes built their identity on only one or two aspects, mostly related to performance. Ronkainen et al. (2016), thus, encouraged athletes to construct their own identity, considering there were several factors that influence the athlete’s sporting experiences.

Other researchers used narrative methodologies to explore how young athletes developed their identity. Through exploring personal stories, behaviours and perceived identities, they assessed the role of the sports culture in identity development and how to protect

athletes from only developing an athletic identity. They used the stories of athletes, who were in their early career years, exploring how the sports culture posited a lot of pressure for athletes to form an exclusive athletic identity (Carless & Douglas, 2013; Law & Birgisdóttir, 2014). The studies showed how the sports culture might influence athletes' identity formation, which could be one area that influenced the athletes' anxiety experience.

Similarly, Champ, Nesti, Ronkainen, Tod & Littlewood (2018) explored how a player's identity is socially constructed influenced by the sports culture while studying elite youth football athletes. They used ethnography over three competitive seasons to get a deeper understanding from the inside, interested in a more longitudinal research. They suggested that identity is a fluid notion that changes according to the cultural context the athlete is placed in, calling for working on a more organizational level when working with athletes. These studies even though not focusing mainly on tennis athletes, nor generalizable, demonstrate how understanding the athletes' context can help understand their experience better.

Ryba, Ronkainen & Selanne (2015) also explored meaning making, values and identity that athletes formed, focusing on social and cultural contexts. The study analysed two life narratives of transnational athletes in the Nordic region. The two subjects researched had similar ages with different genders, athletic status, sports areas and regions in Europe. Through three in depth interview sessions, the researchers assessed the relationship between their athletic career and life outside their sports. They were asked to explain how they made sense and formed meaning of their lives and their athletic careers and how gender and culture influenced their behaviours and life choices. The athletes stressed on three different points related to their athletic career: performance, integrating sports and academics and National career. Although their case-studies could not be generalized, they show the way different athletes make sense of their sports and how the culture influences such decisions. Each athlete has a different subjective experience on their career goals and what it means to them. Moreover,

many athletes might be studying while competing, which would pose additional pressure and different perspectives on how they look at their athletic career.

Samuel (2013) conducted research looking into how events that required coping throughout an athlete's life might affect their athletic careers and identity change. Two athletes were studied focusing on identity, how it related to sports, and whether it changed over time. The research showed that the athletes based their identities on their performance. It has been suggested that personal changes might affect an athlete's performance and thus his or her identity. Hiles (2007), similarly, proposed how people construct identity position depending on what they choose to give meaning to, suggesting how identity is not fixed.

Ryba et al. (2015) added that identity development might be an issue especially with adolescent athletes. Henriksen, Larsen, Storm & Ryom (2014) supported this, saying it was essential to recognize that adolescent athletes were not like older ones, as they were still going through identity formation. This may suggest that it is essential, especially with adolescent athletes, to help them understand what meaning they form in relation to their sports and how other areas in their lives maybe related to their identity as well. However, in this research the focus will be on older athletes, some of which maybe approaching the end of their tennis careers.

To sum it up, Ryba et al. (2015) and Ronkainen et al. (2016) suggested that athletes formed meaning based on their sports performance rather than other areas in their lives. Ronkainen et al. (2018) stated that this does not mean that athletes only viewed their identities as athletes solely, as identity is not a fixed notion. However, Ryba et al. (2015) suggested that basing identity on mostly being athletes might pose a danger in the inability to form a life narrative out of their highly athletic sports achievement.

Although many researchers showed that identity could be based on performance, they had not explored how identity might influence the athletes' experiences of anxiety (Nesti,

2011a). Thus, it would be important to explore how the experiences of anxiety in relation to sports and competition might be related to the meaning athletes give to their sports, essentially, winning and losing.

2.9.2. Authenticity

Anxiety in sports may be related to authenticity and given the ability to choose (Nesti, 2011a). Authenticity emerged recently as an important notion in the field of sports (Bednar, 2014; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). Van Deurzen (2002, p. 43) stated that being authentic was about being “the author of one’s own destiny.” Wulfing (2008) likewise suggested that anxiety was linked to authenticity as it pushed beings to make authentic choices making them the agent of their lives.

Heidegger’s (1962) notion of authenticity is mainly related to temporality, as death is the inevitable future. Heidegger stressed that temporality directed the human thoughts into the future, leading them to self-growth and authentic life. He suggested that *Dasein* was primordially carried away with everyday life, which meant that it was easy for beings to fall into the everyday world and be forgetful of their being. He stated that authenticity was related to one’s self, in which one should be resolute with what was really possible for them and own it.

Being authentic does not mean to fully lose connection with the world or become isolated. It is more about making choices, knowing the possibilities of having these choices and the risks that may occur with these choices. In-authenticity, meanwhile, is when one avoids anxiety of having to face challenges or choices (Heidegger, 1962) or as Cooper (2003) describes it: denying one’s own freedom and responsibility.

Bednar (2014) explored Heidegger’s notion of authenticity and how it related to sports. He suggested that sports could be both a foundation of authenticity and a source of in-authenticity due to the pressure from elite sports. He proposed that authenticity was always

changing in a dynamic interaction with in-authenticity, in which one could not be fully authentic or inauthentic. Bednar (2014) added that the main mode of an athlete's expression was their performance. This means that when the performance is authentic it usually relates to the athletes showing their potential. On the other hand, athletes should be more aware of both their minds and bodies to be true to themselves.

Many athletes rebelled against the strong politics or media pressure of being a celebrity, in an effort to be more authentic. Being an elite athlete could help them understand and relate better to themselves, the world and others, through their sport. However, in-authenticity may be apparent with athletes too when there is a misunderstanding of what the purpose and meaning of life is. Athletes usually learn to make fast decisions, which may present a struggle when their careers end, which in turn, could result in in-authenticity (Bednar, 2014).

Nesti (2011a) proposed that with all the awards and achievements, some players might become inauthentic and distracted. This is similar to Heidegger's idea that it is easy for humans to fall into the world around them, when an athlete has been used to doing something in a certain way. Ronkainen & Nesti (2015) agreed that sometimes when athletes turned into professional players, they became inauthentic, as their love for the sport developed into a career with a certain structure or culture. Bednar (2014), thus, stated that to live an authentic life an athlete should follow their own passion but respect others.

Sports psychologists may benefit from having more knowledge of the values of athletes and how they feel authentically, focusing beyond the culture of competitive sports. This may help athletes open up about their true goals and how they can manage them within the competitive environment (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). Tamminen et al. (2013) suggested that athletes experienced growth when they experienced a risk of losing their sports and adversity.

Bednar (2014) proposed that working on authenticity with an athlete required attention to one's use of their potential and how they took care of their own soul, as suggested by Plato

and Socrates. However, he questioned whether it was better to always strive for authenticity, as he believed this might not be helpful when an athlete's identity was not mature. His approach to authenticity was one that had both an antagonist and an integrative authenticity, as sports have both examples and poles of authenticity. He suggested it might be helpful to be true to oneself, sometimes against the norm of society in sports. However, with the integrative authenticity approach an athlete could take on new things and integrate them with others (Bednar, 2014).

The struggle of being authentic versus in-authenticity may be difficult for athletes. Anxiety might be related to how athletes strive to reach their full potential or realize all their possibilities, as Heidegger's (1962) notion. Sometimes athletes might avoid certain experiences to avoid feeling the anxiety associated with them. However, sometimes with the anxiety induced by life, the athlete could try to make sense of their own lives, both as players and as beings in the world (Nesti, 2004). This gets us back to meaning making, which includes what the sports and playing competitively mean for athletes. These studies allow for looking at anxiety in a different perspective, understanding more why athletes play sports and what they find in it, perhaps acknowledging whether they are truly playing for them or for other reasons that might not be authentic, which may also influence their anxiety experience. The studies did not directly target the relationship between anxiety and authenticity, which may need to be studied more focusing on different types of athletes at different stages in their athletic careers.

Ryba et al. (2015) suggested that exploring athletic identity allows athletes to think of life in an authentic way. Ronkainen et al. (2016) also proposed that even though research sometimes highlighted how much living an elite athletic life was hard, some athletes preferred the values and meaning related with this kind of identity narrative. Authenticity research, nevertheless, did not reveal how athletes' experiences of anxiety might be affected through

their competitive athletic journey. Thus, to understand athletes' experiences of anxiety, the notion of authenticity would need to be further explored together with how they make sense of their being as athletes.

2.9.3. Death

Anxiety is highly related to death as discussed in 2.9. Yalom (1980, p. 29) suggested, "Our attitudes toward death influence the way we live and grow". Ending in relation to time is significant in sports, as Phoenix, Smith & Sparkes (2007) and Martinkova & Parry (2011) suggested. They maintained that sport was structured by time, as there were always beginnings and endings in matches, or trainings were structured by time. Thus, in sports there is always an inescapable ending.

Ronkainen & Nesti (2015) and Ronkainen & Ryba (2017a) researched how retiring from sports might be similar to the notion of death that was inescapable. Ronkainen, Ryba & Nesti (2013b) pinpointed how retiring might be a great loss to athletes and their identity. They stated that several athletes worried about what would happen with their life after ending their sports career. They wanted to explore how the concept of the possibility of retiring would affect the athlete's choices in moving forward in their sporting career (Ronkainen et al., 2013b).

Ronkainen et al. (2013b) and Ronkainen & Ryba (2017b) suggested that ageing was an existential given that reflected the athletes' freedom to redefine their meaning of living. They said it was also related to whether the athletes would continue or retire from their sports careers. Similarly, Cooper (2003) suggested that the realization of death could be a motive to search for meaning in life, realizing choices. Yalom (1980) added that the idea of death motivated people to recognize their responsibility in living. This relates to Heidegger's (1962) notion of authenticity and how a person lives knowing things may end soon.

Ageing is considered a physical matter related to the athlete's bodily endurance and capabilities rather than tactics (Ronkainen et al., 2013b). However, they also regarded it as a socio-culturally embedded notion. Ageing, together with other contexts such as having an injury or burnout, may force one to face the existential givens of life, which is finitude.

Ronkainen et al. (2013b) explored how Finnish endurance males attached meaning to their experiences of ageing and/or decreasing physical capabilities and how this affected their careers. They conducted 10 in-depth life story interviews with runners and orienteers, who were within the age range of 25-62; only two considered themselves retired. They used the existential narrative framework, looking into authenticity and agency of Heidegger (1962) and meaning making of Frankl (1992). The results showed that athletes considered ageing and physical limitations an existential threat to their athletic life path.

The study further explained that when the meaning was based on performance, athletes faced a threat to their sense of self due to ageing and physical limitations. However, when athletes spoke about post athletic life and career, the meaning became more complex and was derived from several sources rather than solely their performance (Ronkainen et al., 2013b). The complexity of meaning is similar to what Yalom (1980) mentioned in regard to a shift to the mindfulness of being, considering the internal experiences and what other meaning the sport represented (Ronkainen et al., 2013b).

Ronkainen et al. (2013b), however, debated the use of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), as it limited the understanding of athletic identity. Instead of looking at identity from one dimension, this study showed how athletes looked at the meaning of their sport and how it reflected their whole life. Running meant more than performance; it incorporated values, feelings of the athletic experience, the team, personal growth and travelling as well as excitement associated with competition. Some even found a spiritual meaning to it.

Ronkainen et al. (2013b) called for contextualizing the literature of athletic identity since it might affect the meaning assigned. They proposed that using performance and winning solely for assessing athletes' development might affect early retirement. They suggested that athletes should focus on different ways of looking at their identity besides only their athletic performance for a healthier relationship with sports. They also found that finitude and career ending were universal to all athletes, but the way athletes assigned meaning was affected by culture, gender and other factors (Ronkainen et al., 2013b).

In another research, Ronkainen & Ryba (2017b) studied 10 male runners between the ages of 25 and 62, who competed nationally at their peak years. They used an existential narrative approach. They suggested that competing meant winning for these athletes, but when they continued beyond their peak the meaning of competition changed to enjoying the community and the experience. They suggested that focusing on the athlete's narratives may help them make more authentic decisions, seeing ageing as an existential challenge to be faced rather than an involuntary force to quit (Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017b). The findings of these studies included a more in-depth look into ageing and how it influenced runners' identity, which might not be applicable to tennis athletes. Nevertheless, they may resonate with some of the tennis athletes' experience in terms of ageing and ending of their athletic careers.

Realizing one's death or ending, which in the context of sports may be by retiring, getting injured or ageing, may push athletes to be more authentic and mindful while being in their sports, as it allows athletes to face the existential givens in life, experiencing anxiety at times. Thus, the experiences of anxiety for athletes may be understood by exploring how death/loss of their career may affect their identity and how it may threaten their being in the world, which has been sometimes associated with their performance.

2.9.4. Interrelating with Others

The way athletes interrelate with others such as coaches for example could have an impact on anxiety as discussed in 2.6.6. Heidegger introduced how *Dasein* was always “Being-with” (1962, p. 150), which he meant we were always being with others in the world even if they were not present. Heidegger (1962, p. 156/7) stated that: “Being-with is an existential characteristic of *Dasein* when practically, no other is present-at-hand or perceived.” Even *Dasein*’s Being-alone is “being-with” in the world.

Evans, Eys & Bruner (2012) suggested that athletes always worked within a group dynamic, even when they played individually. This is true as athletes may play for a team or against opponents and work with coaches. Chan, Lonsdale & Fung (2012) proposed that athletes were influenced differently at different ages. Mainly, parents and coaches influence athletes at younger ages, while their peers influence them at later ages.

Gearity & Murray (2011) stated that a good coach was someone who helped athletes work with their anxiety, raised their self-esteem and helped motivate them. They used existential phenomenology as a qualitative approach to look at the athletes’ experiences of poor coaching. They interviewed 16 current or former athletes, who played professional, semi-professional or college level sports. The athletes, who reported they experienced poor coaching, discussed five themes that came out of their experiences: not caring, unfairness, weakening the athletes’ mental skills, poor teaching skills and on the athlete’s part coping with poor coaching skills. The athletes said that poor coaching included not providing the emotional support required, favouring some over others, distracting athletes, inflicting self-doubt, demotivating, and even dividing the team. Coping with poor coaching helped athletes have more perseverance, sometimes not listening to the coach. The findings suggested that coaches who created an ego-goal climate were associated with higher anxiety and performance stress,

which reinforced athletes' self-doubt. The study brought up the importance of a phenomenological approach to understand the athletes' lived experiences of their relationship with their coaches and how this influences them.

Gearity (2012) in another study looked at the athletes' experiences of poor coaching and the ethical issues that arose with that, using existential phenomenology. He asked 16 current or former athletes, who played collegiate level, to speak about their experiences with poor coaches. All athletes described a poor coach as uncaring, inconsiderate of athletes and unsupportive. They described such coaches as self-centered, mainly focusing on winning. They said they were alone, feeling they would be pushed aside if injured. The results suggested that athletes wanted their coaches to help them self-develop and called for an athlete-centered culture, not a culture based on winning.

Although these studies did not target how coaches influence the athletes' anxiety experiences, these studies used qualitative approaches that allowed for more understanding of what athletes struggle with their coaches, which some tennis athletes may experience too.

Similarly, parents influence young athletes' sporting experience (Bois et al., 2009), as discussed in 2.6.6. Harwood & Knight (2009) suggested that parents might have a negative influence, as suggested by coaches and athletes in youth sports, especially with tennis as it required financial, time and effort commitments and obligations. Others such as teammates, opponents, and spectators might also influence the athletes' anxiety experience as discussed in 2.6.6, although past research did not really reveal how.

On the other hand, some athletes experienced feeling alone in their sports experience, as discussed before by Gearity & Murray (2011) and Gearity (2012). Ronkainen & Nesti (2015) stated that many athletes might experience loneliness due to leaving family and friends, while training or competing. However, loneliness in existential psychology is more complicated than only missing the people. It is related, as Yalom (1980) suggested to existential isolation, which

is feeling more isolated than others even if having relationships. This is another area that may be of interest to study to understand the experiences of athletes' anxiety. This area is relatively new to sports, which may need more research to understand how athletes experience being alone in the tennis court while competing.

Athletes, then, are constantly in a relationship with others even if they are alone in their experience. 'Others' may influence athletes and their experiences of anxiety before or during competition.

2.9.5. Spirituality

Spirituality has been an area that was also researched with athletes (Watson & Nesti, 2005; Nesti, 2007; 2011b; Ronakinen, Nesti & Tikkanen, 2013a; Egli, Fisher & Gentner, 2014). Ronkainen et al. (2013a) stated that humans are spirits in their essence and that spirituality is being aware of one's own existence and understanding oneself. Nesti (2011b) and Ronkainen et al. (2013a) suggested that the word spirit was used so often in sports, and that religious beliefs and spirituality were important parts of many athletes' lives (Nesti, 2011b; Watson & Nesti, 2005).

Spirituality may or may not involve religion (Egli et al., 2014). Watson & Nesti (2005) focused on integrating spirituality when working with athletes as part of understanding what sports meant to them and the peak experiences they might experience while engaging in their sports.

In their study, Ronkainen et al. (2013a) focused on the personal and spiritual meaning that elite athletes and coaches assigned to their sporting experiences. The participants were asked to write a personal essay about what sports meant to them to look at their in-depth understanding of their experiences. Eight elite athletes and two coaches from different countries and different religious origins participated. The 10, who were between 25 and 47

used an existential narrative framework to look at main existential themes and assign meaning through storytelling. The researchers suggested that not all participants mentioned spirituality but they all had major shifts in the existential meaning of their sports, being authentic, and remaining authentic within the high-pressure environment of competitive sports. The main two stories of their research focused on ‘losing authenticity’ and ‘sports as a spiritual journey’. Losing authenticity was reflected through the mixed and complicated feelings some athletes had, how they were compared and compared themselves to others and how striving for performance made it difficult to remember their motivation to play. This study was very specific to the experiences of ten athletes; however, it may resemble how some tennis athletes may experience their tennis journey.

Similarly, Simpson, Post, Young & Jensen (2014) used existential phenomenological interviewing to understand how ultra-marathon running allowed athletes a spiritual experience as they felt they connected with a natural environment and experienced peacefulness. For them authenticity was essential. They proposed that the more the existential worldviews coincided with the demands of one’s career, the more experiences the athlete would have in life and their career

Watson & Nesti (2005) also suggested that spirituality could help athletes when they struggled with any crisis, when they needed to understand the meaning and values of their sports and when they needed to make choices. Nesti (2011b) stated that some athletes felt their identity was secured even if they were threatened to lose their athletic identity, just knowing that God would love them unconditionally. Nesti (2011b) called for exploring values, meaning and spiritual beliefs to understand the whole person, not only the athlete. He added that understanding how spirituality guided an athlete’s life might help explain his or her authenticity and choices (Nesti, 2011b).

Integrating spirituality may allow athletes to tackle their issues in and out of sports and understand their sense of growth along their sports journey (Watson & Nesti, 2005). Such research shows the significance of adding the exploration of spirituality in a wider sense, in terms of beliefs, values and meaning, when working with athletes. Although none of the above studies were on tennis athletes, it is important to understand how some tennis athletes experience spirituality while competing.

Egli et al. (2014) in another study looked at the definition of culture, spirituality, faith and religion within the sports context and how spirituality was part of the cultural values. They called for exploring how spiritual practices such as prayers or meditation might influence anxiety and performance. They further proposed that sports psychology might benefit from the integration of spirituality in their work.

Similarly, Azimirad & Jalilvand (2012) proposed that competitive anxiety was influenced by spiritual transcendence. However, they used a quantitative approach to look at spiritual anxiety, competitive anxiety and higher levels of self-confidence, using the Transcendental Spirituality scale developed by Piedmont (1999) that looks at prayer fulfillment, connectedness and universality, and the CSAI-2 scale. They found that the higher the measure of spirituality, the higher the athletes felt confident and the more control they had over competitive anxiety. They suggested then that from an existentialism perspective, prayer might influence the athlete in general as a person and help their anxiety. They called for spirituality-based meditation training while working with athletes (Azimirad & Jalilvand, 2012). Their study does not really depict how prayers may influence athletes' anxiety.

Other research looked at routines, which could be considered rituals. Grant & Schempp (2013) researched athlete's routines and behaviours before competition, looking deeper at the description and meaning of those routines to the athletes. They found that athletes felt these

routines meant they were prepared mentally and physically and helped them feel secured and comfortable.

Mesagno, Marchant & Morris (2008), likewise, looked at how pre-performance routines could help decrease or remove choking. They studied 88 bowlers, who ranged between 16 and 61 and who were more likely to experience choking, which means tremendous deterioration in performance under pressure. They focused on how Pre-Performance Routine (PPR) can improve pressure in performance. They used a quantitative measure using the CSAI-2, which showed less anxiety for those who used PPR.

Lonsdale & Tam (2008) studied the consistency of the NB basketball players of their PPR. They recorded 14 NBA play-off matches, with players of an average age of 27. They looked at routines before the free throw, suggesting that when athletes had a PPR they had more accuracy in the shots.

Hazell, Cotterill & Hill (2014) also studied the relationship between PPR, performance and anxiety. They looked at 20 British male semi-professional football players, who played for at least five years. The study had a pre-and post-intervention approach. The players were taught to do a PPR for seven days before the penalty kicks, while the control group played without the PPR. They used the CSAI-2 to measure anxiety and the Bandura's scale to measuring self-efficacy, focusing on the accuracy of the penalty kick. They found no significance of performance for the experimental group but found less somatic anxiety for those who performed the PPR (Hazell et al., 2014).

In addition, Burger & Lynn (2005) looked at superstitious behaviours in major league baseball players, focusing on the cultural differences between American and Japanese baseball players. They researched 77 baseball players, 50 from the USA and 27 from Japan. They used a semi-structured questionnaire, finding that most players believed in superstitious behaviours. Many practiced their superstitious rituals in every match, which helped them feel in control

especially that baseball had many uncontrollable variables. However, Japanese players were found to perform less superstitious rituals than American players, as Americans believed more that their behaviour affected their performance (Hazell et al., 2014). Most research on routines used quantitative approaches that show whether their routines helped them but did not demonstrate how these routines help them and how this influences their anxiety experiences.

Exploring spirituality, then, may be of use when trying to understand the experiences of anxiety with different values, beliefs and practices. Spirituality was shown to be related to how athletes made sense of their world and how they make authentic choices in their lives. In addition, the use of rituals and routines whether spiritual or only behavioural was shown to influence anxiety too.

The next section will illustrate the significance of an existential approach when trying to understand the athlete's anxiety.

2.10. The Significance of Existentialism for Understanding Athletes' Experiences of Anxiety

The existential school of thought could be used to explore the different dimensions of the athletes' anxiety, pointing to how interrelated they might be. This approach is different from what have been previously proposed in the sports psychology field. Ronkainen & Nesti (2015) proposed that anxiety was not only an unpleasant pre-competitive emotion, but also according to existentialism was normal.

Lundqvist & Sandin (2014) suggested that it was essential to look at the athlete as a whole person with their values and choices. Nesti (2011a), Ronkainen et al. (2013b) & Ronkainen & Nesti (2015) suggested that the existential approach might help get an

understanding of notions that CBT could not look at, such as choices, limitations and responsibilities, authenticity, spirituality and search for meaning. Existential psychology may place emphasis on the things that may be unpredictable or that may disrupt an athlete's life such as: retiring, getting injured or the death of a loved one (Ronkainen et al., 2013b). It can also address other changes that happen to players such as future aspirations, focusing on how athletes are free beings (Nesti, 2011a; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015).

Ronkainen et al. (2016) suggested that not much research focused on the internal world of the athletes as most concentrated on the social construction rather than the lived experience. This is why they called for using existential psychology and a phenomenological approach to better understand the athlete's identity. Similarly, Nesti (2011b) and Maranise (2013) proposed that the past existential literature in sports revealed the importance of using phenomenological methodology and existentialism to understand the athletes' anxiety experiences and unveil the notions associated with them as beings.

Ronkainen & Nesti (2015) clarified that existential psychology was founded on the basis of understanding humans and not fixing them. Aggerholm (2015) praised existential philosophy in sports, as not providing an absolute truth standardized to all athletes. Rather, it focuses on helping understand how human beings find meaning and value in relation to sports (Aggerholm, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2018). Existentialism calls for understanding the athlete's whole worldview and how they relate to themselves, others and the world to understand their anxiety (Van Deurzen, 2002). Ryba et al. (2015) believe that existentialism brings a new focus for sports counsellors, psychologists and therapists to offer athletes a wider look at their careers and their lives.

Unlike what has been suggested by sports psychology that anxiety is a negative emotion that may hinder performance, existentialism proposes it as a normal experience. Sports

psychology has been trying to integrate more qualitative research to understand more the experiences of athletes, as there has been a shift to seeing athletes as whole beings.

Very little research looked specifically into the experiences of anxiety for tennis athletes. Flaire, Alix, Ferrand & Verger (2009) stated that very little research has been done on anxiety and performance with racket sports. They studied tennis players assessing the relationship between the cortisol levels and how they were related to behavioural and physiological reactions to a stressor. They suggested that in tennis competitions, on the match day, stress levels increased with more salivary cortisol concentration, which might modulate the immune functioning.

Lewis, Knight & Mellalieu (2017) looked at the emotional experiences of adolescent tennis players during tournaments using a case study approach to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional experiences of youth athletes. They studied two males and two females between the ages of 12 and 15, with eight years of tennis experience. They suggested that athletes had a wide range of emotions both positive and negative during their competition such as calm, confident, angry, anxious, frustrated, etc.

This research will explore the lived experiences of anxiety for Egyptian tennis athletes before and during competition trying to understand anxiety from a holistic view. The next section will introduce how tennis is similar to living and how being a tennis athlete may be explained through different dimensions, which would show how existentialism may help understand the experiences of tennis athletes in general and their experiences of anxiety in particular.

2.11. Being a Tennis Athlete within the Four Dimensions

Tennis life is full of paradoxes as it is a “wrenching, thrilling, horrible, astonishing whirl” (Agassi, 2009, p. 25). Agassi stated that the language used in tennis was also present in

everyday existence such as the words: service, love, break and advantage, as if every match was a mini example of life. Even the way the match is structured into points that become games and then sets and how they are all interconnected in a way that any point maybe the turning point, is similar to how the day is divided into hours, minutes and seconds, all involving choices (Agassi, 2009).

Van Deurzen (2010) explored how people exist within four dimensions: the physical, personal, social and spiritual. Each individual can be viewed within these dimensions at any particular time. The dimensions are not clearly detached from one another and they assimilate differently for different people (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Similarly, Law, Ireland & Hussain (2007) proposed a Universal Integrative framework refined by Law (2013 a & b) that included four dimensions: personal, social, organizational and professional for both coaches and coachees.

By the same token, athletes as a coachee and/or coach, including tennis athletes, may be charted within a similar framework throughout their journey as players. This section will illustrate Van Duerzen's (2010) four dimensions and its relationship to tennis, as exploring the different dimensions and their relationship to tennis may show how being a tennis athlete is a multidimensional way of being, which may reflect the experiences of anxiety holistically.

2.11.1. The Physical Dimension

The physical dimension mainly implies the way individuals exist through their bodies, relating to their physical surrounding (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Human beings exist in and through a body interacting with others, who are also existing in and through their bodies (Lemma-Wright 1994). "Tennis is a mind-body sports, with one profoundly affecting the other" (Braden & Wool, 1993, p.1). The physical dimension mainly looks at how the body is experienced, whether an athlete perceives himself or herself as strong or weak, slow or fast,

thin or fat and how this influences their actions. It also includes how well the body performs, and how much he/she pushes their body.

The physical dimension also involves the relationship of the body experiencing others such as the coach for example and experiencing the environment such as playing in sun or at night, in the cold or heat, and the type of court: clay, hard or grass court (Van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). Exploring how the physical experiences of the body and the surrounding environment influences these athletes may also aid in understanding a dimension of the anxiety associated to athletes before and during competition.

Exploring the athletes' bodily experiences is an essential part of playing sports as it is after all a physical experience. Athletes usually become skilled using specific movement forms that they require and "develop a spectrum of sensory intelligence and use that intelligence to execute skilful, practical sporting action" (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007, p. 126). Hockey & Allen-Collinson (2007) also suggested that athletes have a bodily understanding and perception of sports besides their cognitive one. This fits into the physical dimension of the existential model (Van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). Thus, athletes relate to the world through their bodies and this embodiment affects the quality of life they live, as illustrated by Merleau Ponty's (2005, p. 239):

"We are in the world through our body, and in so far we perceive the world with our body".

This reflects how exploring the physical dimension may help understand part of the anxiety experiences for athletes.

2.11.2. The Personal Dimension

The personal dimension is more concerned with the inner worldview of the individual and how individuals perceive themselves in the present, the past and the future. Individuals need to understand who they are (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Athletes may feel

more self-acceptance, gaining more confidence, positive self-image and strength associated with playing competitive sports. However, an athlete needs sometimes to separate self-acceptance as a person from that of an athlete to protect success (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014).

When someone is passionate about something it may be considered part of his or her identity. But high athletic identity may mean that self-acceptance may be related to failing or achieving in sport (Martin & Horn, 2013), thus some athletes have based their self-worth on how they perform. For example, they may think that they might be accepted more if they win (Gallwey, 1974). For tennis players to understand who they are, they need to understand how they feel about playing tennis competitively, and what their choices, responsibilities, compromises and limitations are. Exploring the personal dimension, then, can benefit in understanding the anxiety athletes experience while playing.

2.11.3. The Social Dimension

The social dimension involves how individuals relate to each other as we always form relationships with others (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Sports have made athletes develop more relationships, which may have a great positive effect on them. Most athletes, such as tennis players, make friends within the sport setting and have coaches, who provide them with trust, security and support (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Travelling to different tournaments may have also influenced the growth of athletes inter-relationally (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014).

Athletes' performance and anxiety may differ with different people, according to how they interact together. Van Deurzen (2010) suggested that even though human beings were with others, they were always in isolation as no one experienced what they did. This notion can be easily applied in tennis, as athletes play at many instances alone in the court. They experience feelings and thoughts no one knows of, isolated in their game. According to Agassi (2009), tennis is lonely; there is no space to hide when things do not go as the player wants.

Understanding the social dimension then may also help in exploring another angle of these athletes' anxiety.

2.11.4. The Spiritual Dimension

The spiritual dimension is the value system human beings live by and find meaning and purpose in life. It is how people view a connection to something greater such as God for example (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Understanding what is important for athletes and what values they live by may help them gain a better perspective of what happens to them when something occurs that does not follow their values or that opposes their meaning systems. Sometimes athletes are forced to sacrifice things for their athletic life, thus they need to find meaning of their sport and assess whether the demands required for it are worth prioritizing (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014).

Part of the spiritual dimension might improve their holistic well-being by reaching their purpose in life or engaging in the sport to get a connection to the greater divine (Maranise, 2013). "Sport is a place in which people place their faith", as the athlete's identity maybe highly related to his or her spirituality or religious beliefs (Egli et al., 2014, p. 396). Most athletes have rituals that have different meanings and implementations from one athlete to another. These rituals may reduce performance anxiety and help athletes gain a sense of control in an uncertain situation (Maranise, 2013).

For Agassi (2009), players sometimes control what they can by building routines to increase their sense of control. Dwelling into what this experience of rituals is like and what is of value to the athletes may help them understand part of their anxiety during the match.

The above four dimensions and their relationship to tennis may show how being a tennis athlete is a multidimensional way of being, which may reflect the experiences of anxiety holistically. Mental skills training and other proposed approaches to work with athletes and

their anxieties might not capture these experiences holistically. These athletes may find it helpful to incorporate the interventions from counselling psychology and existential approaches with MST and other mindfulness-based interventions.

In this chapter, how anxiety impact upon athletes has been discussed in the literature review. The chapter starts with the literature search strategy adopted in the review, followed by the main definitions of sports and anxiety, demonstrating the different factors that influence the athletes' anxiety, then the approaches that have worked to manage and control the athletes' anxiety experience. The chapter then highlights how the existential perspective proposes a new way of looking at how athletes face existential anxiety, in addition to how other existential notions, such as meaning-making, death, authenticity, spirituality and social interactions, may influence the athletes' anxiety experiences, calling for using a more phenomenological approach to understand the anxiety experiences of athletes. The last section discusses how tennis relates to being in life, and how athletes exist within four dimensions of being. This section explains athletes' anxiety using these dimensions and how athletes would benefit from counselling psychology using an existential approach together with sports psychology. As this research aims to explain how anxiety could be handled in a more contextual manner, considering not only what factors influences it but also how these factors may influence the anxiety experience for the individual athlete differently, it calls for the use of qualitative approaches.

The next Chapter discusses the methodology of the research, including the methods used, participants and ethical considerations.

Chapter Three Methodology

3.1. Introduction to Research Method

Drawing on the literature review, most of the research in the field of sports psychology used quantitative approaches. However, there is a call for shifting the research paradigm towards a more qualitative approach within the field to understand participants' experiences rather than measuring them. I chose an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to carry out the research in order to understand the lived experiences of anxiety for athletes.

This chapter discusses the methodology, the choice of methods and the method used for this research, starting with exploring qualitative methods in general and their significance in understanding the experiences of anxiety for athletes. It looks into the various epistemological positions of different methods, illustrating the importance of qualitative methods. It then moves to introducing the phenomenological approach and its importance in sports psychology, adding the relevance of narrative analysis in the field. It also illustrates how IPA fits more to the requirement of this research, discussing it thoroughly and looking into its epistemology and process. Additionally, the sampling process and the research procedure are introduced, demonstrating how the data would be analysed in this research. I will then move on to discuss confidentiality, ethical considerations, research challenges and limitations (Sections 3.9-11. respectively), finishing with Section 3.12. discussing my reflexivity process within the research process.

3.2 Ontology

Research is determined by epistemological and ontological assumptions. It is essential in order to choose the most appropriate methodology for a research to look at the philosophical assumptions and underpinnings, which also integrate the philosophical position of the researcher (Poucher, Tamminen, Caron & Sweet, 2019). Ontology is concerned with the nature of existence and how reality is structured (Crotty 1998). Ontology is ‘what is there to be known in the world’ (Richie & Lewis, 2014). Some of the main ontological concerns are whether the natural and social worlds exist similarly and whether social reality exists regardless of human interpretations (Riche & Lewis, 2014). These questions are vital to establish the foundations of a research and what it is interested in. There are several different ontological positions that vary from realism, idealism and materialism. Realism views the truth of reality regardless of what people believe in; while idealism views reality as known through the human mind and social constructionism (Richie & Lewis, 2003).

My ontological position as a researcher is essential (Willig, 2008). My view on the world has shifted tremendously after changing my undergraduate studies from chemistry to psychology, followed by studying anthropology/sociology in my Master degree. Managing to integrate the three disciplines psychology, sociology and anthropology opened my eyes to the importance of the contextual world for the human being, shifting from a more positivist/materialist stance.

Working, earlier, within the medical field with people with cancer, has been a great challenge for me, as I have found myself challenged between the medical model and the concern of the individual experience. In addition, being interested in a more holistic approach that views illnesses have also transformed my view into a more individualized view of the human experience and their world. This helped me look more into what is real for the person,

their meaning-making process, taking into consideration their socio-cultural context. In addition, being drawn to the existential training and its phenomenological approach has resonated with my stance. This, thus, fits more with a position that is more involved with critical realism, looking at how reality maybe known through the human mind, how the person's experiences are real to the person and how they construct their own meaning (Willig, 2008).

3.3. Epistemological Position

The epistemological position influences the method used in research (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008). Epistemology focuses on “how, and what, can we know?” looking at the nature and scope of knowledge and what knowledge is intended to be produced (Willig, 2008, p. 2). Epistemology looks at the theories behind choosing which method (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The epistemological position varies from positivism to relativism. The positivist position looks at the world in a scientific way (Langdridge, 2007). It looks at one objective truth, mainly using quantitative research, ignoring how information can be socially constructed (Willig, 2008). Willig (2008) suggested that this position does not involve any influence from the researcher, looking at the world in terms of cause and effect.

The relativist position, on the other hand, claims that knowledge can never be objective or completely true, stating that there are always different constructions and interpretations to knowledge (Willig, 2008). Each position entails a different way of approaching and researching knowledge.

The epistemological position that a researcher holds entails the methodology and the research paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a researcher, I have to go back to where I

place myself and who I am, as mentioned in section 3.2. As a former tennis player, who grew up trying to understand my own experiences and the experiences of my children in relationship to their sports, I realize that each one of us has a totally different experience. My journey in psycho-oncology and later training in existential psychology, which is not interested in labelling or generalizing experiences, has helped shape my epistemological position, which is a relativist stance. This position fits more with the qualitative research paradigm, interested in how knowledge is relative to each individual and how it is constantly constructed.

3.4. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research looks more into the quality of the experience, while quantitative research paradigms are more interested in measuring the numbers, sizes, and the cause and effect (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Quantitative research is more structured, clearly defined, and can have replications, while qualitative research is a more flexible approach (Eklund, Jeffery, Dobersek & Cho, 2011). Even though both research paradigms come from a different ontological and epistemological positions, both qualitative and quantitative research are not necessarily opposing (Richie & Lewis, 2014). Qualitative research, however, places more value on human interpretation and understanding of the phenomena (Richie & Lewis, 2014).

Qualitative researchers approach knowledge in a critical way, looking at the narrative, the experience, and how its meaning is constructed through culture, social, context, and languages. Most qualitative methods focus on how people make sense of their world and what meaning they give to their experiences (Ashworth, 2008), studying people in their own contexts (Willig, 2008). Qualitative research methods are used “to capture the richness of the themes emerging from the respondent’s talk” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 9). Qualitative researchers are interested in the participant’s psychological, social and experiential world.

Qualitative researchers fall within a more relativist position depending on the method that is selected (Willig, 2008). The choice of methods varies, depending on their research aims, epistemological position, degree of reflexivity and the role of language in the construction of meaning (Willig, 2008).

Culver, Guilbert & Trudel (2003) reviewed the use of qualitative research in sports psychology in three journals: *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, and *The Sport Psychologist*, published between 1990 and 1999. They proposed that over 80% of the research within this period adopted a quantitative method. They suggested that even when qualitative approaches were used, they were used in conjunction with quantitative approaches (as a mixed method) to describe the data produced quantitatively.

Later, Culver, Guilbert & Sparkes (2012) followed up with a study reviewing the use of qualitative methods within the same three journals for the years 2000-2009. They suggested that there was an increase of 29% in the use of qualitative methodologies and that more quotations were included in the data. However, they stated that a positivist position still prevailed in sports psychology research, although, qualitative research had been growing. In addition, they proposed that there were a variety of qualitative methods used.

McGannon, Smith, Kendellen & Gonsalves (2019) examined six sport and exercise psychology journals from 2010-2017 in an effort to continue exploring the use of qualitative methods, however, adding their criteria to look at how rigour and trustworthy the research is, focusing on epistemology as well. They followed a descriptive summary of trends in qualitative research. They proposed that within the years 2010-2017 there has been an increase of 31.4 % of articles that used qualitative research, and that the most prevailing epistemological position was interpretivism (McGannon et al., 2019). Poucher et al.(2019) also studied the trends in qualitative research in the past 30 years till July 2017 in five sport psychology journals, suggesting that there has been an increase in the use of qualitative research as well, with a more

increase in constructionist articles after the year 2011. They called for more use of qualitative research to help expand other ways of knowing (Poucher et al., 2019). Qualitative research, then, can help gain a holistic understanding of the athlete's experiences better, as athletes will be allowed to describe their experiences freely without being limited to certain descriptions (Eklund et al., 2011).

The above literature review shows that the prevailing approaches to research anxiety have been mostly quantitative and that there has been a shift to a more qualitative phenomenological approach to depict the complexity and depth of anxiety for athletes. In the following section, I shall describe the phenomenological approach as one of the qualitative approaches moving on to why I chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) particularly in detail.

3.5. Phenomenological Method

Phenomenological methods explore human experiences (Willig, 2008). "Phenomenology is both a philosophical approach and a range of research methods concerned with how things appear to us in our experience" (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 46). Husserl (1983) introduced the phenomenological approach to psychological enquiry, mainly focusing on the conscious experience of the world. He studied human beings looking at both the objective and subjective experiences, exploring the experience itself away from the scientific positivist approach. Husserl (1983) suggested that the subjective experience is always directed towards an object, and this is why phenomenology is not only a subjective experience. Phenomenology is more, as Van Deurzen (2014) described it, the awareness of the experience; each experience has a subject, and object and a predicate. Husserl (1983) called for reducing the experience of a phenomenon, by looking at the experience as it exists and presents itself to the perceiver, and not as how the perceiver wants to perceive it. Van Deurzen (2014) stated that it is essential

with phenomenology to observe carefully, clearing our minds from any previous knowledge that might affect the observation of the real experience.

Willig (2008) stated that phenomenology looks at the experiences of being a human, what is important to human beings, and what influences their lived world. According to phenomenology, the world and the self/person could not be separated from existence as they both represent something (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

Phenomenology has three rules: the rule of *epoché*, description, and horizontalization (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008). Husserl's (1983) concept of *epoché* is basically, taking a step back as a researcher to identify pre-conceived notions and remove biases as much as possible. The rule of description mainly focuses on describing the experiences rather than explaining them, while horizontalization suggests that every detail is equally important (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008). By following these rules, the goal of phenomenology is to go to the basics of the things themselves (Husserl, 1983; Spinelli, 2005). The use of language is very important in phenomenology, as human beings use language to make sense of the world (Cohn, 1997; Langdridge, 2007).

Phenomenology can be descriptive and interpretative (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis will be discussed in Section 3.6. Dale (1996) suggested that phenomenology should be used more in sports psychology, as it would provide a better description of the athletes' experiences that might be ignored in other kinds of approaches. Nesti (2011a) added that phenomenology could help shift the research from measuring notions to exploring meaning, especially with anxiety, as phenomenology could explain anxiety in terms of May (1950) and Heidegger's (1962) notions. Thus, to understand what being anxious means to athletes we need to ask athletes to describe anxiety in their own terms, using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, then, could be a method of choice in this research to help describe the experiences of anxiety for athletes.

3.6. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

My goal in this research is to dig deeper into the lived experiences of athletes, trying to bridge the gap between the quantitative approach (that built theories about anxiety), the positivist view that has identified anxiety as a notion that should be decreased or placed in a certain state for athletes to perform better, and what can be really applicable with athletes. This, thus, requires a more interpretative approach that can help depict certain conclusions to help suggest more applicable ways of working with athletes.

An interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) might help more in looking at the lived world experiences of athletes rather than phenomenology or narrative analysis. IPA looks deeply into the lived experiences- understanding how people are trying to make sense of their social and personal world by focusing on an experience that is important for the participant's life and allowing participants to reflect on it (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009)

3.6.1. Epistemology of IPA

As suggested in Section 3.3. epistemology is about how we can know (Willig, 2008). IPA adopts a relativist/empiricist position. An empiricist position is interested in the way and form of collecting data rather than the theory itself, looking at the categories of meaning. Relativist, as suggested in 3.3, suggests that there is no one truth; no one objective way that looks at anxiety. An IPA researcher is not interested in how true or real the experience is, but more at the meaning of the experience between the participant and their world, taking a more relativist position (Willig, 2008). IPA is gaining popularity in qualitative research, looking in depth at exploring phenomena rather than forming a theory or generalizing. It focuses more on in depth rather than breadth (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In addition, IPA lies within the social constructionist dimension, suggesting that factors such as culture, social, language and history

construct human experience and knowledge. IPA, thus, falls between experiential approaches such as the pure descriptive phenomenology and the discursive approaches; experiential, as it focuses on the experiences of the person and how they make sense of things, and discursive, as it looks into how sociocultural factors may construct the world (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Shinebourne, 2011).

3.6.2. IPA

IPA is phenomenological in its essence, thus focusing on the meaning and reflections of human experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008) as discussed in Section 3.4. IPA has two other dimensions in addition to phenomenology itself: the hermeneutics and idiography. Hermeneutics focuses on the interpretation of the experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA places the researcher in the subject's shoes, using an interpretative activity (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It involves looking beyond what the participant has stated and to reach a deeper level of interpretation to describe the experiences studied (Ashworth, 2008). The Interpretative part of IPA is essential in this research as it focuses on what it means to be an anxious performing athlete.

According to Heidegger (1962), phenomenology on its own already has a large interpretative component. Human beings are always interpreting their world trying to make sense of it. In IPA, part of the hermeneutics is done when the researcher does not take the participant's narration as a fact, and instead interprets what the participants say by looking closely into the meaning of the data. In this approach part of the hermeneutics is considered a dynamic process- a joint reflection between the researcher and the participant, and the researcher taking an active role in interpreting how the participant makes sense of their personal and social world (Smith, Flowers & Osborne, 1997; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Langdridge, 2007; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Thus, IPA is a double hermeneutics process (Smith et al., 2009); the first interpretation occurs when the researcher tries to understand the participant's world and their ascribed meanings and the second is when the researcher goes beyond the participants' narration and gives more insight. This means that IPA researchers try to understand the participant's world through both the participant and the researcher's experiences from the interpretation of a phenomenon and the analysis of the descriptive data respectively (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Larkin et al. (2006, p.102) describe it as giving "voice to the concerns of participants; and the interpretative requirement to contextualize and make sense of these claims and concerns from a psychological perspective". However, some issues may arise due to the second interpretation if the meaning is not derived from participants but constructed by the researcher (Willig, 2008).

The third dimension in IPA is the idiography dimension (Smith et al., 2009), which looks at the intentionality and the detail of each individual's data one at a time before integrating it with others (Willig, 2008); before generalizing and going across patterns (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This dimension focuses on each participant's experiences on their own but also looks at the group experiences. This occurs during the analysis process, when the details of each experience are explored but the commonalities and differences among and within the group are also analysed (Smith et al., 2009).

Idiography focuses on how the meaning can come from the detailed exploration of the unique individual looking at the particular rather than the universal (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It aims to see the patterns of meanings that participants discuss, comparing and contrasting them, sometimes reaching a more general account after looking at each case extensively (Smith et al., 2009), as every case contributes to understanding (Smith et al., 1997). IPA needs a balance between the intensive and detailed analyses; each case is handled on its own but at the

same time all cases are also handled together (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA connects the research to previous research discussing the topic too (Shinebourne, 2011).

IPA thus integrates phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography to social constructionism and narrative. The experience is always socially and historically contextual, thus considering its socio-cultural historical aspects as discussed in Section 3.6.1. (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA looks at cognition as an important aspect of human existence too that could not be separated from being in the world through focusing on the perceptions and beliefs. In addition, it focuses on the emotional and bodily experiences. Individuals are asked to interpret their experiences through narration (Eatough & Smith, 2008) and thus the use of language is essential in making sense and interpreting meanings (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Shinebourne, 2011).

IPA then is eclectic, looking at the experiences from several dimensions, such as the cognitions, the embodied experiences, the social and cultural contexts together through narration and deep exploration of how not only the participant but also the researcher are trying to make sense of the participant's experiences of the phenomena.

IPA is therefore useful for this research as I am trying to reach the experiences of anxiety as detailed and multidimensional as possible. The ideographic dimension is also important to compare and contrast the experiences among athletes, not to generalize but to give an idea of how some athletes might have similar or different experiences and thus help them in working with some of these anxiety experiences.

My epistemological position as a researcher and a human being, in general, is that there is no single truth to knowledge. I value and respect the individuality and contextualization of each experience; thus, I am more interested in exploring the lived experiences of each athlete rather than searching for a single truth of the experience of anxiety. However, I am mindful

that I bring my own interpretation of my reading of the experience (referred to as the double hermeneutics). I understand that as a researcher, I am a co-producer of the knowledge, with the participants, in this research. This is unique to IPA in my perspective, and why I chose IPA.

3.6.3. IPA Criteria and Evaluation

IPA has been used recently in several sports related research. For instance, it was used to understand athletes' experiences, as its idiographic quality may help develop programs to fit the young athletes' needs (Henriksen et al., 2014). IPA was used to explore the in-depth experiences of ultra-marathon runners (Holt, Lee, Kim, & Klein, 2014) and of elite Canadian athletes to understand how they make sense of the team selection process for the Olympics (McEwen, Hurd Clarke, Bennett, Dawson & Crocker 2018). Callary, Rathwell & Young (2015) suggested that IPA is relatively new as a research method in sports psychology though the trend has been on the rise. However, many researchers did not report the difficulties of using IPA that they might have encountered (Callary et al., 2015).

Like most qualitative research methods, IPA does not have a fixed research protocol, which makes it difficult to replicate the results. The outcome is highly influenced by the biography of the researcher, as the interpretation is done through the researcher's lens, and thus its validity becomes questionable as an approach (Callary et al., 2015). Smiths (2011) suggested that there were criteria that could be used to assess the quality of an IPA research. IPA should have a clear focus on a certain phenomenon and follow the theories of IPA, as stated in section 3.6.2. Since IPA depends on the interviewer, it is essential that the interview process would help rich data emerge (Smiths, 2011). Researchers should also be as transparent as possible, since the data analysis process depends mainly on the researcher's interpretation (Smiths, 2011; Callary et al., 2015).

Researchers are encouraged to have a reflexive journal that keeps track of their journey throughout the research and their engagement with the data (Eklund et al., 2011; Callary et al., 2015; Poucher et al., 2019). In addition, it is important that the data analysis would be rigorous, having a balance of convergence and divergence. If the sampling size is 8 participants, for example, as in this research, then it is essential to have more than half the participants share the same theme, allowing enough space for elaboration of the theme rather than handling the theme in a superficial manner (Smiths, 2011). It is vital the paper is persuasive, supporting the claim it makes (Smiths, 2011), thus the use of quotations in qualitative research can help give the data context and be more persuasive (Eklund et al., 2011). In addition, Smiths (2011) suggested that an IPA paper should be written carefully. These criteria are discussed in more details in section 3.8. The next section describes the research procedure and process.

3.7. Sampling and Procedure

Purposive sampling was used as the research aimed to interview those who played competitive National, International, and/or college level. IPA mostly uses purposive sampling as it targets participants with similar characteristics to explore the phenomena deeply (Langdridge, 2007; Shinebourne, 2011). The sample size is small, as IPA does not require a large sample size (it can be very time-consuming and difficult to research on a larger sample due to the thesis time limit). In addition, IPA sampling size might be small as it is more interested in exploring the experiences in detail (Smith et al., 2009).

An advert was placed on the Egyptian Tennis Federation Website, where players could contact through phone or email to participate. I intended to give 6-9 months for participants to join. After more than seven months, I realized that I only had three participants, thus I sent to the University ethics board and asked for their approval to have flyers ready for the coaches in different clubs to place on their noticeboards and the changing rooms. I also asked the coaches

to send a blanket message to the whole team through the team WhatsApp group as this is the form of communication that coaches contacted the players within Egypt (not through emails). In addition, I used the snowball sampling method, as it was helpful in a culture like Egypt and when the number of participants was small.

The sample consisted of eight Elite Egyptian tennis players, who played National, International and/or college tennis. The criteria for selection was tennis players between the ages of 18 and 25 who experience anxiety that they felt hindered their performance. The reason for choosing this age range is that 50% of the women and 35% of the men playing competitively in Egypt range from 18-21 years old (ETF, 2016). The hope was to get an equal gender split of the sample size. However, mostly females approached the researcher as shown in table 3.1.

Other demographic data was collected such as years of competition, current ranking and whether the participant had any previous professional psychological support. On average, participants had 12 years of competition experience, three of which played college tennis, four of which played national tournaments, while the last player played only internationally. One college player and one from the national players also played internationally. Only two participants had previous psychological support for sports, as shown in table 3.1. However, the ranking was removed to protect anonymity, as shown in table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Participants' Demographic Description

Participant	Gender	Age	Years of Competition	Competitive Genre	Previous Psychological Support
Sarah	Female	24	17	National	No
Mary	Female	21	9	College	No
Jayne	Female	20	10	College	Yes
Melissa	Female	21	11	National	Yes
Sophie	Female	24	16	National	No
Emily	Female	20	10	National/International	No
John	Male	18	8	College/International	No
Peter	Male	25	15	International	No

Three participants contacted me by email showing their interest in the research, while the rest contacted me by phone. By law in Egypt, anyone under the age of 21 was considered a minor (Civil law, 1948) and should get permission from their caregiver before entering research or coming to psychotherapy. As shown in table 3.1. I had three participants who were under the age of 21 years. These players' parents were contacted to sign an agreement form approving their children's participation in the research. Arrangements were made to meet the parents and the players to explain the research's essence beforehand. However, parents were told that they would not have access to any of the data. Indeed, it would be fully confidential so as not to breach any confidentiality ethical issues and this was made clear and transparent

to both parents and players. Player's 21 years and older only needed to sign the consent form and were informed their interview would be confidential.

3.8. Interviewing

The interviews were one-on-one, open-ended, and used semi-structured questions. These kinds of interviews are called in-depth interviews, which aim to understand the deep experiences of the participants. In-depth interviewing allows participants to tell their stories and speak without being limited by closed-ended questions or a highly structured interview. Semi-structured interviewing is like a dialogue with a certain purpose (Smith, et al., 2009); it give space and flexibility for participants to allow the unexpected (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The interview was semi-structured in the sense that there were a set of questions used as a guide, yet not followed religiously, to allow the participant to lead the conversation (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). The interview consisted of 10 major questions and probe questions to allow further exploration when needed. The probe questions were used to help the participant elaborate rather than checking or agreeing with the researcher (Willig, 2008). See Appendix A for the interview questions.

The interviews were done in a discrete and private office within the tennis office premises to ensure privacy as much as possible. Before starting the interview, participants were told that they could withdraw if they wished without giving any reason and with no consequence. They were also informed that they can withdraw up to the point of writing up my thesis. The interviews took around 60-70 minutes each, at a time convenient for both the researcher and the participant. They were voice- recorded on a digital recorder and mainly conducted in English. However, the participants used some Arabic words for elaboration. A certified translator translated the Arabic words so that there were no researcher biases. These words when featured in the verbatim were stated with their translated meaning.

As stated in section 3.6.3. IPA depends greatly on the interviewer to allow rich data to emerge. IPA does not have a fixed way of conducting a proper or correct interview. There are guidelines that are followed and the interview depends on the skill of the researcher (Smith, 2010). The interview process is like a space that is given between the researcher and participant that depends highly on the interaction and the dynamics present between both (Smith, et al., 2009). There may be some power differentials that could have affected this interview process such as me being a counselling psychologist, someone who played competitive tennis, and someone who is older in age than all participants.

Being a psychologist who is older in age, I could have influenced the power dynamics in the interview process, which could be prevalent in a culture like Egypt. However, I tried to put them at ease by being authentic during the interview process. Building rapport is essential, which could be initiated by warming up to decrease the tension (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I started the interviewing process introducing who I am and explaining what the research is about, in attempts to try to ease into the conversation. An interviewer needs to be comfortable with silence, noticing any non-verbal cues, and enabling the participants to process some of what they are saying (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). As a psychologist, active listening is one of my trained strengths; I also used empathy to pick up emotions in the room, pausing at times when it was needed. I tried to stay with what the participants were saying, holding a curious position, reflecting and rephrasing at times what they have told me. However, I made sure not to link or interpret what was said to patterns or themes, that I may have picked up on. I also made notes of some words that they said to get back to probing about it later. It is vital to have a balance between asking and probing in order to have a smooth balance in the interview (Eatough & Smith, 2008). I wrote notes after each interview focusing on some of the observations I had for each participant and their body language as well. I did not disclose that I played tennis competitively when I was young. Some

participants were aware that I played tennis competitively, some saw me in the context of tennis with my children and others did not know either. However, the fact that I used to play tennis may be a bonus that could have helped me connect and build rapport with the participants, because I know the language and I know all about the sport. The next section illustrates the data analysis process.

3.9. Data Analysis

3.9.1 Stages of Analysis

As part of the data analysis process started earlier, even before the first interview, I asked a colleague of mind to have a trial pilot interview with me as a participant, in order to be aware of my own biases, which I will discuss in section, 3.13. I also had research supervision after this trial to assess the interview questions. I then started the data analysis process after the first interview, following the strategies recommended by Smith et al. (2009). The strategies that were recommended include: a close analysis that goes line-by-line of the experiential content; identifying the different themes by looking into each case alone; looking across multiple cases; building a dialogue and interaction with the coded data as a researcher to get more interpretations; having a structure that can help show the relationship between themes; organizing all the themes coming up into clusters with major themes and sub-themes; getting supervision to help make sure the researcher is on track and assess the themes and interpretations; building a narrative with evidence from the data verbatims going from one theme to the other; and reflecting on my own perceptions, biases and processes.

It is essential to engage and get in the data, which occurs from the beginning while transcribing the data, listening to the data several times before even starting the analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Analysing the data was a complex process and one that was not linear (Smith et al., 2009). Each interview was handled separately. I listened to each interview and re-read each transcript several times. I then started a line-by-line analysis of the transcript.

I started writing notes, trying to pick up themes from transcripts looking at the language used, context and content. This process was done in three phases. I formed a three-column table as shown in table 3.2. where I placed the transcript in the middle column. The first phase (*descriptive phase*) of the analysis was summarizing the information in the left column, writing some notes in this column and on my computer. This left column focused on the description of the transcript's content, looking at the different meaning. This summary looked closely line-by-line at the analysis. The second phase (*linguistic phase*) involved looking at the verbatim again and focused on the language used for each participant. There were words that had remarkable meaning for the participants or were repeated over and over or had a different tone. I, thus, highlighted these words, that had meaning for the participants as shown in table 3.2. The third phase (*conceptual phase*) looked at the underlying concepts, focusing mainly on coding and interpreting the data. It was essential in this phase to move on to another level of abstraction to a concept (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This process called for a reflective engagement with the participant and was a very dynamic process.

Table 3.2. Three-column Table

<u>Description</u>	<u>Transcript (significant language)</u>	<u>Concepts</u>
<p>Fear of losing match</p> <p>Fear of not fulfilling expectation</p> <p>Fear of failing to do what supposed to do</p> <p>Sometimes fear of winning (if playing against someone not supposed to defeat)</p> <p>Fear of losing the lead</p> <p>When win against someone not supposed to win, lose concentration, feel rushed, feel need to rush to finish match</p>	<p>P: maybe fear of losing the match, fear of mmm, how can I describe this, [I mean] for example people expect me to win this particular match so it's fear of not fulfilling this expectation, fear of failing to mmm to do my, what I'm supposed to do, mmm, and sometimes it's fear of winning, if I'm playing against someone I'm not supposed to defeat and I find myself I'm leading and I'm close to winning there is this anxiety that, [which is], ok so it's very close so it's a fear of losing lead, I guess bardo</p> <p>I: can you explore that a bit, what do you mean by losing the lead</p> <p>P: [I mean] when I'm winning against someone I'm not supposed to win</p> <p>I: what's, how do you feel during that moment, when you when you, are starting to win someone good</p> <p>P: lot of times I lose concentration, I feel rushed, I feel [I mean] that I need to rush to finish this match, mmm so that I don't give her a chance to make a comeback [or something]</p>	<p>Fear of several things</p> <p>Fear of not fulfilling expectations and fear of failing (expectations)</p> <p>Fear if winning someone not supposed (expectations)</p> <p>When win someone not supposed to win (expectations)</p> <p>When winning/ lose focus and rush (set expectation that need to finish)</p>

Each transcript was handled and analysed on its own. I noticed that most participants had certain patterns or similarities in certain experiences. I also took notes on my experiences during the interview and other thoughts. I was interested in my interaction with the participants, besides the transcripts. As mentioned earlier in section 3.7, it is essential to observe and make notes of any language, pauses, voice tones, volume changes or gestures that were used (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I even added the pauses and laughs that occurred in the transcripts (as shown in appendix B).

3.9.2. Identifying Themes

Moving on to gathering the emerging themes entailed a double hermeneutic process, which reflected on my comprehension of the participant's understanding of the experience. I found myself going back and forth between the transcript, the themes, and their content. Each interview was handled on its own. I focused on the right margin, where I noted themes and started grouping similar themes together. I formed a table for each transcript that looked at each theme and the main content of each theme as shown in table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Example of Theme and Content

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Content</i>
<i>Physical Influence</i>	Anxiety is experienced in legs and chest	Legs tense up and become shaky	Chest start breathing faster and chest tight	Different kinds of anxiety mental and physical	Difference between what thinking about and how body is feeling	Sometimes not mentally anxious but physically anxious (body is shaking and tight before the match)	When anxious body react, sometimes do not understand why physically anxious
	Most of the anxiety is not mental	During the match, I maybe winning or ok but I find my legs tensed and stiff	During the match, more anxious when play on a new court	When play in a new court, feel more aware of all the surroundings that are new	When play in a new court lose concentration	More anxious when not used to the surface/physical environment	Anxiety with new surrounding may fade away during the match depends on the match

I then identified these themes and had extracts of quotes grouped for each theme. After doing this process for the first interview, I moved on to the second interview to repeat the whole process again, then to the third, then the fourth and so on, until I had all the themes from all the

interviews. This involved a cyclical process. It was also not easy to forget completely some of the themes that were discussed in the past transcripts but I was aware of this throughout the process.

This process was very difficult in the first transcripts, but I found that the process got easier and flowed better the more I analysed and went through the transcripts. I tried to minimize bias and personal subjectivity by seeking research and peer supervision, checking and receiving input from my supervisors in order to achieve inter-subjectivity. The next phase was to work across all the interviews looking at the similarities and differences among participants.

3.9.3. Bringing it Together

This step involved looking across all themes, identifying any recurring themes, looking for patterns, grouping them together, checking if they agreed with the participants' transcripts or not, as shown in Table 3.4. I formed a table with all the major super-ordinate themes, that incorporated all the main and sub-themes that emerged through the data analysis process. During this process, I renamed some themes when necessary.

Table 3.4. Super-ordinate Themes

Super-ordinate theme	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4	Interviewee 5	Interviewee 6	Interviewee 7	Interviewee 8
Anxiety	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Physical Sensations	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Competition Meaning	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Loss/Ageing	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Identity	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Routine	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Over- thinking	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Self- confidence	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
Expectations	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Choices	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Relational Influence	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Ageing	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES

I found that after grouping all the themes together the structure that made sense to me was to group them in terms of physical experiences and sensations, meaning of sports, internal/mental world and inter-relational world, which are discussed in Chapter 5.

3.10. Confidentiality

To ensure the participants' privacy and anonymity the participants' files were directly transferred from the recorder to the computer and immediately deleted from the voice recorder. It was encrypted in a hard drive folder named with a coding system to identify each participant. The participants' names were changed and any identifying information about the participants in the transcripts were removed. The participants were informed that pieces from their verbatim

might be used as an anonymous example in the thesis and a consent form was signed beforehand, stating that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research (Bps.org.uk, 2019). See Appendix I.

3.11. Ethical Concerns

I received permission from the Egyptian Tennis Federation (ETF) to recruit players. See Appendix L. I adhered to any ethical guidelines required for the research in Egypt. Ethical issues might arise from the fact that I used to be a player, which might put some pressure on parents or players to feel the need to participate in the research. Ethical issues might also arise if coaches sent the blanket message and some players felt the need to participate just because the coach sent it, although it would not be directed to anyone.

I made sure that the participants and the parents were well informed of the research's nature and the fact that the participants could drop out whenever they wanted. Participants were also told that they did not have to answer any questions if they were not comfortable doing so. I was aware that some of the players might not feel comfortable discussing pressures they faced from their coach or from their parents. That is why I was very clear that the data would all be confidential and coded in the computer. This adheres to the British Psychological Society ethics guidelines (Bps.org.uk, 2019). In addition, I gave each athlete resources in case they needed to be referred to someone or asked for a referral.

There were only a few top professional tennis players in Egypt; this would raise an issue of anonymity, even though confidentiality was ensured. It was possible that someone might identify a player from their story. As a result, I made sure the verbatim chosen in the thesis did not identify a specific player, to protect anonymity (Bps.org.uk, 2019). In addition, with the snowballing sampling method, some players may disclose to others that they had participated in the research, and that it might be interesting to participate. However, I made

sure that any new participant, before starting the interview, was aware that the data would be anonymous explaining all the terms.

I also had to care for the player's safety in case the interview opened up difficult issues for them. I had to show them empathy and give them space during the interview and maybe refer them to a therapist in the counselling centre if they felt the need. It was unlikely that the research would have a direct harmful effect on the participants, but there was always a possibility a participant might feel distressed after discussing personal experiences. Accordingly, I checked with the participants and asked them to let me know whenever they were feeling uncomfortable or wished to stop the interview (Bps.org.uk, 2019).

In addition, there might be a possibility that talking or thinking about anxiety experiences might make the players become more aware of some of their issues, which might interfere later with their performance. I was not sure how any of the players might be impacted by the interview, but I stated there was a possible risk before starting the interview. I gave each participant a full debrief after the interview, handed them a list of resources for support, and informed them of possible referrals if they need further support.

3.12. Research Challenges and Limitations

Although qualitative research can obtain very comprehensive data, it does raise some issues about the validity of the data. Validity examines the extent to which the results obtained are indeed what we aimed to study. To overcome some of the validity issues, researchers can obtain feedback from their participants to make sure that the interpreted result embodied the same meaning as what was described by the participants (Willig, 2008). The validity may also be compromised when transcribing the data as the description is analysed through the researcher (Dale, 1996). Knowledge exists with the subject, who perceives the knowledge. It is co-constructed by the researcher, thus the validity of qualitative research such as IPA can be

questionable as the data may vary with the different researchers and participants (Langdridge, 2007).

Although choosing purposive sampling to try to get a homogeneous group, players varied in the tournament level they entered. One of the limitations thus, could be that the data could have been different if all the players only played International or only played National tournaments. Another limitation is the way researchers ask the questions and their presence influences the research process (Langdridge, 2007). The quality of the IPA results also varies according to the skills of the researcher in interviewing, analysing, writing and interpreting (Smith, 2010). Thus, this research could have yielded different results if another researcher had taken on this research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Most qualitative research results are not replicable. This influences the validity and reliability of the result (Smith, 2010). The data reliability is also an issue with small samples focusing on the particular individuals without representing the general population. However, the goal of the qualitative research is not to generalize but to show that the experiences and their meaning might be shared (Willig, 2008). The data may not be reliable since participants might be asked/probed with different questions, depending on the participant, the researcher and many other factors (Dale, 1996).

There might be an additional compromise due to the different usage of language in this research (Dale, 1996). Some participants used some Arabic words, which were translated and could affect the meaning of the data produced. On the other hand, since the research took place in the participant's context, so ecological validity is not an issue. Reflexivity plays a role in dealing with validity by acknowledging the researcher's role in influencing the research process and data which will also be discussed later (Willig, 2008).

The interview was also time consuming due to the open-ended questions required to attain as much exploration and description of the experiences of anxiety (Dale, 1996).

Existential psychology, in addition, suggests that few people do not want to face their anxiety. Dealing with stress presupposes a level of developmental maturity that some young athletes have not yet attained (Nesti, 2004), which may pose a challenge to the research.

3.13. Reflexivity

The researcher's reflexivity and recognition of how their role and relationship with the participants have an important influence upon the interviews and analysis (Smith et al., 1997; Langdridge, 2007; Shinebourne, 2011). The researcher's understanding of the participant's thoughts influenced by the researcher's assumptions are never set aside totally; on the contrary, the researcher's reflexivity could help them make sense of the assumptions (Willig, 2008). Constant reflexivity is required as there are limitations of what happens in the interview and on the level of interpretation (Willig, 2008).

As a researcher, I relate to this research in several ways. I am an ex-player, a therapist interested in sports, and a mother who would love her kids to continue in this sport if they want to. I found my years of playing tennis competitively the best experiences I had, teaching me so much discipline, teamwork, commitment and challenge. After stopping tennis, I felt like I almost lost who I am. I did not understand how important this was to my being in the world, which is why I enter this research with the first basic assumption that tennis is essential to the athlete's life and identity. However, this may be a pre-conceived assumption that I have as a researcher.

As suggested in Section 3.4. a major rule in phenomenological methodology is the rule of *epoché*, which means putting initial beliefs and biases on the side for a temporary period to reach the immediate experience (Husserl, 1983; Spinelli, 2005). Thus, as a start I should be very aware of my first basic assumption and belief that tennis is essential and forms part of the athlete's identity, as my previous experiences might get in the way of reaching the player's own individual lived experiences. This is why I spent some time acknowledging my

experiences, asking myself questions about what competition, winning, losing and other things meant to me. This enabled me to think and identify my experience and keep this in mind while interviewing participants. In addition, I asked a former doctorate student to interview me using the same questions I had for this research, in order to explore what comes up and understand my assumptions and biases even more.

As I mentioned earlier, I struggled with anxiety and not believing in myself, which might have differed for me if I understood where this was coming from when I was younger. I imagined myself as a therapist meeting a new client for the first time, trying to pause all the thoughts or assumptions I might have about feeling anxious and just staying with what the participant was saying. However, bracketing can never be absolute but it is essential to always put in mind the challenges faced by the prior information and judgments we might have (Cohn, 1997).

Although my role as a researcher could have influenced the interview process, this could also be perceived as a strength to such a research. For instance, my position as a former competitive tennis player, a mother of two children who play tennis competitively and a counselling psychologist in training who has worked in the field for at least ten years, could have allowed me to enhance the rapport I have built with these participants during the interview process allowing them to open more about themselves, making the interview process smoother. This led to a richer data that would not have been collected by another interviewer who did not have the same background.

Since I am using IPA as a research methodology, it is highly likely that I influence the research within the hermeneutic process. This suggests that the analysis of data could have been very different if someone other than me was administering the interviews and analysing the data. I also noticed some commonality in the themes that came up during the interviews and the themes that came up from the literature. I was aware that I needed to keep my

knowledge from the literature review in the back of my mind and just staying with the interview, but this was very difficult, as the literature review also helped me to develop themes and concepts without deeply understanding the experiences.

I also made sure that I was staying with each interview and experience alone and not mixing the two together. I focused on each interview analysis individually and only grouped the themes when I finished all the interviews. I felt that highlighting the language used for each interview and the words each participant used helped me look at each experience on its own. I noted there was a pattern or a main theme for each participant's anxiety experience that I would have followed. Thus, I had to really remind myself during the interview that I was a researcher and not a therapist. The next chapter discusses the analysis of the findings showing all the major and sub-themes.

Chapter 4 Analysis of Findings

4.1. Introduction to the Findings

This chapter presents the analysis of the transcript from the semi-structured interviews on the lived anxiety experiences of the eight participants, delving into the unique feelings and thoughts of each participant and their commonalities of their experiences. Meta themes and their subordinate themes were categorized, reflecting four dimensions that influence the participants' experiences of anxiety: emotional manifestation and *physical* sensations; anxiety in relationship to the *competition* world and its *meaning* to participants; and the participants' *internal* and *inter-relational* world as shown below in Figure 4.1. In this chapter, these themes will be detailed.

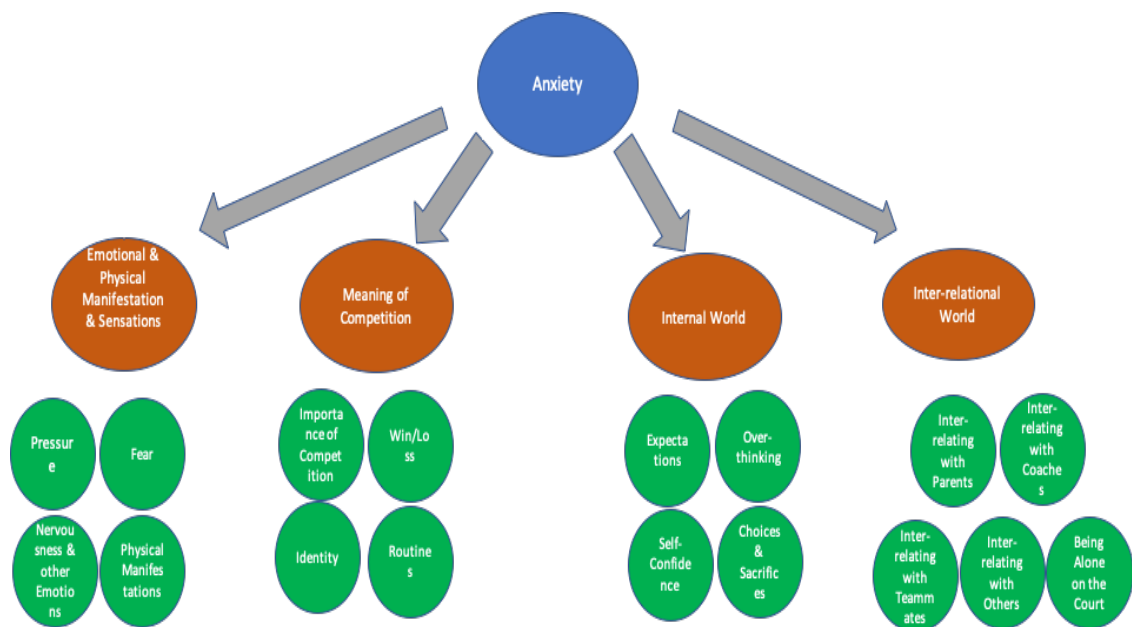


Figure 4.1 Themes and Sub-themes

4.2. Anxiety

Anxiety emerges as a category, portraying the emotional manifestation and sensations participants experienced as competitive tennis athletes. All eight participants admitted to feeling more anxious in their tennis lives than in any other facet of life, as tennis represented a huge part of it. Some participants believed anxiety was helpful for them during the game. They all felt that anxiety affected their physical abilities, influencing the way they performed and handled competing. Anxiety was described as *pressure, fear, nervousness* and *physical manifestations & influences such as* tightness, worry, stress or excitement at the same time.

4.2.1. Anxiety as Pressure

Three of the participants had experienced anxiety in the form of pressure, sometimes before but mostly during matches. Mary, for example, explained that she felt pressured mostly with closing sets. According to her, any athlete has to go through some kind of pressure, though not necessarily hindering. She accepts anxiety as part of the game even if it is pressure, *“I don’t think you can escape anxiety, you just have to go through it,”* she explained.

Pressure and tension are also experienced outside court. According to Mary, juggling many things and multi-tasking can bring general anxiety and stress. She said, *“I get maybe a little stressed if I don’t have enough time, I have a lot of tests to do and I’m just short on time, I have practice, I have meetings, I have a lot of things and I just don’t have time to finish that stuff so maybe I stress a little bit, I get anxious, mmm, it works out but it’s just something that I feel.”* At many instances, Mary’s tone of voice became lower and slower, referring to anxiety mainly in third person, as if, this was a common phenomenon to many tennis players and that anxiety was inevitable. It also felt like she was stepping back from this anxiety and was looking at it from a more distant place rather than being stuck in it.

Jayne, similarly, experienced *anxiety as pressure*, but added the word ‘tightness’ to her description. This experience is mainly related to being under a tight time frame such as having a tight score, having to do many things or being rushed to do things. She said, *“I have played tie breaks that go up to 13-11 for a set so, probably around the nine all ten all part of the match, it starts getting very stressful.”*

Similar to Mary, Jayne believed that competition in itself meant pressure and winning meant the ability to overcome pressure. However, she felt it was better to play under pressure sometimes. *“I mean I play way better under pressure than I do without pressure, so for me it’s like ok this is where I actually have to get my everything together and start playing properly,”* she said.

The third participant, Sophie, also experienced anxiety in the form of pressure and stress. She equated the experience of anxiety to having a big obstacle that she constantly felt. Pressure for Sophie had several explanations, *“Pressure means, mmm, it’s also about thinking (I mean), if for example, my forehand isn’t like going well and my backhand, or maybe I’m not playing well this day, ‘it’s not my day’ (I mean) hahahaha the famous saying (I mean), (so) the pressure means all of this, maybe I will lose against a girl that mmm I’m used to winning (so), that’s the pressure”*.

This kind of experience mostly depends on the match for Sophie. She explained that she felt mostly pressured and increasingly anxious when the score was tight, similar to Jayne and Mary. Sophie stressed that she was highly anxious when she lost balls within the tiebreak. However, even though her anxiety was very high in the tiebreak, she felt her focus and movement improved at that time as well.

Pressure can be a paradoxical experience as expressed by both Sophie and Jayne. Despite their heightened feelings of anxiety and pressure when the score is tight, they prefer to play under pressure. John had similar feelings, *“When I worry like this for the match and start*

getting really worried [...] that's a good thing for me, cause, first of all, I play better when I'm under pressure somehow like adrenaline just kicks." This description of "adrenaline kick" depicts the physiological sensation and root of anxiety that John experienced when he felt pressure and found helpful, which will be described in section 4.2.4. The term 'pressure' was one way to describe how some participants experienced anxiety, which felt inevitable, helpful at times and unhelpful at times.

4.2.2. Anxiety and Fear

Fear is another emotion associated with anxiety as expressed by four participants. All four participants described their fear and anxiety as highly contextual depending on factors such as *who* the opponent is, what the score is, which round they are playing, and how well they are performing in the beginning of the match. For instance, three participants described how fearful they felt before the match and how this anxiety and fear diminished as the match started. All four participants linked fear to loss, though two of them also experienced fear and anxiety, while winning tough matches. These two participants explained that they experienced fear when they were leading with tough opponents, as they did not expect to win these matches. In addition, three participants expressed how their fear is related to expectations placed on them by themselves and/or others.

For Sarah, a very strong theme of fear surfaced when she explained what anxiety means to her. She discussed how fear was related to loss not only in tennis but also the loss of other things due to playing tennis. She said, *"Maybe losing interest in things I love, maybe losing interest, maybe losing people that I love, maybe mmm, maybe fear before exams how I can manage my time to handle all the things that I can't make it because I was playing tournaments so I think it is fear"*.

Sarah also related her fear to unpredictability such as playing against an opponent for the first time and not knowing what would happen in the match. She said, *“If I will play for the first time and don’t know how she is playing, sometimes I will be very, very, very fear (afraid)”*. Sarah’s fear is associated with several variable factors such as playing different opponents, rounds of matches, surfaces, wind levels, or starting with a losing score and not performing the regular pre-competition routine. Most of these unknown factors caused fear before the match but diminished once the match started.

Melissa similarly described the experience of anxiety as fear, in which her sensation of fear depended on different situations. Melissa not only fears losing a match, but also experiences similar feelings while winning, as she is afraid of losing her lead or not fulfilling expectations. She said, *“Maybe fear of losing the match, fear of mmm, how can I describe this, (I mean) for example people expect me to win this particular match so it’s fear of not fulfilling this expectation, fear of failing to mmm to, to, do my, what I’m supposed to do”*.

Emily, likewise, described her anxiety as fear before the matches, specifically when it involved others. She seemed to care more about winning and losing, as her anxiety increased when she played for the team, which will be further explained in Section 4.5.4. She added that fear was like a continuous stress that went on and on. She said, *“I breathe with difficulty, I fear tennis matches, mmm, continuous stress before any big event, before a match in the league or a championship with the national team, especially in matches that don’t, mmm, concern me alone, that are for something else like for the national team, if I’m playing for the national team I feel like I want to do my best, so I worry and I think about a lot of things and I’m scared that I won’t be good enough to win”*.

Emily’s voice was very low, when speaking about her fear and anxiety, but she did not take time to answer, which seemed to have been something she had thought about and experienced before.

Peter's experience of anxiety was also expressed as fear. He preferred not to think of anxiety, however he got scared right before the match. Nevertheless, this fear diminished when he started, unless he was playing in cloudy weather. Peter's fear before the match is mainly connected to thinking about how well he will perform and what the result of the match will be. When he was younger, he used to get very scared from overthinking, but he practiced stopping himself from doing so. In addition, similar to Melissa, he gets scared and felt like choking sometimes when he is beating someone tougher than him, as he felt that his opponent might come back any time.

Partially, his anxiety was related to concern over his ranking and opportunities he gets to improve it. His fear, like Sarah's, was contextual, depending on who would play and in which round of the tournament he was playing. Peter's experience of anxiety seemed to be expressed in a distant way; he heavily emphasized *how* he tried not to think about it, trying to disconnect from it. In addition, his experience of fear, similar to Sarah and Melissa, seemed to be associated with his own expectations. Thus, to these participants, anxiety is associated with fear, including fear of the unknown, of unpredictable outcomes, of losing the lead, and of not living up to the expectations, which was contextual for most participants.

4.2.3 Anxiety as Nervousness and Other Emotions

Anxiety is also experienced as mixed emotions felt at the same time including as nervousness, stress, worry and/or excitement. Three participants explained that these emotions can influence them differently at different times, sometimes being helpful and sometimes not. Jayne described her anxiety experience as *"A mix of sometimes, it's excitement, mixed with I don't know, I don't want to say that I'd be a bit scared, but it's excitement and nervousness all at one."* Jayne stated that anxiety placed her in an uncomfortable zone, saying, *"Anxiety is my least favourite emotion, so it makes me uncomfortable. I can be sad but still be in a comfort*

zone, I can be happy and be in a comfort zone. But anxiety, I can't be anxious and comfortable at the same time." Sadness, to Jayne, was also experienced when she relived a match she lost and it reminded her how bad she felt at the time.

Similarly, John experienced anxiety as nervousness, stress and worry. His anxiety was related to his concern of how well he would perform in a match. John described being anxious just before a match as the worst feeling. Even though John knew that it would not help him, he found it difficult not to worry. On the other hand, John described this kind of worry as essential before the match in 4.2.1. The experience of anxiety is described as a vicious circle of worrying and thinking of different scenarios, which will be discussed in Section 4.4.2.

The way John spoke about his anxieties reflected on the *pride* he took in his performance, representing what he valued as a person and what he could not tolerate, such as loss. Loss as a theme will be discussed in 4.3.2.b The way John explained his feelings and the way he spoke really indicated how much he needed to experience anxiety before the match to be *in the game* and perform well. This may imply that anxiety is helpful for him prior to and even during the match. Consequently, anxiety is experienced as one or more emotions at the same time that does not always have negative implications, varying for different participants.

4.2.4. Physical Manifestations and Influences

All eight participants mentioned the physical manifestation of anxiety as the experience of tension in different parts of their bodies while competing, which in turn influenced their game. Anxiety, however, manifested itself differently for each individual participant. For Melissa, she could experience anxiety physically even if she was not mentally anxious. She explained how restraining it felt saying "My legs become really tensed so sometimes they start shaking and I wouldn't really move properly because they are so tensed, mmm I start breathing a bit more faster rate, so I feel like my chest is maybe a bit tight and mmm and the way I play

itself, it starts to differ (I mean), the way I play is not loose and free, I start to be a bit more tensed when I play so this shows also in my strokes and in my footwork and everything.”

Jayne, similarly, experienced anxiety in her legs, which she felt become slow, sore and heavy both before and during a match. She also felt that her shoulders and her brain felt heavy. She described the cloudy thoughts and confused feelings she experienced, saying, *“In the physical way I think it goes back to that tightness of like being unstable I guess, and the emotional way, it is just too many thoughts running in my head at the same time. It becomes of, it becomes a cloud of thoughts that I can’t separate.”* She felt less anxious when she had more time to think, process and envision herself.

Sarah also described how her experience of anxiety influenced both her mind and body. She said she physically felt shaky, particularly her legs, which consequently stopped her mind and body from operating well, causing her to make wrong decisions. Peter too experienced anxiety physically. His hands got sweaty and he felt his body tighten as he started pushing the ball during his game. He said, *“All my muscles get tighten up and I get so stiff and then I feel pushing the ball and my ball is completely short then how it used to be, even in the match, then it completely freeze my body.”*

Emily felt her chest closing and she struggled to breathe and felt her heart rate speeding up. She said her senses disconnected and she could not feel her body, *“I feel I can’t breathe easily and mmm, my heart rate goes up, I feel that my senses are all there but I can’t feel anything... Sometimes, I even feel that I can hear my own heartbeat in my ears, that’s how I feel, mmm, that’s it.”* Similarly, John experienced anxiety in his chest.

Mary and Sophie, however, said the stomach was their weak point when it came to anxiety. Mary described her stomach as an “empty hole” that responded to pressure. She felt that her swinging technique was affected, causing her to play in a defensive way. Sophie, also,

described pain in the stomach similar to Mary's, but added other symptoms like headache and pain in the legs. Her anxiety affected her sleep immensely.

All participants expressed how anxiety was physically present while playing competitively. This physical manifestation may have played a role in how they performed. It could have been noteworthy to explore more around what some players would do in order to manage their physical sensations and what happened to their bodies during a match.

4.3. The Competition World

The Competition World highlights how participants make meaning of their sporting experience. The participants learn that *competition* is what makes up the essence and meaning of being an elite tennis player, which ultimately plays a significant role in their *identity* not only as athletes but also as beings in general. The importance of *winning or losing* reflects the different meanings assigned to each and their influence. However, loss may manifest in different forms, from loss of a match to loss of a whole career, which influences participants' anxiety experience. Also, the meaning of routines and how participants use them to help with their anxiety experience are presented in this competition world.

4.3.1 The Importance of Competition

All participants expressed how competition was essential to them, pointing out how it was the whole point of playing tennis and how they enjoyed the challenges they experienced while competing. Only one participant discussed how she felt pressured, playing competitively, hoping it would end soon. The opinions of the seven participants on how they enjoy competing put them under anxious circumstances as they fear losing and stopping to play competitively.

Melissa loved competition. She considered it a chance to apply what she learnt, as she mainly practised to compete. Competition to her is a life goal as she says, "*It gives me also purpose, (I mean) I set goals and I work for them so it gives me kind of, I mean, a project to do, I don't just play for the sake of playing*". For Sarah, similarly, competition meant

everything. Her main goal was to become the oldest competing Egyptian tennis player. This meant that Sarah would try to push and challenge herself to keep going. Peter, also, considered competition as a challenge to improve. He said, *“It (competition) means, fighting in the court, the challenge between me and the other players in the rank system [...] if you don’t have a goal or a challenge in front of you then it’s pointless to play.”*

Peter strived by setting goals similar to Sarah and loved reaching them and setting new ones to feel he was improving. However, they both sounded different as he seemed to care about the challenge between him and other opponents, while she described the challenge to be from within herself, to prove that she could push herself to seek perfection.

Likewise, Mary regarded competition as being a *challenge*. She found competition essential for her, in which there was no point of playing without competition. She explained that competition was *“Part of who you are today, and definitely I’m going to miss it if I just quit after.”* [underline added by the author.] In other words, it defines her identity (expanded in Section 4.3.3). That is why some tennis players, like John, reveal they have become competitive in most areas of life. Competition to them has become the motivation to do the right things and stay on track.

Jayne, on the other hand, stated that competition meant pressure. She did not think she would continue competing in five years’ time, as she felt she was done with the pressure. She said, *“I know it’s always going to be there but I feel like I need to let it go. Like it took so much time, so much energy, and just, a lot that I need to, to just be done with”*.

4.3.2. Win/Loss

In competitive sports, winning and losing are central; the goal is not to simply show the skills and/or exercise one’s capabilities but to beat the opponent (Skillen, 1998). Thus, winning or losing is an inevitable outcome of a competition that all players would experience. They are

like the yin and yang, part of the same coin, which would make it difficult to describe loss as a theme without describing winning and what it means to these participants.

4.3.2a Win

Winning as part of playing competitively cannot be separated from the meaning of competition. All the participants stated how *winning* was essential, despite its different meaning to each of the participants. Winning, they suggested, meant reaching their *goals*, defying odds, applying what they learned, and/or deserving the hard work they put in. Two participants stated that even though playing good tennis was more important than winning, they still thought winning was the main goal of competing. They all said that striving to win has brought about anxiety before and during the competition.

As said in the previous section, John just liked to *compete* and *win*. He took pride in his level of performance, acknowledging he cared about playing well more than winning. However, he could not tolerate losing at all, as will be shown in Section 4.3.2b.

Emily described how she felt when it came to winning, saying, “*Winning the match means a lot of things, it’s not just tennis, I could be playing very well but, my mental is not there, maybe my opponent is helping me win by making mistakes and other things but my mental is not there, but for me to win means that all the things were there, tennis, mental, fitness and everything.*” She later explained how the three components were like a triangle, in which the mental part was the base, affecting the other two components like Figure 4.2.



Figure 4.2. Mental, Tennis & Fitness Triangle

She said, *“It is, winning or losing for me is that if my base is there, I feel that I can fix the other two things, but if my base is not there everything falls apart.”* Emily’s usage of the word ‘fix’ was quite interesting to me, as it could indicate how she viewed her struggles as things that required fixing. Moreover, she mentioned how she felt the need to control her thinking, which could also relate to this concept of fixing things. Winning also means that she was good. Emily spoke about being good and not good enough several times, which will be discussed in Section 4.4.1. Nonetheless, her description of the components of tennis is thought provoking.

Similarly, winning for Peter was everything, *“It’s all what matters to me, (I mean) if a match, if I’m not playing well, but I win, it still counts for me as a win. A win is a win, no matter how I win.”* Sarah also believes that winning is essential to reach her ultimate goal, yet to her winning is about how well she plays and not about the other player’s bad performance. She said, *“Step by step towards a greater goal [...] I want to be something in my mind, so my small steps would be that I will win every match and I win every tournament to satisfy and succeed [...] I don’t like to win match without being comfortable [...] (if) my opponent give(s) me presents or give(s) me unforced errors, I don’t feel comfortable with this game. I feel comfortable or focused when I play [...] I mean I am the one who wins because of the way I play.”*

Sarah sounded very motivated to continue competing as long as possible. Since it is not very common for players in Egypt, especially women, to continue playing over the age of 25, it seemed from interviewing her that she was determined to change that and continue playing competitively longer than anyone else. Sarah and Peter differed in how they conceptualize winning. Sarah was not satisfied unless she played well and takes charge of the court, while Peter considered any win satisfying.

Sophie, meanwhile, stressed the importance of winning like Emily, Sarah and Peter. She said, *“Winning leads to you being in the National team, everyone talking positively about you, keeping the high spirit.”* Winning, for Sophie, leads to other greater outcomes. Even though she made sacrifices, she only focused on reaching her goals.

Winning meant a lot to Mary too, but the definition and perception of winning had changed for her over time. As she was growing up, the strive for winning was very stressful, but now she has accepted that an athlete could not win all the time, *“That’s what you ultimately play for, so it’s very rewarding, it’s, just growing up you just learn that you are not gonna get it every time, you are not gonna win every time, (so) it, when you win, I think growing up, you appreciate it more.”* To Mary any win was satisfying like Peter. She spoke in second person for most of the interview when asked about her experience, which seemed to me a way of showing how this experience might be similar to others or maybe it was a way of processing her feelings. Mary also learned through time that winning could not be sustainable, and that others, who were working as hard as her, might deserve to win too.

Winning had different meanings for Melissa too. Winning could mean beating someone or defying expectations or odds, Melissa was laughing when I asked her what winning meant to her, which could reflect how much it means to her. She said, *“Winning a match, or just even if sometimes I lose matches but I feel like I win because maybe I mmm, [...] I see them better like apply what I learn or I am closer to my goals.”* Jayne looked at the bigger picture, seeing

that winning meant she had overcome the pressure of competing and was able to reach a score before the opponent. To her it was “*A reward for all the hard work I have put in practice.*” Even when the whole team won and not herself, she felt that winning was the reward for their collective effort. Even though, Jayne did not speak much about competition in general, she spoke about winning and how important winning was for her whether she was the one winning or one of her teammates.

Competition, then, always involves winning and losing. The meaning and drive for winning differ for each individual, thus the importance and meaning of winning may influence each participants’ experience of anxiety differently.

4.3.2b Loss

All participants stated that losing was an experience they did not like and stressed that loss influenced their anxiety before and during matches. Six of the participants suggested that the way losing influences their anxiety depends on the kind of loss they experience. Two participants saw loss as a learning experience, one looked at it as a motive to push oneself more and three considered loss a source of blame for not playing well enough. Another participant considered loss as a huge issue that made him question whether playing tennis was worth the effort he put. Interestingly, seven participants also discussed how ageing could be a type of loss.

John was the most expressive when it came to explaining how much he does not tolerate losing. He said the thought of loss made him angry and affected his sleeping pattern. John kept describing loss as “bad”, explaining it made him feel he did not do the right thing. According to him, loss is the main source of stress and anxiety before and during a match. He reflected upon it saying, “*When you're losing sometimes, it can break you down [...] you think about quitting, you think about like why am I even doing this.*” He, however, said that losing was more tolerable when it was against a stronger player in an International tournament rather than

a National one. The worst type of loss for him was when he lost for playing badly that it took him days to calm down and accept. He acknowledged losing should be taken as a learning experience.

The theme of loss is so recurrent with John, as he keeps on linking several other themes to loss, as will be discussed later. It shows how much the idea of loss really influences John's experiences of anxiety as it affects his sense of worth, the meaning of playing competitively and the motivation to continue this sport.

Emily's tolerance of losing was different to that of John's, yet she still finds that losing was very difficult to live with since tennis really mattered to her. Similar to John, losing affected her sense of self-worth and she tended to blame herself, especially her mental state, for her loss as suggested in 4.2.1. She described loss as doing something wrong and/or not doing good enough, blaming herself saying, *"It means something is not right, something is not there [...] any of the things, tennis, fitness, mental maybe and maybe all the things are there but I wasn't good enough to win[...] when I lose, I feel that I'm living my worst days [...] maybe I had played very well and lost but afterwards mentally I feel I wasn't good so this causes a drop, so sometimes I'm the reason why I lose, sometimes I am the one who pulls myself down."* Her fear of losing as stated in 4.2.2. is usually very salient before the match, in addition, the more she loses the more she becomes anxious.

Peter shared Emily's feelings of blame and responsibility for loss. He blamed himself for his losses, unless he felt his opponent was better, which he also found difficult to accept. He said, *"If I lose then I have to see if I played bad, it's most of the time I blame myself for how I played or how I, my performance was in the match."* He felt owning responsibility helped him with reaching where he was. However, blaming himself too much affected him at many instances.

Peter used the word blame many times throughout the interview, which he explained as feeling responsible for his own actions. His body language and voice reflected how sure he was of his thoughts and feelings, and he answered without any hesitation. Loss and fear of losing was something that Peter tried hard to block before the match, however, he thought about loss after the match to work on how to get a different outcome in his following matches.

The worst kind of loss for Peter, similar to John, was losing when playing for the team. It added more burden and responsibility for the game though it motivated him, nevertheless. He explained he would hold the blame if he lost for the team in these simple words, *“No matter if someone told me you did your job, I would blame myself that I am the one who lost because in the end it’s an individual game, you win or you lose, yeah for the team but it’s you, it’s you who play [...] The advantage is to have the responsibility, to hold the team to my team mate, to be there for them, to support them, to win this match for them.”*

Peter used the word ‘learn’ when he lost the match to someone tougher. He considered it a learning opportunity to try to improve his game. However, he used the word ‘fix’ when losing to someone he perceived was not that strong. It indicates how he looked at his role and responsibility to fix and change.

Melissa also blamed herself for losing. She constantly felt like she did something wrong, yet she knew that loss could not be escaped in competitive games, as she said, *“I feel like it’s mmm [...] it’s because I did something wrong [...] so I kind of blame it on myself.”* For Melissa, loss seems to be related to her and others’ expectations of what she should do, which will be expanded further in Section 4.4.1.

Sophie, similar to Melissa, cared about what others think and how they perceived her when she lost. Losing to someone she usually beat was the most upsetting to her. She said, *“I don’t really accept losing from [to] people I used to win, I mean I always think about what*

people might think if I lose, that's what causes stress". In addition, her worst kind of loss was if she started off winning and ended up losing the match in Section 4.2.2.

For Sarah, loss on court could mean one of two different things: either losing hope or pushing herself. As discussed earlier in Section 4.1 about anxiety, loss has a greater meaning for her that extends beyond the tennis court, as it relates to a greater fear of losing the goal she set for herself, losing her identity as an athlete, or even losing the time she spent playing and competing. She said losing to her meant losing her aspiration to become number one, leaving her as a normal girl with no hopes or dreams. On the other hand, she stated, *"Sometimes it will be also a push if I lost the last time, because I don't like to lose from the same person twice"*.

Mary also classified loss into several types. She stated that she accepted certain losses more than others, though she did not like losing. Losing was mostly disappointing to her if she did not feel confident, but, less disappointing when she has tried her best: *"It depends on the match, if I feel I was not confident, I didn't play my game, I was thinking too much, mmm [...] I wasn't just performing as I would have liked to [...] then it's disappointment, but if I, if the match was close, if she had some chances and I had some chances and it was just a matter of a few points here and there, so you are [...] a little disappointed not as much."* Loss and anxiety then were experienced differently for Mary depending on the effort she put and how well she and her opponent played during the match.

For Jayne, similarly, losing depended on the type of loss. She suggested that if she gave her best then loss could be a reward or a learning experience. However, if she did not give her best then losing was a disappointment; a feeling that she put effort in this sport but did not receive the outcome she wanted. She said, *"I believe there are several types of losses there are matches that you just go in and you are playing a very tough opponent so if you give if you give your best I guess, I look at it as, it can be a reward sometimes you get to learn something, and*

some losses are just, I mean, I don't like to lose but sometimes I accept it better than some losses."

The theme of loss has also been linked to *aging*. Seven of the participants mentioned 'getting old' and how it related to tennis and anxiety. Emily spoke about getting older in a way that made her scared of losing to some of the younger girls. She said, *"I'm getting older [...] and there are upcoming younger girls that are better, with a higher potential, so I become worried that a day would come where I would for example lose to a girl who is much younger than me. But now I, know, I feel that it's normal and that as long as I'm working and I train well; there will be other players around me who will train well too."*

Sarah, similarly, mentioned that most of the players her age had already quit. This was a challenge but also a goal she looked forward to as discussed. Peter, likewise, felt that aging was a huge challenge for him but also a motivation to take care of his body. He said, *"It makes me want to be more taking care of my body, because I know the more you get old, the more you will get injured, the more you will need to work even more to, to be able to compete with the young."*

Mary expressed that she might not change her outlook regarding tennis even when she gets older. She explained her point of view saying, *"I guess I am going to mature more but I don't know if I am going to be looking at tennis from another perspective [...] I don't think I'm going to be 100% satisfied with this decision, just because tennis has been a part of me, just growing up for a long time, and just the competition part is what I'm going to miss most."*

Jayne, on the other hand, felt that when she got older, she might want to approach tennis from a different angle by coaching for example. She also feared that when she got old, she would find tennis challenging. She described her great challenge saying, *"Probably having to force myself to workout. I won't have to, no actually, because I can work out with*

anything that's not related to tennis, when it comes to tennis I start getting iffy about it, so maybe having to say no to someone who wants to play."

When John spoke about age, he differentiated age and the expectations from tennis accordingly. He gave an example saying, *"When you're like 18, 19, it's just more aggressive, more like better serve, better volleys, to start thinking about different tactics too. When you're 12 obviously you're hitting the ball really slow, really high, just making balls for others to miss but then when you're older, you have to be more like aggressive, you have to be able to win the point and not wait for the point to come to you."*

Losing influences all participants' anxiety, however the meaning of loss differs for individual participants and the extent and how they perceive their anxiety differs according to the different meanings. This affects the anxiety that happens before, during and often even after the match.

4.3.3. Positioned-Identity

Identity was one of the themes that came up in this research for nearly all participants. Being a competitive tennis athlete, for all participants, defined their identity. However, one participant expressed a slightly different relationship to tennis, though the sport continues to be an essential part of her life. This could show how losing matches or losing their competitive nature might threaten their sense of positioned-identity, as suggested earlier (Hiles, 2007; Ronkainen et al., 2018), which inevitably could impact their anxiety, as discussed in Section 4.3.1.

Sarah discussed identity explaining how she mainly identified herself as a tennis athlete. She clarified, *"If we say that my character is divided into many things, I think that half of my character will be tennis and the other one will be an [omitted by the author to protect anonymity] and the other one will be I'm a lady."* She stated that tennis and competition were everything to her, adding that without tennis her life would be missing something important.

"I spent it more than seventeen years playing tennis so it won't be very easy to say ok no more. In my life, I can't. When I stay two weeks without playing, something became missing in my life without tennis," she said. Although it was difficult for her to compete and simultaneously study in Egypt, tennis was what made Sarah happy. *"Something that makes me happy, the courts, the smell of the balls,"* she described.

As she spoke about tennis, Sarah's voice and facial expressions reflected her emotions. It seemed like her whole body smiled. This could indicate the importance of tennis to her, which reflects how it could be a major source of anxiety if she loses it.

Peter, similarly, expressed how he considered tennis his life. *"Tennis is almost my everything. It is my job, how, everything to me [...]* It means a lot of years of hard work and a lot of years of sacrifice. It means a goal that I really want to reach to help the other players, the young players to motivate them, to see that it can be possible, that nothing can be not done so it means a lot to me, tennis."*"* The way he spoke about tennis made me understand how much it seems like a mission to him. On the other hand, losing tennis could threaten his sense of identity, and influence his anxiety.

John also stated how dedicated he was to tennis and how it affected his life. He said, *"Tennis is basically like all I do so there's nothing like school, I don't know like, there's nothing really that gets me, gets me as much as tennis."* He described tennis as something that represented a great value to him to the extent that when he lost it meant everything, he did was not worthy anymore. He contradicted himself though he indicated how loss could really be a source of anxiety for him.

Mary also saw tennis as a big a part of her, believing it would be difficult when she stopped playing competitively. *"I don't think I'm going to be 100% satisfied with this decision, just because tennis has been a part of me, just growing up for a long time, and just the competition part is what I'm going to miss most,"* she stressed. While speaking, Mary lowered

her voice, which I felt conveyed some sadness when she spoke about quitting. In addition, quitting for her meant stopping to compete, so even if she continued playing tennis, that part of her identity as a competitive tennis player would be lost. This was different to the way John thought. For him it was either he was a good tennis player or it would not be worth the effort he exerts and sacrifices a lot for.

Sophie, likewise, stated that tennis was essential in her life, giving a look that showed she was stating the obvious. The way she talked implicitly conveyed that tennis was and always would be a big part of Sophie's life. Melissa, likewise, considered tennis an integral part of her life. However, she recognized that later she might need to let go of it to transition to another phase in her life, possibly going into another career after college.

Jayne, on the other hand, had a completely different relationship with tennis than all the other participants. Jayne admitted that she had a love-hate relationship with tennis. She confessed that tennis took her away from family and friends and when she was 13 or 14 years old, she felt left out. She said, *"It was the age where I can see all of my friends are going out, my family is doing all of these things and I feel, the beginning of me being left out. It was like ok I am feeling left out because of tennis [...] so for me it was like, ok great, but not great, like."* Jayne did not consider turning pro, as she would stop competing. She felt she needed to let tennis go, as it took a lot of time, stated in Section 4.3.1. However, she would love to coach at a later stage and this was how she felt she wanted to relate to tennis. How Jayne related to tennis and its importance to her versus her readiness to letting go showed that losing it from her life might not play a big part in her anxiety unlike the others.

The positioned-identity of a competitive tennis player is at the forefront of most of these participants' lives, which may reflect how any threat or loss to this identity may influence their anxiety as suggested in Section 4.3.1. How a player's identity influences the anxiety they experience is a topic that would be of great value if further researched.

4.3.4. The Importance of Routine

According to the participants, *routine* is essential in containing and controlling anxiety. It is a source of comfort for all participants, who had *pre-match* and *in-match routines*. Each participant had a different routine, which had a personal meaning and unique significance. Routine, in the above context, refers to a set of “critical mental skills and patterns of behaviour affecting performance” (Grant & Schempp, 2013, p.156).

Peter described his routine as very structured and rigorous, always done in the same way regardless of whom he plays against or what time the match is. He explains his pre-match routine, saying “*If it’s in the early morning, three hours before the match, I eat, then rest in the room, go to the gym, run a bit, do some mobilization and stuff, and then go warm up, and stay in the court until the match. Warm up, change and be in the court like even before the referee and the other opponent comes.*” He felt comfortable with his routine as it meant he did his role and would win consequently. This basic routine gave him a sense of security, becoming part of his basic practice. However, before tough matches he said he warmed up more to make sure he was prepared. I sensed that Peter was someone who was comfortable with structure. He did the same thing most of the time. This could be why he did not really know how his routine influenced his anxiety as he always did it no matter what.

John, on the other hand, stated that he got anxious when he was not organized or prepared before the match. He said, “*The thing that most affects my anxiety is like when, when, I’m not organized, when I’m not like before the matches when I don’t wake up early, when I don’t have a good breakfast, when I don’t warm up, those things really affect because as I said before the match, you start thinking and then you start thinking and then you think, ah ok, I haven’t been doing the right things today that’s gonna affect me more in the match.*” For him routine and preparation was more of a mental thing.

John spoke a lot about *doing the right thing* and how this was related to how much he felt he deserved to win or not, which affected his anxiety. He said, *“When I’m not doing the right things, I just think ok, I’m messed up, I don’t deserve to win, so I have to try even harder and then it worries me a lot.”* John mentioned ‘right thing’ and ‘organized’ several times, which might indicate how essential being organized was for John and how this reflected his perception of deserving to win.

John explained how his routine was completely based on trial and error. He said, *“You start doing random things, you start like thinking and then when it works out for you, you start doing it again, just works out for you, again and then you just get used to it and then you don’t do it, you messed up.”* He said that his in-match routine became a sort of superstition (laughing) and a main determinant of winning or losing. Superstition is believing that uncontrollable factors can be controlled to get the required outcome (Burger & Lynn, 2005). John mentioned examples of things he did or did not do during the match, which, he felt, might have influenced his anxiety, *“I don’t step on lines, I have to bounce the ball certain number of times before my serve, it just helps me focus.”*

On the other hand, being organized and prepared helped John, especially before going to play on new surfaces. John used the third person when he spoke about being organized, which could show how it maybe a general rule for everyone. John used the word ‘rusty’ in different contexts but they all described how he felt when he had not been playing for long or had not been prepared for something new. This indicates how preparation and organization are essential for him and how they influence his anxiety.

Jayne also mentioned how preparation was essential for her. She felt more anxious when she did not feel prepared, *“I think that most of my anxiety is related to things that I don’t like, I don’t, I like to be prepared, I like to plan in advance.”* Preparation has also been discussed when Jayne referred to ‘confidence’, which will be revisited in Section 4.4.4.

However, Jayne related confidence to how well she was prepared, *“If I haven’t been practising, I haven’t been doing anything, and I go into a match I know that I’m not prepared so it would affect [my confidence].”*

One way Jayne prepared before a match was by taking her homeopathic remedy, which was important for her. Even though Jayne did not have a certain routine that she performed before or during matches, she still considered her remedy vital to keep her calm and help ease her anxiety before and during the match.

Emily also discussed how her routine consisted of training and preparing well before a match. This preparation gave her a sense of security, *“When I don’t train a lot I don’t have a sense of my strokes and I worry that I would go in the match and feel that my strokes are not there, that my tennis is not there but when I train a lot I feel secure.”* Emily repeatedly stressed how important preparation was for her when we were ending the interview. Her pre-match preparation and routine also helped reduce her anxiety.

Emily also had an in-match routine, which helped make her feel comfortable and satisfied. *“The place where I put my towel during the breaks, I like to put it in a certain place that I like, I like to put the water and my juice in a certain place too [...] “I put them in the right place, I feel that I’m mentally comfortable,”* she laughed. It seemed that for Emily, similar to John and Peter, placing her towel in the right place reflected the importance of routine, and how she might feel anxious if it was not done correctly. However, as Emily’s routine became rigid, it seemed more like a ritual than superstition.

Sarah, also had a routine before every match, which involved, eating at a certain hour before the match, relaxing in her room and taking a shower. Her routine for each tournament was usually the same. She usually preferred to sit on the right side of the referee and start with her serve. If this did not happen, she felt under pressure. Having her routine in place, she felt *“More comfortable in the match [...] more focused.”* She described herself as superstitious as

John; she wore the same outfit and preferred to play on the same court. Sarah was smiling when she described her superstitions, which I experienced as a way of justifying how important her routine was for her. Her routine seemed to influence her anxiety before and during matches.

Mary, likewise, discussed the importance of routine for her. She shared a pre-match routine with the whole team that diverted her from thinking too much before the match. In addition, she had an in-match routine, which she considered important. She explained, *“Whatever the court is, four, five or six, I have the one specific bench I have to sit on, and then my towel is always coming out of the bag. It is like not outside; it is like coming out of the bag. I use it, I put it in and then I just get a part out. I don’t know there are little things like that but I, with the balls, I can have like two balls in my hand and just like one specific one, and like, sometimes I want to play with the same one as I did the point before, with, and sometimes, it depends on the match”*.

Mary said her routine made her relaxed and comfortable, feeling that everything was in place. Despite confessing she knew routines were mainly superstitions, it made her feel she was doing the right thing. Again, the words ‘doing the right thing’ and ‘superstition’ come up representing how much having and following routine influences Mary’s anxiety.

Melissa stated that her routine consisted of visualizing herself playing well, in addition to listening to music. She clarified, *“I can visualize it, I can see myself playing like loose without any tension mmm I listen to music, mmm, before mmm like I try to not think about this, because there are a lot of expectations on me so I try not to think about those but it still comes up.”* She tried not to think much before the matches but visualizing the matches she had played well before sometimes increased her anxiety as it raised her expectations, which would be discussed in Section 4.4.1. In addition, sometimes she did not have time for any pre-match routine due to schoolwork.

Melissa also had an in-match routine, as she said, *“I go to the baseline, mmm, with my legs first, (I mean) I position my legs first and then I bounce the ball only once and then I play the serve right after bouncing, mmm, so I can't bounce and then wait a few seconds I have to serve right after it, mmm, ya, and I, I don't look at the opponent.”* This routine helped her manage her anxiety and fear. She continued, *“Last year that I couldn't serve because I was so anxious and I was so scared and panicky, mmm, so I made up this routine and I found that this routine helps me not, avoid panicking before serving.”* Melissa also discussed how routine was reassuring for her, helping her calm down and feel secure.

For Sophie, music had been something that she uses as a pre-match routine to help her relax before matches, specifically before critical matches. She laughed, *“Yes, every match I, (I mean) a song is stuck into my head, maybe hahahaha, I can sing it inside me and mmm, it relaxes me.”* She slept well and ate two hours before the match. She felt that eating earlier helped decrease her pre-match anxiety since anxiety caused her stomach pain as discussed in Section 4.2.4. She said, *“The thinking about the (stomach) heaviness I told you about, that I ate well, I mmm, I'm having my powerade and everything (so) hopefully everything is going to be like well”*. However, similar to Melissa, due to her school workload, she did not always have time before matches to do a specific routine.

Routine, ultimately, had a substantial significance for all participants, as it became a container for their anxiety during their match play, or a way to manage their anxiety with the illusion of being more in control to reach the desired outcome. It would have been interesting to probe into the origin and inspiration behind the habitual routines that players adopt and whether they have any particular childhood resonance with them.

4.4. The Internal World

The Internal World encompasses the internal processes within the competitive participants, including expectations, over-thinking, choices & sacrifices, and self-confidence. All these themes influence their experience of anxiety.

4.4.1. Expectations

‘Expectations’ is a theme that is widely covered by all participants. It can be divided into internal (expectations set by the individual) or external (ones placed by others), which will be discussed in Section 4.5. All participants have a benchmark of expectations that they placed on themselves which in turn influenced their anxiety experience.

Seven of the eight participants discussed how they set high goals and how these expectations influenced their anxiety in a way that could be helpful or harmful for their performance. Six participants discussed how these expectations were initially set by their parents, maybe unconsciously, and that they later internalized them. However, three of them still believed they were highly influenced by their parents' expectations, affecting their anxiety before and during matches. Additionally, seven participants who expressed anxiety also resulted from others' expectations as well.

Melissa illustrated both her internal benchmark and external expectations set by others. Winning means defying expectations and losing means not performing as expected, which reflected how significant *expectation* was for her. She defined anxiety as fear of not fulfilling expectations, *“When I 'm playing against someone who is higher in ranking or is more tougher than me, there are certain expectations that I'm not supposed to win this match, so if I win then this is defying what people expect me to, what the score is expected to be, mmm [...] and also mmm [...] I mean what I expected myself, also not just what others expect of me, what I expect*

for myself, I expect myself to win this match.” Thus, the idea of winning against a stronger opponent to her is verging on the unexpected, raising expectations and heightening anxiety even more.

Melissa added that if she had previously played well with an opponent, her expectations next time she met the same opponent were raised, fuelling anxiety. In addition, she experienced less anxiety when she did not have expectations for her matches. She explained, *“Sometimes when I’m visualizing maybe past matches that I played and performed well, it makes me more anxious because it raises my expectations of myself, mmm [...] but when that happens I just I stop it, I turn to something else”*.

Melissa also discussed how her anxiety was influenced by audience presence during matches, which led to more expectation and pressure. She felt restricted, which in turn influenced her performance during matches. She said, *“When I feel that a lot of people are watching I feel that there are some things I’m supposed to do and not supposed to do, so I feel a bit restricted.”* Her anxiety of not performing as expected extends beyond tennis too, *“It’s the same one that I feel when I’m maybe on stage when I’m giving presentations, I don’t really think about them but I find myself mmm reacting to them, I mean, I’m more tense, mmm, I’m more aware of people that are around than I mean, it makes me lose my concentration.”*

Melissa said that her parents were the ones who initiated her expectations, telling her they anticipated she would win as she grew up. Her coaches, she said, further reinforced it, making her blame herself or view herself as a failure if she did not fulfil these expectations. She said, *“A lot of times I turn around at myself, so if I fail him again so I’m a failure, I didn’t do what’s expected, it’s all, it’s all because of me.”*

The word expectation and its meaning for Melissa varied throughout the interview. Melissa's experience of anxiety is influenced by several kinds of expectations linking to how

she will perform, the goals she set for herself, who she will defeat, how many points she will be able to win, and how she views her level.

She mentioned the word 'should' often throughout the interview, as she said, *"This means that mmm (I mean), I, I should win it, I, I deserve to win it from all the hard work I have to put in, mmm, the player in front of me I see as, I see myself that I am better than her so I should win it, mmm, I know how to defeat her, I know what tactic to use, so I still could win this match, it's all about like should."* Melissa revealed how much her anxiety and performance were greatly influenced by expectations both before and during matches.

Emily brought up the theme of 'expectations' when she defined how losing meant dealing with the 'unexpected', like Melissa. She considered herself not good enough when she lost, even if she played well. This was due to her personal expectations, *"If I'm thinking about a lot of things, I feel that I have, mmm [...], a lot of things that I have to do, that I have to play well, although don't have to do that, I don't need to do that, but I, but I feel that my mind makes me feel that I need to do that and be good and play well."*

Emily discussed how her expectations changed as she always expected to play at a high level but now, she realized how sometimes she would have her lows, even though she stated that this made her very anxious. She said, *"Although I know now that one can't be always in a high level and doing well all the time and playing well, there has to come a time when she won't be good or her performance will worsen a bit and her level will decrease a bit, but still I feel very upset and I wish that these days pass and I go back to, to, to, my previous level or the performance."*

Expectations emerged when Emily expressed how one of her fears was feeling that others did not view her as good enough. This seemed to be contingent on the expectations she had set for herself and the expectations she thought others set for her. The concept of good enough appears with Emily often, which she experienced when she lost or played against

difficult opponents. She also questioned her level in comparison to others, *“Maybe I wasn’t good enough to begin with, mmm maybe a lot of other people are really better than me, it’s not going to be such a bad thing because mmm [...] of course there are people, a lot of other girls who play and who are better.”*

In relation to others’ expectations, Emily expressed how she was upset when she felt she had disappointed someone, because she did not do what was expected of her. Paradoxically, Emily also stated how sometimes she used this disappointment as a motivation to work harder and prove people wrong.

Expectations occurred with Mary as she experienced them inside and outside the courts even in her daily life. Inside the court, growing up, she used to expect that she should win and even though her parents never directly told her she should, she felt pressured to win when they watched. This kind of expectation has changed now, as the meaning of winning changed as mentioned in Section 4.3.2a.

As Mary played for college, she felt the need to perform well. She stated that the coach expected her to perform well and she felt the need to prove she deserved the scholarship she got. This made her anxious as she stated, *“Obviously when you play for a school and they give you a scholarship and they want you to perform there is some pressure [s] sometimes you are like ok I’d better win, I really need to win, although they just tell you we just want you to do your best, that’s what they say, but obviously they want you to win. They got you here so that you could win for the team, so just the idea of playing for the school and, that’s maybe, it brings up some anxiety.”* It is interesting that she said it from the second and third persons’ point of view when speaking about this kind of expectation, which may show how she thinks this is a general expectation placed on everyone at college.

Mary expressed how her teammates’ expectations also impacted her feelings of anxiety. However, she felt she did not carry the responsibility of winning all alone. She said, *“They*

think they're the best of the best so they always mmm [...] like look at you and always talk about you and always expect things from you so that makes me maybe a little bit anxious [...] I have other people to share this with, it's not just expectations from me, it's also from the other girls on the team so I feel like, I'm sharing."

Contrarily, when in Egypt, people's expectations induced anxiety. She expressed, *"People are very, how do you say, they talk about each other a lot and they say, did you see she beat whoever x and y beat I don't know who, it's just very, it puts some on you because people are expecting mmm [...] expecting you [to] win or expecting you to lose [so] you just have to, (for sure) you don't have to think about all this but it still affects you in a way."*

Peter, meanwhile, mentioned expectations when he discussed how achieving in his career added more responsibility and expectations to always excel. He said, *"Because it makes me in the end a good person, I mean, if I am doing everything right, eating well, doing my fitness, my tennis, my routines, working hard in practice and, eventually it is, it is the right thing to do."* Additionally, he would feel disappointed, like Melissa and Emily, if he did not reach his goal in this career. Peter had a benchmark that he measured himself based on his expectations, thus, he felt more anxious when he did not meet them.

Peter also discussed how the expectations he had about other opponents and how tough they are impacted upon his anxiety before the match. He put the blame on himself if he lost. He said, *"If I am playing a guy that I know already by rank that he's much better than me then, then, then, basically I am entering the match knowing that most probably I will lose so I am trying to just make a good match or try to improve myself in a game to see how I compete against this guy. Then, then I don't blame myself, then I am happy or with how I performed."*

Peter also felt the need to be more prepared if he was going to play against a stronger opponent. This made him feel anxious, *"Even before the day, before the match, I feel that I have a tough day, and then this makes me warm up 15-20 minutes even more. And how I warm*

up, and work on the things that I will, supposed to do in the match.” If he was beating someone, he was not expected to win then he might get anxious and threatened by the idea this player might come back anytime. Playing against a tougher opponent would place more expectations on Peter to focus more. This was different from Melissa’s experience when she started beating someone she was not expected to beat although their anxiety was affected in both contexts.

Jayne’s experience of anxiety as a function of expectation started initially as her mother had high expectations of her when she was younger. She reported, *“I think a part of why I felt so much pressure is because she had very high expectations of me. So, because, I don’t know, I guess every mom and their children, just she has, every mom has high expectations for their children. So, I guess it translated into pressure for me.”* The way Jayne framed her understanding of how mothers place high expectations in the general sense, considering it a normal thing. Jayne later mentioned that she had internalized some of these high expectations, which on the contrary, helped reassure her that she would do fine. Setting high expectations for herself also helped her manage her anxiety before or during the match. On the court, Jayne expected to perform well in practice when she was more prepared as discussed in 4.3.4. and she would feel disappointed in herself when she did not meet her expectations, just like the others.

Part of being a competitive athlete for Jayne is expecting to stand out. She said *“I felt like why sacrifice everything that you’ve worked so hard for just to be a regular person? [...] I have always like to stand out, I love to be super me.”* Jayne’s usage of the terms ‘stand out’ and ‘super me’ reflects her expectations to do something great. She equated standing out with being herself. Her body language and voice suggested how sure she was of her approach.

Jayne stated that anxiety was related to thinking about the outcome of the match. As mentioned in 4.3.1. Jayne stated that a huge goal of the competition was to get the required outcome. However, the meaning of outcome for Jayne changed, *“Before, the outcome used to*

be all about ok, I'm going to win, I'm going to lose. Now, I'm looking at it more on the how I'm going to perform side. For me this is an outcome, like I learned something from the way I played during the match.” Sometimes she felt that external unexpected factors might influence the outcome or prevent her from reaching the expected outcome even if she put in the effort, which was difficult for her to experience.

Jayne also had expectations of her teammates, because they all counted as a united entity. She experienced anxiety and disappointment when they did not reach the outcome. Jayne worried more about the outcome of others than her own since she played within a team and felt that her teammates had let her down and did not meet her expectations when they did not reach their outcome. She said, *“I would feel like they let me down to a certain extent, but it would mean that I did my part, but maybe they haven't tried to do theirs, it depends, maybe they haven't failed to do this they tried to do their part or not.”*

Jayne expected her opponents to respect her on the court and felt very anxious if she did not receive what she expected from them. Additionally, Jayne felt anxious of her coach's expectations, as he got disappointed when they did not reach their outcome. She reflected, *“He would start talking about [...] he is disappointed and how we put in the work and effort or whatever and then we are not getting the outcome he wants.”*

Although Jayne shared some experiences of anxiety due to expectations placed by others, she emphasised the expectations she places on herself and on others. She discussed how failing to meet her expectations feeds her anxiety during matches and how sometimes setting very high expectations helps her manage her anxiety.

Sophie talked about expectations, mainly referring to her mother's expectations, which could be similar to Jayne's. She cared about her mother's expectations and what her parents would think of her and got upset if her mother thought she did not play as expected. However, Sophie also discussed her own expectations, which influenced her negatively. She said, *“I*

would be so negative, and the spirit will I mean deteriorate, no it will not make me play as I should I mean.”

Sophie’s anxiety from not playing as expected extends to warming up before the match. She revealed, *“If I warm up, I get so anxious mmm maybe I will not play as I warmed up the way I did.”* Sophie mentioned that she would be anxious during matches if she felt her performance in matches was not as expected. She felt very anxious if she was leading in the score and the score got tight. *“If I’m up in the first set for example, like 5-2 and the score is 5, I mean I’m expecting to win, 6-2/6-3 when the score gets closer, this gets me anxious,”* she explained. This anxiety made her become defensive rather than aggressive.

Furthermore, she could not accept performing badly or win as expected against someone she regularly beat, which is one of her biggest fears. Sophie discussed the notion of perfectionism when she talked about her expectation to always beat the same opponents. This was highlighted when she said, *“When I’m used to win two or three specific girls, one of the top players and I lose for one or two times, no this, this means that I’m not performing as I should.”*

Sophie used the word ‘perfection’ frequently, as she viewed herself as a perfectionist at times. She felt she constantly wanted to win every time and did not want anyone to comment in a negative way about her. However, her description of being a perfectionist was only in relation to tennis, as she felt that being competitive requires perfectionism.

Sarah set a lot of goals and expectations for herself, hoping to be the best player in the country. Like Sophie, perfectionism has also been discussed as part of Sarah’s expectations and a main source of her anxiety. Sarah also used the word ‘perfection’ frequently throughout the interview. She said, *“Because sometimes I want to be perfect [...] Perfection for me [...] to be a tennis player, to be a good friend, to be a very good [...] omitted by the author to protect anonymity], not a tennis player, I want to be a very good tennis player, I want to be a very*

good friend, I mean I like giving everything the effort it deserves so I want perfect in everything in my life.”

Sarah, as mentioned earlier, expected to beat her opponents, because she was the one finishing off the balls and not because her opponents missed the shots. Sarah described her feelings when she did not perform as expected, saying “*Sad sometimes very sad it’s like for example not that the world becomes dark and gloomy but I become upset with myself.*”

Sarah also felt pressure and got scared of not being good enough and not reaching her goal, similar to Jayne and Emily. However, with the expectation she placed on herself, there was an awareness that she might not be able to train as much as others who were younger, had fewer academic demands and lived closer to the tournaments’ sites. This expectation affected her anxiety both before and during competition.

While seeking perfection in tennis, Sarah felt that she neglected other things in life, although she wished to be perfect in all domains. She stated, “*Sometimes I forget myself as a lady to be more perfect in tennis, sometimes I forget myself mmm as a girlfriend, sometimes I forget myself as a good friend for my friends.*” I sensed that Sarah’s expectations were very high, as she always expected to perform perfectly or to win because she was in control, not because the opponent did not perform well. This, in turn, may suggest that she perceived ‘loss’ as out of control or out of expectations, thereby influencing anxiety experienced during the match and affecting her ability to play.

On the other hand, John had a different experience with expectations. He did not care about what others expected of him, rather he expected himself to play well, playing good tennis. He was aware that at his age, he did not necessarily need to be winning every time, so he cared about being more aggressive on court and winning points. He stressed, “*Expectation of this stage in tennis is way of playing rather than winning or losing.*” However, he also stated that when he did not care much about his performance and did not place any expectations to perform

well or win, he was not anxious but he performed poorly. He described this stage in his life as *“That stage where I just go to a tennis match and not really care and not really give. This was my worst stage honestly.”*

John used the word ‘care’ often and it seemed to link closely to his notion of expectation. John also claimed that no one made him worried. He said that when he played against older people he did not necessarily need to win, as he was not expected to. He spoke about the right things to do, similar to Peter, and how this influenced his anxiety. He reflected, *“When I'm not doing the right thing, I just feel, like I just think that I don't deserve to win, it sounds pretty weird.”*

Expectations then are a theme that comes up strongly with these participants influencing their anxiety before and during matches. Expectations, whether internalized or expressed by others, have shown to influence the goals these participants set for themselves. The meaning attached to not fulfilling these expectations again affects their anxiety.

4.4.2. Overthinking

‘Overthinking’ is another theme related to ‘expectations’ since it is bound up to the participants’ thoughts before and during matches and is therefore a function of their anxiety. Overthinking is a shared theme that emerges for seven of the eight participants. The only exception was Sarah, who did not mention over-thinking. Five participants expressed that overthinking influenced their anxiety before matches, while the others stated it affected anxiety levels during matches. Only John revealed that overthinking after matches influences his anxiety and motivation to play. All seven participants discussed the need to control over-thinking to manage their anxiety experience and perform better.

For John, anxiety was all about thinking. His overthinking was mostly related to losses. As discussed earlier he thinks a lot about tennis’ worth when he loses. John struggled with a thinking cycle that influenced his anxiety after matches, but he thought resting his brain right

after a match yielded better results. He believed, *“If you're losing then [...] you're just really angry, you're just thinking about the loss too much so that your brain starts leading you to like different situations but like, when you're like relaxed and take like two days three days off, then you start rethinking it, you're much more wiser and you think better.”* John added that after a loss, overthinking affected his sleep. He said, *“You just over-thinking at night [...] you right away just start thinking about it, like your loss, how you messed up in the tennis court, you start feeling like really bad.”* This cycle of overthinking for John stayed for a few days, in which he was constantly reminded of his loss.

Before a match, John thought about how he would perform and what the outcome would be, raising his anxiety levels. He explained, *“Right before the match, you're thinking [...] of different scenarios that like will lead to you losing at the end and then you start worrying [...] When you're stressed out like before the match it's the worst feeling.”* John was clear that what he said was not a general rule, but rather his own experience of anxiety from losing, although he used the second person a lot when he spoke.

There was a stage when John stopped thinking about his matches and his losses but this influenced his anxiety in another way, as it meant that he did not care much. He said, *“Some people when they don't have this stress, they don't have this worry for the matches or thinking about losing or not aware of what's gonna happen, they play better than because the stress breaks them down but for me, I don't, I just don't care, I just lose”.* John, thus, prefers to worry and think, as he felt this is helpful for him even though it influences his anxiety. He explained how he had to stop and reflect about what he was intending to do with tennis, which really helped him to play again with motivation.

Peter, similarly, stated that his anxiety was highly affected by thinking about various things such as other players' ranking and performance level. He said, *“I think a lot about ranking, and the players, and if this match I win, where I will go in my rank, and if I have a*

good role, or for example the seed that I am going to play, he lost, so then I keep thinking yeah now it's a good chance for me to use this opportunity to go deep in the tournament and win more matches, so I think that's what makes me get scared of losing". However, if he loses, he does not think much about his loss, as thinking about losses after the match influences his anxiety post-match.

When Peter was younger, he used to over-think. His thoughts extended to several factors, *"I used to think of how I will play, how my game plan will be, how he will play, how everything will go, in the match, and then I was even thinking in the match now I am playing bad, now my strokes are not going well"*. However, his coach made him aware of how thinking influenced his performance and anxiety and taught him how to manage his thoughts. Now, Peter learned to stop his thinking and to shift his thoughts to the next ball, as he realized how over-thinking influenced him tremendously. He said, *"To stop thinking, to not think, I mean to keep playing, finish the ball, it's gone, think about the next ball, don't think, don't even look at the score, don't think about the score, play."*

Peter used the term 'messed up' with thinking several times, as if he felt the need to control his thinking because if he did not, things could get messed up. It would be interesting to explore the phenomenon of allowing the self to think. On the other hand, Peter discussed how he did not think when he won even if he performed badly, unlike when he lost, as he said, *"Because I think that there must be a reason why I lost"*. Overthinking seemed to be an issue for Peter that he needed to be controlled before and during the match as it influenced his anxiety and performance. However, overthinking was allowed after losses to an extent to help him learn from his mistakes.

Emily said that she thought greatly before the match, which influenced her anxiety and sometimes her performance. She said, *"When I sit and think before the match about anything, I feel that I'm stressed."* Sometimes Emily struggled with over-thinking that she felt it was out

of hand. This was highlighted when she said, *“I’m thinking too much and sometimes I can control this thinking during the match and sometimes I can’t, it depends on where I am exactly in the match, if I’m performing well I don’t think of anything that’s on the outside, but if I’m playing badly and losing, I start to mmm [...], my mind starts thinking about negative things that make me feel anxious.”* She tried her best not to think during a match to be able to perform, similar to Peter. Sometimes, in the match she thought about what she needed to do to get out of a situation or improve it.

For her, thinking raised her expectations of doing things. She felt that she thought of several trivial things that others might be surprised of and that added to her anxiety. She said, *“When I tell someone about them, they tell me why do you think that way in the first place? They say go play, you train, you know how to play, that’s it go play, you will play well but I keep thinking about a lot of things, small things.”* She said that overthinking added to her anxiety, thus she tried controlling her thoughts while playing. She said, *“When I’m controlling my thinking mmm my level becomes better, it becomes better in tennis, better in mental, better in everything, because if I’m able to control my negative thinking immediately I feel I’m heading to a better place.”*

Emily stated that there was a helpful way of thinking for her in a match, which she defined, as focused saying *“That all my thinking mmm is about the match, the way I play, mmm, the tactic that I put to win, I don’t think of anything else, that’s what I mean by focused [...] If I’m focused mmm I’ll know how to control everything, I will know to control my thinking, to control my tennis, mmm, my breathing, everything.”* During the match Emily could think of external things and how they might impact her performance. Similar to John and Peter, Emily had thoughts after a match, *“When I get out of the game I start thinking again and I rethink, I rethink the whole match, I can know what went wrong.”*

Mary considered tennis a mental game and struggled with overthinking, which fuelled her anxiety during the match. She said, *"It's a very mental game, most of the time, it's your head, it's how you think of it."* Before the match, when she gets distracted warming up with the team she thinks less, but once she enters the court, she starts thinking. She pointed out, *"I feel like when I'm by myself and I'm really about to start a match and during the match is when I feel anxious."* Her thoughts got crowded with the first few rallies when she started assessing how good her opponent was. She asked herself who was better and how she would perform against her opponent.

Part of Mary's anxiety was related to how much she could control her thinking. According to her, negative thinking might be a vicious cycle and might hinder her greatly. She related negative thinking to self-confidence, which will be discussed in Section 4.4.4. Overthinking also increased when she tried to close the set as discussed earlier.

Mary stated that when she started overthinking, she did not feel relaxed and her body got affected as discussed in Section 4.2.4. To her, thinking varied according to different variables such as who her opponents or team were and how important the match was. When she was playing in Egypt, her anxiety intensified as she knew all the players. She said she did not overthink when her opponent was not known to her. In addition, Mary also believed that when the coach lowered her position in the team matches, it made her overthink her abilities, affecting both her anxiety and her self-confidence.

Jayne, also, described her anxiety sometimes as overthinking, which felt like a cloud of thoughts as described in Section 4.2.4. Jayne described her need to control her thoughts saying, *"I just take decide to take, I decide to take my 15-20 seconds between balls to reset myself during my breaks just so that I can focus and think to myself ok now this is the situation what am I going to do."* She explained that her performance the day before the match influenced her thinking patterns during the match. *"I'd have a great practice the day before so I'd be ok, then*

we're going into the match thinking about what happened yesterday or how I practiced yesterday, so I'd probably play better," she reiterated. Jayne also spoke about how her coach influenced her thinking and anxiety, stressing that she preferred to have some space after the match to process things *"in a clearer state of mind"*.

Melissa too said that thinking about her expected goals influenced her anxiety as discussed in 4.4.1. However, similar to Peter, she tries to avoid thinking before a match to focus. She explained visualizing before matches helped her in some instances to let go of thinking and try to play without tension. She said, *"I start to think about mmm matches that I've played before that I've done well, I can visualize it, I can see myself playing like loose without any tension."*

Additionally, Melissa doubted herself when she thought of the choices and sacrifices, she made for tennis, which will be discussed later. As she approached the decisive stage of ending college, she felt anxious about her future plans. She said, *"It makes me more anxious because mmm I keep thinking about, especially in the next five years, mmm, I keep thinking."*

Thinking about external things such as others' opinions was anxiety provoking for Sophie. She defined it saying, *"Anxiety means thinking about the external factors while playing [...] I suppose in the critical points of course the external factors, it's all about the external factors and the too much thinking."* She felt that thinking interfered with her performance, which was captured when she said, *"I don't get into the game in like the first set or something because I'm thinking too much, it takes so much time in most match, not so much time but in the critical matches and the important matches against the top players it is a big obstacle."* However, she tried not to think much when she lost balls. She did not talk much about overthinking. She only related her thinking about perfectionism to anxiety, saying *"You think the ideal things put pressure on your mind."*

Overthinking then, is associated with the experiences of anxiety for most participants before and/or during the match. It related to the expectations and the anticipation of the participants. In addition, most participants expressed how they practised to control their overthinking in an effort to manage their anxiety and perform better, which would be an interesting area to explore.

4.4.3. Choices and Sacrifices

‘Choices’ is another common theme that emerges from the analysis of the transcripts. All eight participants expressed how their choices on and off-court influenced their experiences of anxiety. They all used the word ‘sacrifice’ when they talked about their off-court choices. Six participants discussed how off-court sacrifices raised expectations, which heightened their anxiety. Three participants said they would have to make further choices after finishing their academic studies, which influenced their anxiety. Mainly, all struggled to manage between studying and playing competitive tennis.

Jayne talked about how she had to make several off-court choices that affected her anxiety. She chose to continue in a difficult school with long hours that was far away from home to train after that. She said, *“I went to a very hard school as well, so I would go to school for 8-9 hours a day, which was an hour away from home, and then have to go to practice at like 8pm or something, and then have to study, so I found myself sacrificing things that I didn’t necessarily want to sacrifice, so it would add a certain feeling of anxiety.”*

From Jayne’s sacrifices was her social life as she refrained from several family trips, events and outings with friends. She also felt she sacrificed her grades as she had to accept getting lower grades to keep up with her training. These sacrifices made her feel left out, but they taught her to enjoy her own company. This in turn made it easy for her to adapt to moving abroad. As Jayne thought of the sacrifices she made, she expected to excel in tennis to feel it

was worth it. She said, *“I felt like why sacrifice everything that you’ve worked so hard for just to be a regular person, because I feel like when you have this much, or just to be like the rest of your friends. I have always like [liked] to stand out.”* The choices and sacrifices Jayne made have influenced her experiences of anxiety but also propelled her to feel that it was worth the sacrifice.

Jayne expressed how she chose to stay in the present and embrace a positive attitude. Jayne used the word ‘positive’ several times related to controlling her emotions, as she felt the need to stop herself from feeling anxious. This has become an approach that she used on and off the court. She also constantly talks to herself using positive, encouraging words. She said, *“I have to ask my brain to calm down, to focus on what’s happening right now rather than what’s going to happen later on.”* The way she framed her sentences might reflect how it was an instant choice she made. In addition, as stated in Section 4.4.1., Jayne chose to set high expectations of herself and reassures herself that she would manage to reach these expectations to avoid being negative.

Melissa stated the choices she made to play competitively. She used the word sacrifice to describe her choices, saying she would for example go to tennis practice rather than sleep or study. She discussed other sacrifices saying, *“Lot of sacrifices, mmm I used to play music, I stopped because I couldn’t find time to practice that with the daily practices plus University works so I don’t really have time so I had to choose between music and tennis so I chose tennis, mmm a lot of times I choose tennis over sleep, and I sometimes choose going to practice instead of study.”*

Even though, she felt sad sometimes by sacrificing something she loved, she also felt she made the right choice as she enjoyed tennis more. This sacrifice did not necessarily influence her anxiety but sometimes made her doubt her choice, which made her eager to play better. She said, *“They don’t know really affect my anxiety a lot, sometimes I, when I start*

thinking about, mmm that I stop playing music for example to do this and to play tennis and I'm not performing well for a while then I start to doubt myself, you chose this over music something that you also love so it might make me more anxious to play better." It took Melissa a long time to answer this question and to reflect on how her choice affected her. This reflects her increased expectations of playing better while favouring tennis over music, similar to Jayne's experience. She said, *"I've quit playing music to do this so this this, I mean, mmm so it makes me like want to be better because I, because I left something else to do this so I shouldn't be wasting time and I shouldn't be staying at this kind of level"*.

Melissa added that she would have to make another major choice when she finished studying, which would be very tough for her and may add to her anxiety later. She declared. *"I'm gonna have to make another choice whether to continue playing tennis or just play for fun or just quit altogether for other thing."*

Melissa then discussed her off-court choices she made to compete and how they merged with her expectations and anxiety to perform well in matches. Thinking about her future choices also enhanced her experience of anxiety.

Sophie expressed how her choice to play tennis competitively meant playing for long hours to the point that the sun darkened her skin colour. She said, *"I spent a lot of time practicing and being at the club and I got so much tanned and I didn't used to be this colour because of tennis."* Sophie joked about it but it represented the long hours she had spent training in the sun and how pervasive they were.

Sophie spoke about how the choice of playing tennis affected her both positively and negatively. Growing up she did not spend much time with her friends in the summer, which influenced her anxiety in general, similar to Jayne. This was highlighted when she said, *"Tennis affected me negatively in I'll tell you in the sense of me not taking enough vacations like my*

friends at school or college for example, mmm, the social life I didn't have enough time to hang out with my friends, maybe family.”

However, she expressed she did not regret her social sacrifices as being a competitive athlete made her feel more energetic and helped her connect with others besides her school friends. She said, *“Most of my friends are tennis friends, mmm, I love sports, I'm used to play sports like every day, even, (I mean), it made me feel energetic more than any of my friends in school or college or whatever, mmm, (I mean), it's a good way of, of making friends and connections [...] I don't regret it now, because I know how it had like a very good impact on me, the tennis friends I mean better friends than my school friends.”*

Although Sophie did not feel the sacrifices and choices made outside the court influenced her anxiety, she spoke about some of the on-court choices that influenced her anxiety level and performance. She said, *“If for example, I lost the first set against someone (I mean), some player (I mean) mmmm second set I can play I want to say I play whatever, (I mean) I can try new things.”* In addition, when the score gets tighter as discussed earlier, she chooses to change her way of playing.

Sophie also discussed how she had to choose between studying and tennis and how it has always been a struggle managing both together. In college, Sophie had to refrain from some tournaments for her college work, in addition to forgoing travelling for tournaments, which affected her performance. She said, *“Honestly education in Egypt doesn't help the players to like keep competing because I mean everything is far away, I mean my college is far away from home, the club is far away, I don't know, and it needs so much money to like travel all year long, to keep your rank, I mean in a good position, so no I mean it needs so much effort and you don't have time to practice, travel, doing well in college and everything.”*

She also had to change her eating habits before matches, which contributed to her anxiety prior to matches, as discussed before. This was reflected when she said, *“It is kind of*

affected but not as much because for example I didn't sleep well, maybe I didn't have time to eat two hours before or eat properly to begin with."

Sophie, like Melissa, thought she would choose work over tennis at a point and might turn to coaching instead of playing in the future. Sophie explained how she shifted priorities and chose to take care of herself and be with her friends. As she felt she would stop competing soon, she said, *"I've spent a lot of time playing tennis so now I'm thinking, why not now I spend time on myself actually I can, I can do tennis of course, I can actually hang out with my friends more, I can focus on my social life."*

Sophie had made off-court choices to continue playing tennis competitively that affected her anxiety in general, though not during a match. However, she had also decided to make new choices as she felt she might transition to another career soon. Although Melissa was at the same stage, she seemed to be still sacrificing more than Sophie at this stage.

Emily, likewise, discussed how she sacrificed her social life for tennis due to the long practice hours. She was like Jayne and Melissa in the way she might sacrifice schoolwork for tennis too. Emily did not feel these choices influenced her anxiety, however, if she performed badly in a match, her sacrifices affected her anxiety. She said, *"If for example I see for example that they have gone out without me, had an outing without me and all of them are having fun and I'm playing matches and if for example I was playing very badly during that time so I feel very upset, I feel that no mmm I want to go with them and tennis can wait a bit."*

Meanwhile, Emily sometimes chose to socialize to escape from a poor performance. She felt the need to disconnect from tennis sometimes. Emily talked about the need to prioritize to manage her time wisely. She said, *"My time needs to be divided and that I don't let mmm everything affects me negatively, to give myself credit in the thing that I do well and the thing that I don't do well mmm I try to improve it."* When Emily spoke about her sacrifices, she made it sound like a general rule that every athlete abided by and that should not influence her

anxiety. However, she later stated that when she did not perform well, she felt anxious and thought about what she had sacrificed.

Sarah discussed her choice of aiming for perfection, both in tennis and her studies, as discussed earlier, which made her push herself more. Her main priorities were tennis and studying. However, she still had to make some choices when she struggled to manage both. She said, *“I mean I have a tournament and I don’t have time to go fitness before the tournament because I have to study because I have midterms so I will think that during the match I can’t do it as perfect as I want because I didn’t practice before it well.”*

In addition, due to her choice of focusing on both, she felt that she did not take care of herself sometimes, as mentioned in 4.4.1 She asserted. This at times made her feel pressured. *“I call it pressure on my personality, sometimes pressure on myself, because as I mentioned that I want to be a perfect in all, I want to be a perfect in my college, I don’t want my grades to be, GPA remains constant, sometimes I don’t want to be, (I mean) sometimes I want to live my life that I hope to be as a person not as a player mmm (only),”* she argued.

Initially, Sarah did not understand what I meant when I asked her about some of her choices to play competitively but this came later in the context. In addition, Sarah, like Sophie, talked about her choices in the match and how she felt she makes wrong choices while playing, which were influenced by her anxiety. She said, *“It usually between deciding two or three things and you choose one that you don’t feel was right or how.”* Sarah’s expectations and choices were different to all the others as her aims are higher both academically and in tennis. Most participants chose one over the other, while she is trying to choose both together. This has caused her more anxiety.

John spoke of his choices differently too throughout the whole interview. He did not mind his choice to be a tennis player and found it worth it except when he lost. He reflected he could not take tennis seriously when he lost saying, *“Because you waste so much time playing*

tennis and like tennis takes lots of time from like your daily life so when you lose, then you just think like right away there is no point of doing this when you are losing."

John described the sacrifices he made to play competitively as related to school and social life. However, John had different feelings to that as he stated, *"I sacrifice a lot of school to cause I haven't done a lot of school for the past like five six years, so I sacrifice that then I sacrifice going out, maybe I like going out a lot and when I don't go out cause I have to play then I start losing, it just like breaks you down a little bit."*

When he won, John felt good about himself, but when he lost, he got anxious and stressed thinking about his sacrifices. John used the second person, which made it seem as if it were a general rule for athletes to sacrifice and have the motivation for it. He said, *"I feel like I feel like when we sacrifice a lot you just have to be really, really motivated to do that."* There was a period when John really needed to stop and make a choice. He struggled with personal issues and was not performing as well as before. He had to choose between giving it all that he got or just quitting. He reflected, *"So I started thinking that I'm not gonna ruin this, either I'm just gonna quit completely or give in my all, so I was like ok, I'm gonna give it everything that I have and now I started to care about on track again."*

In addition, John also needed to make choices about which tournaments he would play and which college he would play for, but he did not feel very anxious about these choices as he placed that responsibility on his coaches so that he did not make mistakes, as discussed earlier. John stated that he would have to sacrifice more when he grew up and play more important tournaments. He said, *"A lot more stress, a lot more sacrifice, mmm hoping to play Davis cup so that's gonna be very very tough to like because it's, it's not just you playing out it's just, you have to, you're worried about different things like your country, you're, people you're playing with, your teammates, college is gonna be hard too because because you are not letting yourself down again, you're just letting everyone down if you lose."*

Mary did not talk much about her choices but she discussed her first choice of taking tennis seriously when she was younger. However, she still spoke about her struggle with deadlines and tennis, like the others, saying it affected her anxiety. She said, *"If I don't have enough time, I have a lot of tests to do and I'm just short on time, I have practice, I have meetings, I have a lot of things and I just don't have time to finish that stuff so maybe I stress a little bit, I get anxious."* I am wondering if Mary spoke about her choices and struggles much less than others because she plays for her college abroad, which differs tremendously from trying to manage between college and tennis here in Egypt.

Peter, similar to most of the participants, discussed how much he sacrificed for tennis and how worthy it was for him. In addition, he acknowledged that his life as a professional athlete was different to that of his friends. He said, *"Sometimes I feel like, I am not enjoying my life, as much as my friends are, but at the same time I feel like, my life is completely different than their life, that professional player is completely tough to handle."* On the other hand, he felt happy with his sacrifice as he makes his parents and others satisfied. *"That making the people around me proud of my sacrifice, of the kind of money-wise, if being with them, with my parents, the sacrifice I put to be a professional player, I think it's making me, making them proud of me, which is making me happy,"* he beamed. Peter, however, talked about his wrong choices on court and how much blame he placed on himself afterwards. He said, *"I blame myself, that I was bad, that I was doing playing wrong, the game plan was wrong, I was took the wrong decisions, or I didn't take the right decisions in the right time, I was scared, I was too passive."*

The choices that most of these participants have to make, sometimes on-court and sometimes off-court have shown to influence their anxiety experiences at times. In addition, even though they have made off-court sacrifices, yet they all agreed that being competitive tennis athletes is worth these choices.

4.4.4. Self-Confidence

Self-confidence influences anxiety which in turns affect one's self-confidence. Feltz (1988) defined self-confidence as one's belief and trust in being able to perform an action. However, all participants described it quite differently, but proved it influenced their anxiety before and during matches. Five participants related self-confidence to how well they performed and reached their expectations, two related it to playing competitively, while one did not mention it at all.

Mary related her anxiety and performance in tennis to her self-confidence and self-confidence to overthinking. She said, *"If I played like a few good matches and I feel good about myself I'm gonna feel, maybe I'm not gonna even feel, I'm gonna feel a little bit of anxiety but not as much, if I've been losing for a few matches and I'm just not confident in my backhand say for example or I feel like I'm not confident then I start overthinking and I stress out."* According to her, self-confidence was built when she played some good matches and when she could see herself playing the way she expected. She said, *"You always see yourself, you always have like a benchmark for yourself, if you play mmm in that level then you feel confident."*

She revealed that winning happened when she felt confident in many instances. The more she was confident, the more she gave her all from the beginning of the match and, thus, the more she was able to close the set. When she first assesses her opponent, and feels confident about her level, her anxiety decreases. Self-confidence, moreover, increased when she was placed in a higher team match position. However, she sometimes felt less confident when her coach asked her to work on something and applied it in the match. Mary's self-confidence then was associated with several things such as her level of performance, over-thinking, the expectations she placed on herself, and which position her coach placed her in. This affected both her performance and anxiety.

For Jayne, anxiety was highly influenced by confidence; the more confident she felt, the more prepared and less anxious she was. Jayne stated that she generally had a certain level of confidence but it fluctuated daily. She said, *“I believe that I have a certain level of confidence, but it can vary every day, like it fluctuates, so if this specific day my confidence is kind of low I’d be more anxious, if my confidence is higher than usual I’d be more prepared, not as anxious, but there’s always a feeling of anxiety or nervousness before.”*

Jayne defined confidence as the belief that she would perform skills as expected. She added that confidence was something that built up as training before a match influenced her thoughts during the game. She explained, *“Some days, I would have a bad practice the day before so I feel that I will not do as well, like as well as I would like to, some days I’d have a great practice the day before so I’d be ok, then we’re going into the match thinking about what happened yesterday or how I practiced yesterday, so I’d probably play better.”*

Similarly, during the match Jayne felt confident if she was performing well and winning. She did not feel as anxious as when she was playing badly. *“During the match, if I am playing very well and I am winning everything during the match then I would not be as nervous. Because I build up confidence, but if I am down then my confidence would go down, then my nervousness or anxiousness, my anxiety would increase,”* she related. Thus, self-confidence affects anxiety both before and during a match and influences players’ performance.

Sophie discussed how she felt satisfied by competing and how that raised her self-confidence. She defined self-confidence as believing in her game and performance saying *“Self-confidence means my confidence in playing like, mmm, in my performance, like the way I play, the way I (for example) mmm the way I play, the way I think, the way I’m, I’m convinced that I can I can win against the girl.”* However, Sophie’s self-confidence was based on what

others think of her, especially her mother and her coach. She pointed out, *"It gives me confidence, I always want for example my mother to feel proud and happy of me winning."*

She added that the more confident she was the less anxious she got and the less she thought of how others think of her. Sophie declared that playing in the wind gave her confidence though it could be challenging. Sophie's confidence then is based on her performance and how others view it.

Melissa, on the other hand, did not speak much about confidence. She said she felt more confident when she competed, similar to Sophie. *"Believing in myself, believing that I can do something hard or difficult,"* she stated. It seemed like she based her self-confidence on how well she competed and how well she reached her goals and faced challenges, which could be similar to Jayne and Mary. She also believes that being in shape gives her confidence as well as visualizing herself playing better matches before a game, which may also influence her experience of anxiety.

Peter discussed how when he was strong mentally, he was motivated and felt better even if he was not performing well, which seemed to be another way of describing self-confidence. He said, *"I was mentally so strong, that no matter what, how bad I am playing, knowing that I will win this match. I will win completely, no matter how bad, no matter how tired, feeling that I am motivated to even go to practice, to, to play, to play more tournaments, to keep, to play big tournaments."* Not performing well, however, still affected his confidence greatly as he described, *"Affecting me negatively by saying yeah, ok, but why I am losing this match, why I am losing opportunities, and then I would thinking of playing smaller tournaments, to gain this again, this confidence."*

John stated that his confidence was related to winning several matches. He reflected, *"So when you're winning a lot, you just feel like you're playing, you're you're obviously playing good, so when you feel like you're playing good and you're playing solid these days because*

you were winning in the past days, so you just feel like you're kinda of on a streak.” This description indicates how self-confidence is associated with being on a winning streak. He also linked his self-confidence to being organized and prepared, similar to Jayne. It sounds from the way he describes self-confidence in the third person that it could be strengthened whenever anyone prepares themselves ahead of time, as discussed earlier.

John also associated self-confidence to being motivated. He said that when he was not confident he felt *“rusty like thank God like, like haven't been doing it for long so, you don't feel like you're solid, you don't feel like, you're not, you're not like, you're not confident, you're not confident in your strokes, you're not confident in your serve.”* He added that confidence improved his performance, made him think less and diminished his anxiety. He said, *“It's just helpful like when you're confident you don't have to really like think bad or think about losing a lot because you know you can win this.”*

Emily and Sarah did not mention self-confidence and how it might influence their anxiety. However, Emily expressed that she questioned her abilities at an earlier time when she was asked to leave the team even though she won most of the players there. Nevertheless, Emily stated that nowadays if this happened again it would be a motivation for her to prove them wrong.

4.5. The Inter-Relational World

This section describes the way tennis participants interrelate with others and how this influences their anxiety. There are different people who interact with competitive athletes, including coaches, parents, opponents and teammates. This section discusses different relationships, such as how participants inter-relate with their coaches, their parents, their

opponents, their teammates, spectators and themselves during competition, and how this influences their anxiety experience.

4.5.1. Inter-Relating with Coaches

Coaches could have a strong influence on participants' anxiety. All eight participants expressed how their coaches influenced their anxiety before, during and in many cases after matches. Five out of eight participants explained how their coaches' support during their performance played an important role in managing their anxiety during the match. One of the five reported feeling a great deal of anxiety during the match if her coach commented negatively on her game while she played. Two participants reported needing their coaches' support particularly after the match to help motivate them to play and train; one of which needed her coach during the match as well, whereas the other only needed his coach after a loss. In addition, the three remaining participants worried a great deal about disappointing their coaches or not meeting their expectations and that this particular dimension in the relationship had a strong effect on their anxiety before and during the match.

Sarah discussed her need for support from key individuals during her matches, *"I prefer to play with my coaches by my side mmm, I mean not necessarily I mean and they cheer me on but eye contact maybe, I mean is enough for me."* She mentioned that having her coach with her contributed to her level of focus during the match. Mere eye contact with her coach gave her an incentive to play better or to win. She expressed, *"If I'm winning it will make me give more, if I'm losing maybe it stops me, if I'm losing it will shake me awake, it will make me start focusing again."*

Peter also spoke of how integral the role of the coach was for him. Peter liked to make eye contact with the coach, as he felt he was more supported this way, similar to Sarah. He said, *"Coaches affect me a lot because I always, when I play with my coach, I always look at him, I, after every board, if I win it, if I lose it, if, even if I change over, I sit and I look at him."*

He felt safer when the coach was present with him in a match, *“I feel that, not happy, but I feel safe. Safe that, yeah ok he is, I have someone helping me, I have someone supporting me, there for me, cheering me even.”*

He believed that the coach helped him gain awareness of certain patterns of thinking before the match, affecting his anxiety and fear. He spoke of how his coach guides him to embrace or avoid specific thoughts saying, *“he told me that try every time you think of this, you start losing.”* Having the coach next to him in matches helped Peter with his experience of anxiety before and during the match, as the coach acted as his safety anchor.

As mentioned earlier, John could not tolerate losing and that was why he needed his coaches to help him get through such a tough time and motivate him to do better. *“No one really talks to me about it, like not even my coaches, even, they don't really talk to me about losing because they're more professional, they know if they get on you when you lose or when you mess you, things are gonna be worse but if they try to help you, try to talk you through, do things that will make you less worried then you start to be motivated again,”* he asserted.

His coach understood and respected John's personal space and therefore did not discuss the process of the match with him right after he finished, as he needed time to process and calm down. He admitted that if a coach discussed his performance with him after a match, his anxiety levels spiked. In addition, he could only listen to his coaches and past players if he needed any advice in tennis, as he felt they were the most experienced and were in the best position to offer him guidance and helped him steer clear from making the wrong decisions. He said, *“Like me and the coaches usually take a lot of decisions together, don't really like to take them by myself that much because, it's, what if I do the wrong thing then I'm the one responsible always, it's not good so hahahah so I try to I try to like ask people like for advice, I try to like see like past experiences, talk to people with like past experiences things that I have to think about.”* John's

coaches then influenced his anxiety after competing, as they helped him process his loss and found the motivation to get back to training.

Emily, similar to Peter and Sarah, discussed how her coach helped motivate her during the match if she was down. The coach's presence may also help her manage her overthinking, as discussed in Section 4.4.2. Emily's coach takes the time to talk to her and work on her mentally to perform under pressure. She said she gets scared of disappointing him. Emily stated that when she performed poorly, she sometimes wanted to evade the coach. She spoke a lot about fear of disappointing others and herself throughout her interview. Emily's experience of the coach was similar to the rest in how her coach helped motivate her, thus decreased her anxiety at times when she was feeling tense but also was different that she worried about disappointing him, which had reverse effects on her anxiety.

Melissa experienced anxiety before and during the matches when her coach expected her to apply what they had trained on and win. She said, *"The coaches I, I, work with them and I train [...] they expect me to apply what we did in practice through the matches [...] I think about that during the match so during the match, I think about ok, so he expects me to follow this plan, he expects me to do this, we talked about it before the match so I should do that."* Melissa experiences anxiety from any expectations her coach has. If she felt she has failed him this raises her anxiety. She described what she meant by 'failing him' saying, *"Maybe fear of, fear of disappointing him or fear of failing him, especially if mmm if I've been kind of, (I mean) if I've been losing a lot of matches in a row so that's fear of failing him again."* The way Melissa discussed expectations in general throughout the whole interview seemed as though many of the expectations were placed by her and not by others, as discussed in Section 4.4.1.

Mary, similarly, felt more anxious when given a new task by the coach, as she sometimes doubts, she could fulfil his expectations and win using this new skill. She said, *"Asking you to do something specific in your match, because you worked on it then it means*

that maybe you are not that confident in it, or maybe that you are not that good doing it (so), and he is asking you to do it in the match, fa may create some anxiety.”

Mary’s coach influenced her anxiety too if he changed her playing position in the team. She got anxious and disappointed when the coach lowered her playing position in the college matches, as she started to question her abilities. Conversely, Mary got encouraged when the coach raised her playing position. She spoke in the second person a lot throughout the interview. It seemed that her way of replying was taking a stance from the situation and looking at things from the outside, without being emotionally involved in it.

However, the anxiety was different for Melissa due to being expected to win rather than just applying a new skill. She felt that she needed to work hard for the coach and knew that the coach put effort to make things work between her and the teammates. She said, *“He brought you in to perform, so you always wanna be at your best, wanna do your best to prove that you deserve to be here, mmm, so that can create anxiety.”*

Sophie’s coach, meanwhile, influenced her as she felt he understood her well. However, he influenced her anxiety if he commented on her performance during practice negatively. I tried to understand what negatively means and she said *“In the training, he doesn't usually watches, watch, sorry, the matches, during the practice, for example you are not exerting enough effort, you are not, this kind of talk doesn't give me much confidence and motivation.”* On the other hand, if the coach said that she was in good shape, she would feel more confident in her matches and would perform well. His comments could also influence how motivated she gets, similar to John, which will be discussed in a later theme.

When she was younger the coach’s decisions on how to place team members played a role in Sophie’s anxiety. She felt that the coach was unfair in many instances, which raised her anxiety before and during matches and even outside of the tennis court, when she played against specific teammates whom she felt the coach favoured over her. She recalled, *“I mean*

the head coach didn't used to be fair, he wasn't fair at all, he was (I mean), I don't know whether to say this or not, it's very unethical, (I mean) he was prioritizing other players, (I mean) not based on their level, based on personal connections and parents watching."

Jayne's coach influenced her on the court too, similar to Sophie. When the coach gave negative feedback in the break it affected her anxiety during the match or even for the next match. When the coach questioned her ability and performance on the court, she felt more anxious, however when the coach gave her tasks to do rather than blame her, this decreased her anxiety and helped motivate her more. This seems to be different to Mary and Melissa's experience when they were given tasks. She said, *"My coach sometimes, because we play doubles, and then because like a five-minute break and then play singles right away. So in these five minutes, it depends on what he's going to say to you, sometimes it can be terrible, and sometimes it's just going to motivate me, so sometimes if he goes, I don't know, like if he gives us a bad speech I guess, I would start thinking about it, I would start analyse it."*

On the other hand, when the coach talked to her outside of the competition, she felt calmer because she was in a better state of mind to receive what he tells her. As she said, *"I think it comes through easier because I'm just in a clearer state of mind, so I just have time to think about it, process the information, like envision myself doing it."* This is similar to what John said about how he felt more relaxed when his coach talks to him after the matches and gives him some space. Jayne admitted her coach had motivated her at a time when she hated tennis, saying *"Maybe it's my coach at the time, or maybe it's just that I felt like why sacrifice everything that you've worked so hard for."*

Coaches then influenced these participants' anxiety, as it might decrease some of these participants' anxiety experience at times during their match play or sometimes increase their anxiety before and during their match. Some players even experienced anxiety after their matches or training due to their coaches.

4.5.2. Inter-Relating with Parents

Interrelating with parents is a theme that reveals how parents play a considerable role to these participants' anxiety. Five participants explained how their parents influence their anxiety before and during competition, four of who specifically mentioned their mothers as the main influencers. Two of them stated how their mothers could raise their anxiety or could help motivate them according to how their mothers reacted. One participant could not have his mother watch him during his matches, as he was sensitive to any reaction the mother gives. Two participants mentioned how their parents used to influence them tremendously growing up and how they liked their mothers/parents to be watching during the matches as it gave them support. However, they said that parents' involvement sometimes became too stressful that it caused them anxiety even before their matches. In addition, one participant explained how he thought parents affect their children's anxiety in general even though his parents did not influence him at all.

Sophie, for example, expressed how much she cared about her mother's opinion and how her mother influenced her performance. She said, *"If she is happy or like, if she's happy and supporting and like this, I feel I feel very confident, more confident I mean but when she when she keeps having the like, this poker face or the straight face, she doesn't tell me any negative things but like she, she, keeps on having this negative face or the poker face I mean I get more anxious, yes this affects me."* She worries about not playing as expected from her mother, which affects her anxiety, as discussed in Section 4.4.1. She said, *"Because my mother exerts so much effort with me, she comes with me to practice, she does everything, she spends a lot of money, hahahaha, you know tennis so, I mean I want her to, to, to, see the results of all of this."*

Sophie talked about 'negative' and 'positive' a lot, as if matters were in black or white, which seems to hint to an 'all or nothing' mind-set. It seemed difficult for her to elaborate or

dig deeper into how things are apart from the basic negative and positive form and I wondered whether this had to do with language, as English is not her first language, although she spoke it relatively well. Sophie's mother influenced her anxiety during playing in general, sometimes in a way that raised her confidence and sometimes in a way that was not helpful.

Emily, similar to Sophie, worried about disappointing her mother. She confided, *"I play in the match and she doesn't see anything of what I tell her that I do in training, so I feel that I, that I disappoint her, that she came to the match with the expectations that I will play well because I always tell that in training I play very well."* Emily added that at many instances during her matches she wanted to win so her mother did not become upset.

She stated that her mother was the one who had always supported her even when others did not believe in her. She said, *"I feel that she gives me more motive to play, I mean to play better even if I'm losing for example, and everything is against me [...] sometimes she helps me not to think, she doesn't make me think a lot, she tells me things to do, for example go run a bit, mmm, listen to music, mmm, don't just sit there, don't think a lot, but in the match, she is the reason that I decrease my anxiety."*

Peter stated that his parents were generally supportive. However, he did not like his mother to attend his matches. His father, on the other hand, can attend his matches, without influencing his anxiety, as he watches without reacting, unlike his mother. He said, *"My dad used to come watch, but my mother, since I was young, I didn't like her to come watch me but, I always loved her support."* For Peter, his mother's presence influences his anxiety during the match, which is similar to Sophie's experience.

Mary's parents also used to make her anxious when she was younger, constantly reminding her of the draw and bringing up the tournaments. She expressed *"Even though they never said they wanted anything from me on the contrary they kept saying we want you to be happy, have fun, play this game because you like it not because of anything but subconsciously*

they did put, they did make me anxious sometimes.” She wished they had given her more space by not attending all her trainings or matches, yet their presence and support decreased her anxiety, “I am very grateful, mmmm, I think a lot of people needed this support and never got it, and I feel like I’m lucky to have this support at the same time they could have backed off in a few, like at sometimes, they shouldn’t have always been.”

Mary explained that her parents’ influence on her anxiety was not pervasive now as she mainly played abroad and they barely watched her live. She also felt growing up has made her less anxious. She said, *“When I was younger, maybe I would stress out more that I have to win, I have to win, my parents are watching, mmm, like there is more pressure, when you grow up, you are more mature.”*

Jayne, similar to Mary, mentioned how her mother’s presence when she was younger influenced her anxiety during the match. Jayne stated that she used to be dependent on her mother, because she felt comfortable to have her support. However, she also felt pressure with her mother’s presence because she felt her mother had high expectations of her. She talked about her mother’s presence saying, *“I think it would decrease my anxiety, my anxiety like, because she was very reassuring no matter who I was playing, she was just very reassuring. And I think a part of why I felt so much pressure is because she had very high expectations of me. So, because, I don’t know, I guess every mom and their children, just she has, every mom has high expectations for their children.”*

Jayne added that her mother’s words sometimes added pressure even if she did not mean it. Growing up, it became stressful to have her mother around in matches as they end up talking solely about tennis, which adds to her experience of anxiety greatly. She maintained, *“I felt it because we would constantly, all of our conversations would be about my previous match or my current match, so it would, it just became, we are only talking about tennis. So,*

for me it was just like ok I can't take this anymore." Jayne, similar to Mary, is not affected by her mother's presence anymore as she plays mostly abroad.

John, on the contrary, expressed that his parents were not involved in his tennis life. He felt his parents did not care about tennis but were supportive of his choices in general. However, he believed that parents could influence athletes' anxiety to the extent that he thought parents could be the reason for some athletes' failure. He said, *"I have friends that like, their parents just broke them down, were the main reason for them to like, like fail in tennis parents."* He insisted several times that his parents did not care if he won or lost, yet he spoke of how bad parents' involvement could influence their athlete children. I experienced his words as if he did encounter many tennis athletes, who stopped tennis or who struggled in tennis due to their parents.

Thus, whether intentional or not, parents' involvement and expectations have played a role in anxiety experiences of most of the participants through their journey in tennis.

4.5.3. Inter-Relating with Opponents

All participants explained how different opponents impact their anxiety. Three out of eight participants explained they would be more anxious when they were playing tougher opponents but two of these three said it would actually motivate them to win. The third found it more anxiety provoking to have a tough opponent but even worse to lose against a teammate she always beat. One of the eight participants found herself most anxious when she played against younger participants, as she feared she might lose. She also felt anxious when she did not know her opponent. Another was more anxious when she played against someone she defeated before. One of the eight participants preferred not to know her opponents and felt less anxious since she started playing abroad. Two out of the eight participants felt very anxious playing against their rivals, one of which found it very uncomfortable to play against her best friend.

Peter stated that playing against tough opponents made him nervous, but also hopeful that he would win. He said, *“Before the match, it, it makes me feel that, yeah I have, I have a tough day, even before the day, before the match, I feel that I have a tough day, and then this makes me warm up 15-20 minutes even more.”*

Just like Peter, Emily felt more anxiety when she was playing with a difficult opponent. She explained, *“It’s possible that if I know that her level is much higher than me so I get scared that I go on court, mmm, and I don’t play well at all, mmm, that I won’t be good so this makes me more anxious.”* However, she also felt that it was not impossible to beat a difficult opponent. Her anxiety with difficult opponents was due to her fear of not playing well, not doing her best, or not playing as expected, as discussed in 4.4.1. She revealed, *“When I feel that someone is better than me then I know I have to work more to reach that point and be able to get through the first round, second round, quarterfinal.”* She attributed her poor performance against tough opponents to her anxiety most of the time. As she stated earlier, the mental component was one of the fundamental aspects of playing well. It seemed that she had a growth mind-set when it came to performing as a professional athlete, the way she phrased her words had a more aspirational connotation.

Sophie’s opponents were also key contributors to her anxiety, depending on the opponent’s level, which was similar to Peter and Emily. Sophie felt most anxious if she lost to one of her teammates whom she regularly beat. She expressed, *“Yes the opponent of course, (I mean), I told you as it varies according to the match but the teammates maybe when we play against each other in practice and if I win, (I mean) if I’m used to win to mmm against certain players and if I lose one time (so) this gets me very anxious.”* This is interesting to look at because anxiety does not simply stem from feeling intimidated on the court by a “tough” player, but against a familiar player who she is used to beating. Anxiety here is not about being in a new threatening situation, but rather about the pattern that she had with players that she used

to beat. Parents of the opponents also influenced her anxiety levels. The way they talked about her made her more anxious but motivates her to want to win more.

Melissa had a similar experience to Sophie as she felt more anxious when she played against opponents she already defeated before. For her, defeating someone before comes with the expectation that she should be able to win, as discussed in Section 4.4.1. I found the use of the word 'defeat' interesting as a great deal of Melissa's anxiety seemed to be associated with winning and losing, which was almost 'war' like in a sense.

Sarah also stated that her anxiety and fear were heightened depending on whom she played against. However, this anxiety also differed according to what round Sarah was playing. *"Sometimes I will play x first round, it doesn't matter, the same x final it matters,"* Sarah said. Unlike Sophie and Melissa, she revealed she got more anxious if she did not know her opponent. She, however, would be sort of motivated if she had lost to that opponent before as she put it *"I don't like to lose from the same person twice."* Sarah also discussed how she felt more anxiety and pressure from younger opponents as she felt she did not have enough time to train as they did.

John got the most anxious before and during his match when he was playing against his main rival, as he felt the need to prove himself. When he lost, he felt uneasy and had to wait till the next time to hopefully beat them. He added that if he played against older opponents he did not feel as anxious as facing his rival. Again, there was this notion of benchmarking himself to others, which arose previously. He demonstrated, *"Because when you're playing someone that that you're have like a rivalry with if you lose it just felt bad and then and then you have to wait for him to play you again so that you can prove yourself, you really wanna prove yourself."*

In addition, he felt very anxious if he lost to opponents who were not older or Internationally good players. He said, *"It's more stressful and it's harder and, and, but then*

when you're playing with some like [old] that is like really good and you're just thinking about it, ok I just have to prove myself but if I, if I lose then there is not really much that's gonna happen, I won't really feel bad about it." John's way of talking about how he needed to win against his rival and people his age came across as the minimum he expects himself to do. Throughout the interview he mentioned that he needed to prove to himself that he was a worthy player.

Mary, on the other hand, talked about how playing abroad made her less anxious of her opponents, as she did not know many of them. This gave her nothing to think or worry about before the matches, unlike when she was playing in Egypt. This could be similar to Sarah, who felt less anxious when she did not know her opponent. *"I don't know the girl and it's not gonna make any difference if, like I don't know her so I can't think of the match before playing it, I have nothing to think about,"* she revealed. In Egypt, she experienced more anxiety before the matches since she knew most players and had more time to think by herself before her match. She described the tennis community in Egypt as one where, *"People are very, how do you say, they talk about each other a lot and they say, did you see she beat whoever x and y beat I don't know who, it's just very it puts some on you because people are expecting mmm expecting you win or expecting you to lose (so) you just have to, (of course) you don't have to think about all this but it still affects you in a way."*

Jayne also felt that playing against her best friend would influence her anxiety before, during and after the match. If her best friend was the only opponent that really spikes her anxiety. She recalled, *"It only happened once but if we are playing a match against each other, my level of anxiety would be like out of, would be abnormal."* This could be similar to how John experienced playing against his rival but in a different way.

Jayne also had a completely different opinion on how opponents influence her, as she was influenced by her opponent's attitude on the court. She felt more anxious, angry and

disappointed when the opponent had a rude attitude on the court, as it felt that the opponent did not respect her. She said, *“Their cheering, the way my opponent’s attitude is, sometimes, if it is a rude person, it would, I don’t know, it would piss me off more than make me anxious.”* She added that she got anxious when her opponents cursed during the match, *“Some of them start babbling, cursing off in the middle of the match and it’s like ok I took the time not to do that, even though I would really love to do that.”*

Even though all participants had different experiences of anxiety depending on whom they were playing against their level, their familiarity ... etc.; each participant had a unique experience with different opponents.

4.5.4. Playing for the Team

Playing for a team can be regarded as a *mixed feeling* as it may involve several complex dynamics between the player and his/her teammates and between the player and his/her coach. Five out of eight participants showed how playing for a team influenced their anxiety. Two out of eight participants felt a great deal of responsibility and often blamed themselves while playing for the team. One of those two felt very satisfied at the same time when he won. In addition, two out of eight participants did not share the same sense of responsibility as they felt the whole team shared the responsibility for the outcome, so their anxiety was lessened. One of these participants had more anxiety when any member of the team was losing and not necessarily her. On the other hand, another participant did not feel responsible at all for his team’s losses as he felt other team members did not always perform at high levels so if he lost it would not be his fault alone.

Peter talked about how playing for his team influenced his levels of fear. He said he felt scared when the load and responsibility was all on him, as it raised expectations. However, he also liked the accountability of it as he was expected to hold and support the team. Having the responsibility of others was something that had its advantages for Peter. He said, *“If I win,*

everyone would say yeah [Peter] saved us, or we are one good team and that you, I find a way to win, no matter how it is, and then I saved the ship because if, you know, we're a team and we're on a ship and if it sink, then we all die." It was interesting to hear how Peter described himself as the captain of a ship who was responsible for his crew by winning, as if he were the sole hope for the ship to survive.

Emily shared the same sense of burden and anxiety when playing for the team. She was most anxious when she was playing for the national team or for others in general. She worried and got scared of not being good enough to win. She also worried for being blamed for the loss, thus, got anxious before matches. Unlike Peter, she did not see the advantages of holding the responsibility for the whole team. She stated, *"If I'm playing for the National team I feel like I want to do my best, so I worry and I think about a lot of things and I'm scared that I won't be good enough to win, scared that I lose and they will feel, mmm, that I'm not good enough, I'm scared that I become the reason my club loses, mmm, it all revolves around that point."*

John, unlike Peter and Emily, did not experience much anxiety when playing for the team. He said he felt some anxiety when he had to carry all the weight of winning. However, if he lost, he did not necessarily feel the same level of anxiety because he lost for the team; he did not like losing in general. He felt sometimes that since most of the team players did not always perform well, thus if the team lost it would not be his responsibility.

Jayne found that playing for the team influenced her anxiety greatly. Jayne worried about other teammates' performances as well as her own. She did not have the same sense of fear from being solely responsible for losing, yet she felt that everyone's performance counts towards the total outcome of the team. She expressed, *"It is disappointment because I feel like, if I am winning and they are winning, we all share a special feeling of victory, like we are all sharing happiness."*

Jayne felt anxious, before and during her matches, when was she watching other teammates performing poorly. This even influenced her during her own match if she looks at the court next to her and found her teammate losing. She also felt very satisfied when they won as a team as they all shared the victory. *“We are all supportive of each other like even if we are all very anxious, we all take, like try to translate the anxiousness into support for one-another,”* she thought. Jayne also discussed how cheering for other teams could influence her anxiety experience especially when the cheering became too high; she said: *“Sometimes it is harder to play some teams than it is to play others because of the environment they create, so this can create a feeling of anxiety.”*

Mary, similar to Jayne, shared the same joy of sharing with others when she was playing for the team. Being part of a team for Mary, meant doing things together such as warming up and travelling together, that made her feel that the whole team was sharing the burden and responsibility whether they won or lost. She did not feel that her anxiety overwhelmed her as much as when she was playing for the team abroad unlike when she was playing for herself, as discussed in Section 4.4.2.

However, Mary got very anxious with some of her teammates’ attitudes. She said, *“At practice, at, before, during the matches, you always have to like to win so that they can’t say anything about you, so that they can’t, and not that they are perfect and that they win all the time, it’s kind of a competition that’s ok.”* Mary did not like people to hold something against her and had to tolerate her teammate’s negative attitudes, which made her anxious.

Being part of a team and teammates influenced most of these participants’ experiences of anxiety although each participant explained different kinds of experiences.

4.5.5. Inter-Relating with Others

There are other people who may be involved in the athletes’ lives whether on or off the court who may affect some of these participants’ anxiety. Four participants clearly mentioned

‘others’ and their effect on their anxiety levels. For example, Peter cared about how people viewed him in general, as he wanted people to look up to him and wanted to become an inspirational figure for Egyptians especially for younger children to help them realize that nothing is impossible. He said, *“Happy that I’m doing well every, every year, that making the people around me proud of my sacrifice [...] It makes me responsible, more responsible that I have to do everything well. That everything by the book, I cannot [...] for example I cannot smoke, no one [...] I cannot smoke, I cannot drink, I have to be professional. It helps me to keep my professional life going well.”* When he felt that people were looking up to him it reassured him that he was on the right track.

Sophie generally cared about people’s impressions and worried about how she was perceived by others, which affected her anxiety at many points. She said, *“I always want to mmm, I want others to think of me positively, she is playing well, she is doing well, not like she is deteriorating”*. Sophie also worried about the opinions of the parents of other players. She said, *“Like parents talking, parents of other players (I mean) were talking continuously very negatively like, for example, mmm, like why would she train with the same guy, with the same trainer or for example, or, (I mean), I don’t know, I mean they were talking so much negatively about me for example playing with (I mean), with other players or why would she train more hours than our daughters.”* However, these parents’ talking also made her more motivated to do better.

People’s reactions also heavily influenced Melissa. She felt so anxious as if she were being watched. She did not like to be in the spotlight and ultimately hated to be placed on the centre court. She said, *“I find myself more anxious when I’m playing in a court that is maybe in the centre court where a lot of people are watching and there is a big crowd, mmm, ya I get more anxious than when I’m playing in a court that is a bit far from the people [...] I’m more aware of people that are around than I mean, it makes me lose my concentration also, that I’m*

more aware that people are watching so I have to play well so this puts pressure on me to play well so I start to tense up.” She believed that when people were watching her, it raised the perceived expectations on her, which raised her anxiety, as discussed in Section 4.4.1. The pressure also sometimes compromised her concentration and got her thinking of other things during the match rather than the game.

Emily too cared about people in a way that made her anxious to play badly in front of others. She said, *”I’m scared that I don’t play well because I don’t want them to say that I’m not good.”* Emily added that the chair umpire influences her anxiety a lot. She worried about wrong ball calls, making her anxious during the game and sometimes led her to have a snappy conversation with the referee. She admitted, *“Sometimes, for example, incidents happen between me and the umpires so I get scared that this might have an effect on the umpire’s calls in my match so sometimes this makes me anxious but not a lot”*.

There was a sense that there were significant ‘others’ to some of these participants who contributed to their anxiety in various different ways; whether they were spectators of the match, umpires or merely people who talked about them.

4.5.6. Being Alone on the Court

Four participants stated that during a match, the tennis player is completely on their own and this influenced their anxiety. Emily said that even though she needed her mother or coach to motivate her, sometimes no one was able to help her but her, which was challenging. She explained, *“Sometimes no one is able to make me focus”*. John also felt that he was the only agent in his actions as he said, *“No one makes me worried really, cause no one is been harm me in any way if I lose, if I mess up, I just make my own decisions, if I win then that’s for me, if I lose I just own up to it, no one really harms.”* He seemed to derive most of his energy

as a player from being on his own. Sophie too did not like to show feelings of anxiety or stress outwardly to anyone. As a result, she preferred to be on her own before the matches.

Sarah, meanwhile, believed that tennis is predominantly lonely and she got scared that it might affect her social life with her friends or might make her neglect others at times. This was one of the challenges that she felt with pursuing tennis in the future. Similarly, Peter mentioned that anything he does is by himself. He said, *“I always believed that if I wanted to do something, then I would do it, alone.”*

Although all participants explained how others influence their anxiety before, during and sometimes after competing, four of them noted how sometimes no one has the ultimate power to influence their anxiety or what they bring to the performance while competing.

To summarize, this chapter demonstrated how the experiences of anxiety for the participants have shown to be complex and influenced by many, interrelated themes. The main four categories discussed were: the emotional and physical manifestation of anxiety, the meaning of competition for these participants, the participants’ internal world and cognitions, and their inter-relational world with others and themselves. The first category reflected the anxiety experience as pressure, worry, fear, and a mixture of other emotions, together with its physical sensations and manifestations in different areas in these participants’ bodies. The second category illustrated what competition meant to these participants, including meanings of winning and losing, identity, and developed routines. The third category involved the different internal over-thinking, expectations, self-confidence and choices that participants think about and process. The last category included how participants related with their coaches, parents, opponents, teammates, spectators and others who might influence their anxiety experience, as well as how they relate with themselves alone in their sporting journey.

Many participants shared some of their experiences with others and agreed on the same themes, however each participant had their own unique experience of anxiety that showed how anxiety is a rich phenomenon for these participants.

To answer the research question and explore the lived experiences of anxiety for these participants, the next chapter discusses the findings of this chapter in relationship to the literature review.

Chapter Five Discussion

5.1. Introduction to the Chapter

The chapter provides in depth discussion on the results in relation to the research questions and the reviewed literature, placing them in the context of understanding the lived experiences of anxiety for athletes. The aim of the study, as mentioned in Chapter 1, was to explore the anxiety experiences for Egyptian elite tennis athletes before and during a competition to gain a rich understanding of these experiences.

Both the literature and the results demonstrated how anxiety is experienced multi-dimensionally, where several dimensions interrelate to influence the overall experience. Anxiety, as was shown, has *physical sensations and manifestations*, experienced as *fear*, *pressure* and *worry*, among *several other emotions*. It is also *embodied* physically, influencing the athletes' bodily sensations.

As for the influences on anxiety, *the competition world* and the different meanings the athletes assign for *competition*, *loss*, *identity*, and *routines* are often cited. *The internal world of athletes* also influences their anxiety experience. Athletes' *expectations*, *over-thinking*, *choices*, and *self-confidence* all affect their anxiety. *The inter-relational world* has also been shown to impact anxiety, as the way athletes *relate with parents*, *coaches*, *teammates*, *opponents* and *others* as well as their feelings of *loneliness* on court affect their anxiety experience.

The findings showed that instead of conceptualizing anxiety as a negative influence on the player, the research explored and explained its meaning for these athletes and how it contributed to their beings as professional players and human beings. The following section is a detailed discussion of the main themes in light of the research questions and literature.

5.2. Anxiety's Emotional and Physical Sensations and Manifestations

Anxiety was shown in this study to be more complex than what had been suggested in the literature (Martens et al., 1990; Hanton et al., 2004; Robazza et al., 2004; Neil, Mellalieu & Hanton, 2006; Filaire et al., 2009; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Khan et al., 2011; Azimirad & Jalilvand, 2012, Bijleveld & Veling, 2014). The anxiety experiences, according to this research, had considerably varied from those suggested by most of the previous research. This section discusses the various emotional and physical sensations and manifestations the athletes' experienced as shown in figure 5.1. This figure illustrates how anxiety manifests itself as different emotional experiences that can be integrated together and how athletes embody their experiences of anxiety physically, manifested in bodily experiences.

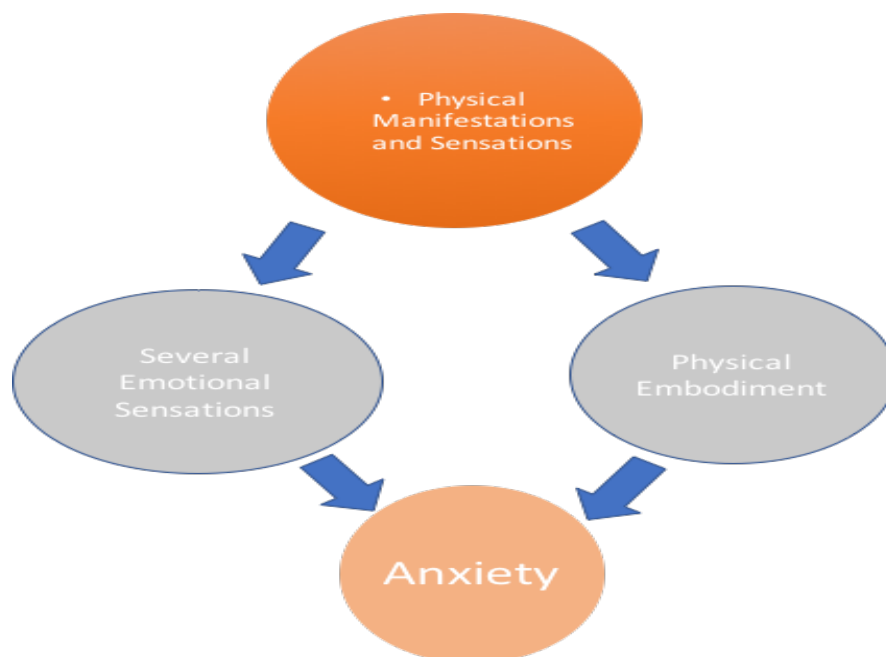


Figure 5.1 Emotional and Physical Sensations and Manifestations

5.2.1. Emotional Sensation and Experience of Anxiety

All participants described their anxiety experience using various emotions such as pressure, fear, nervousness, stress, excitement and/or worry. Some participants experienced more than one of the above emotions at the same time. This is consistent with Holt et al. (2014) who stated that athletes experienced a mixture of emotions pre-race that were confusing and contradictory. These emotions were different from one athlete to the other. This also coincides with the IZOF model that calls for looking at a different range of emotions when looking at anxiety and its influence on performance, trying to reach the optimized individual state that would optimize performance (Hanin, 2010,; Robazza & Bortoli, 2007).

The findings illustrated that many athletes found some of these emotions uncomfortable and unhelpful for them, sometimes hindering their performance. However, many found anxiety helpful both before and during their matches. Many players experienced anxiety as a motivation that helped push them to focus and perform well. The findings opposed the perception of anxiety as binary, categorising it as facilitative or debilitating, disregarding how some athletes view anxiety as one entity (Perry & William, 1998).

Furthermore, the findings showed that participants used other emotions besides fear and worry to describe their anxiety, which contradicted the definition of anxiety found in the literature - anxiety as fear, tension, or worry- conceptualizing it as competitive or performance anxiety that relates negatively to performance (Martens et al., 1990; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Khan et al., 2011; Azimirad & Jalilvand, 2012). For example, Jayne experiences anxiety as a mix of several emotions one of them is excitement.

“It’s a mix of sometimes, it’s excitement, mixed with I don’t know, I don’t want to say that I’d be a bit scared, but it’s excitement and nervousness all at once.”- Jayne

This may also challenge the debate of the difference between the use of physical arousal or somatic anxiety in the cup catastrophe model, when looking at their influence on performance. Somatic anxiety was suggested to consider more the athlete's perception of their physical symptoms, which is geared towards negative uncomfortable sensations, rather than only looking at physical arousal regardless of whether it is stress or excitement or any other sensation. This proposes that even sensations that are considered as excitement may be part of the anxiety experience.

Nevertheless, these results are in line with Humara (1999) and Cheng et al. (2009), who suggested that anxiety was difficult to define and construct and that different emotional terms had been used and equated to anxiety such as stress, arousal and activation. The findings also agreed with Patel et al. (2010), who suggested it was difficult to identify the symptoms that emerged with anxiety. Looking at the different theories that have tried to explain the anxiety and arousal relationship with performance, have shown that it is not easy to really understand what anxiety means and incorporates. This challenges and depicts the limitations of many of the theories and models, as they are mainly aimed at explaining the anxiety-performance relationship rather than exploring the depth and variation of these anxiety experiences. Sometimes anxiety is equated with physical arousal and cognitive anxiety, or with somatic and cognitive anxiety, and other times it is equated with different motivational states or drives that influence their performance. This thus confirms my findings that it is quite difficult to define or construct what the experience of anxiety is. The findings were also coherent with Hanin (2010) and Harmison (2011), who proposed that each individual had an optimal intensity of anxiety that did not affect their performance and that working with athletes should aim to look at the individual experience of anxiety.

It was evident that even when participants experienced a similar emotion while describing their anxiety experience, each participant had their own unique way of experiencing anxiety. For example, when participants described anxiety as fear, the experience of fear and the reasons for fear were different, depending on participants, showing the complexity and uniqueness of this experience. Participants assigned different meanings to fear in relation to their anxiety like fear of losing or winning, losing hope, losing identity, changed contexts, anticipation of performing badly, and unpredictability. The difference between how Sarah and Melissa described their anxiety experience as fear highlighted this point.

“Maybe losing interest in things I love, maybe losing interest, maybe losing people that I love, maybe mmm, maybe fear before exams how I can manage my time to handle all the things that I can’t make it because I was playing tournaments so I think it is fear.” - Sarah

“Maybe fear of losing the match, fear of mmm, how can I describe this, (I mean) for example people expect me to win this particular match so, it's fear of not fulfilling this expectation, fear of failing to mmm to, to, do my, what I'm supposed to do.” - Melissa

The above also reflects the differences between the experiences of anxiety and fear, which is in line with Tillich (1952), who proposes that a person who is anxious tries to find objects to be fearful of, as anxiety tries to turn into fear. Both May (1950) and Tillich (1952) stated that the difference between anxiety and fear was that fear had to do with something specific that could be removed, while anxiety was related to something vague. In addition, May (1950, p.192) proposed that the vagueness of anxiety was related to how much it “attacks the

foundation (core) of the personality, the individual cannot ‘stand outside’ the threat, cannot objectify it”.

This notion is reflected in this study as some participants’ anxiety, such as Sarah’s, is related to losing their identity or wasting the time they have spent sacrificing for the sport, which threatens the core of their being. Moreover, this also agrees with Tillich (1952), who adds that anxiety is, at a deep level, concerned with the fear of the unknown, which explains why athletes get anxious to the consequences of their frequent losses as it may result in the loss of their identity as competitive tennis players. This may be a symbolic kind of death for these athletes, or as suggested by Tillich (1952) ‘the threat of non-existence’, which is related to loss with death or meaninglessness that brings up anxiety.

This study also revealed how May (1950) and Tillich’s (1952) differentiation between anxiety and fear could be applied to other emotions mentioned by the participants such as pressure or worry. Many participants objectified their anxiety to things that were very specific such as the pressure of juggling several things, not being chosen for the team or being judged by others.

“I get maybe a little stressed if I don’t have enough time, I have a lot of tests to do and I’m just short on time, I have practice, I have meetings, I have a lot of things and I just don’t have time to finish that stuff so maybe I stress a little bit, I get anxious.” – Mary

However, as shown later in this chapter, even for these athletes’ anxiety meant much more than that. In fact, anxiety was more complex than fear or any of the emotions stated before, as it existed at a deeper and a vague sense. Furthermore, some participants regarded anxiety as an inevitable experience for any competing athlete. This is similar to Van Deurzen

& Adams' (2011) suggestion that anxiety was part of the human condition, something that would always be experienced, which was captured by Mary.

"I don't think you can escape anxiety; you just have to go through it." - Mary

The way then that anxiety was studied and measured in past research did not grasp the experience of anxiety for these athletes. In addition, part of the issue while working with athletes was how the field of sports psychology considered anxiety as a symptom that needed to be removed or maintained at a certain optimal level (Martens et al., 1990; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Hanin, 2010; Harmison, 2011; Khan et al., 2011; Azimirad & Jalilvand, 2012). This study, however, showed that it was difficult to identify certain symptoms or descriptions of anxiety and generalize or group them into a single description.

5.2.2. Physical Manifestation of Anxiety

It was evident that all participants experienced anxiety in various areas of their bodies both before and during competition. This is in line with the earlier integration of somatic anxiety as part of competitive anxiety (Martens et al., 1990). It is also coherent with the usage of physical arousal in the cusp catastrophe theory, and how the state of physical arousal, which influences athletes is helpful or not for these athletes. Furthermore, it is consistent with Hanin (2010), who suggested anxiety was an emotional experience that involved a psycho biosocial state, involving the body. However, anxiety was manifested differently for these athletes. Thus, even if we consider somatic anxiety or physiological arousal as components that help understand anxiety and performance, each participant in this thesis gave a detailed subjective account of their physical sensations, while experiencing anxiety. This shows the lack of a holistic and phenomenological explanation of the experiences of anxiety for athletes. In addition, even though the time to event paradigm have focused on the different direction and

intensity of somatic anxiety before competition at different time intervals, this thesis shows that the somatic embodied experience of athletes is influenced during competition as well, influencing the anxiety experience for different athletes.

Even though several participants experienced anxiety in the same body part, each had different feelings. This illustrates the limitations of the past research that used quantitative constructs such as CSAI-2 to measure somatic anxiety and relate it to performance (Hanton et al., 2004; Robazza et al., 2004; Neil et al., 2006; Filaire et al., 2009; Bijleveld & Veling, 2014). This was captured when looking at how Melissa and Jayne experienced anxiety in their legs differently.

“My legs become really tensed so sometimes they start shaking and I wouldn't really move properly.” - Melissa

“If I'm very anxious during a match my leg would be very sore.” -Jayne

Exploring the athletes' bodily experiences is an essential part of playing sports as it is after all a physical experience. Athletes usually become skilled using specific movement forms that they require and “develop a spectrum of sensory intelligence and use that intelligence to execute skilful, practical sporting action” (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007, p.126). Hockey & Allen-Collinson (2007) also suggested that athletes have a bodily understanding and perception of sports in addition to their cognitive one. This fits into the physical dimension of the existential model (Van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). Athletes relate to the world through their bodies and this embodiment affects the quality of the life they experience, as illustrated by Merleau Ponty's (1945, p. 239),

“We are in the world through our body, and in so far we perceive the world with our body”,

And in this research:

“All my muscles get tighten up and I get so stiff and then I feel pushing the ball and my ball is completely short then how it used to be”- Sarah

Merleau Ponty (1945) explored the embodied living suggesting that humans always exist in the world through their bodies, relating and connecting to the world through it. He described how our experience of the world is mediated through our bodily senses and perceptions giving us meaning to our lives, thus, our bodies influence our experiences. In sports this is very relevant, as the sporting experience is as suggested a bodily experience as well as a cognitive well.

In Sarah’s example as mentioned above just the fact that she experiences her muscles tight and stiff, it automatically shifts her game from attacking to pushing or shortening the ball, which influences her anxiety experiences influencing her performance. The way an athlete may experience their body in a given day (tensed, weak, strong, and/or injured) may influence how they relate with their world, influencing their internal experiences, possibly experiencing anxiety. In addition, the way an athlete may cognitively perceive their performance in a given day may influence their bodily senses and perceptions, again influencing their anxiety experience.

Merleau Ponty’s (1945) embodied living is illustrated in this thesis, as all the participants described that the embodied experience continued within them while playing, influencing them during performance. This contradicts with Neil, et. al (2006), who suggested that somatic responses that are facilitative during performance disappear once the competition starts. This also challenges the limitation of the time to event paradigm that focuses mostly on the athletes’ anxiety before events. Most athletes explained how they struggled with their performance, while experiencing paralyzing sensations in their body. This is in line with the paradoxical experience suggested by Van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker (2005). For example,

Jayne described how much she needed to speed up her legs to run faster and how much she was experiencing her legs as slow. My findings suggested that the use of phenomenology to get a more detailed sensory description of the embodiment would be of benefit (see Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2009), focusing on a deeper experience of anxiety with and through their bodies.

5.3. The Athletes' Internal World and Cognitions in Relation to Anxiety

The athletes' anxiety experiences have also been related to internal issues that athletes' experience within themselves. The athletes' internal world of cognitions is another complex domain that has been discussed a lot in the sports psychology literature (Jones, 1991; Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 1995; Perry & Williams, 1998; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). It encompasses their over-thinking, self-confidence, expectations and followed routines, which were all shown to influence their anxiety experience. I will discuss this in the next section with reference to Figure 5.2.

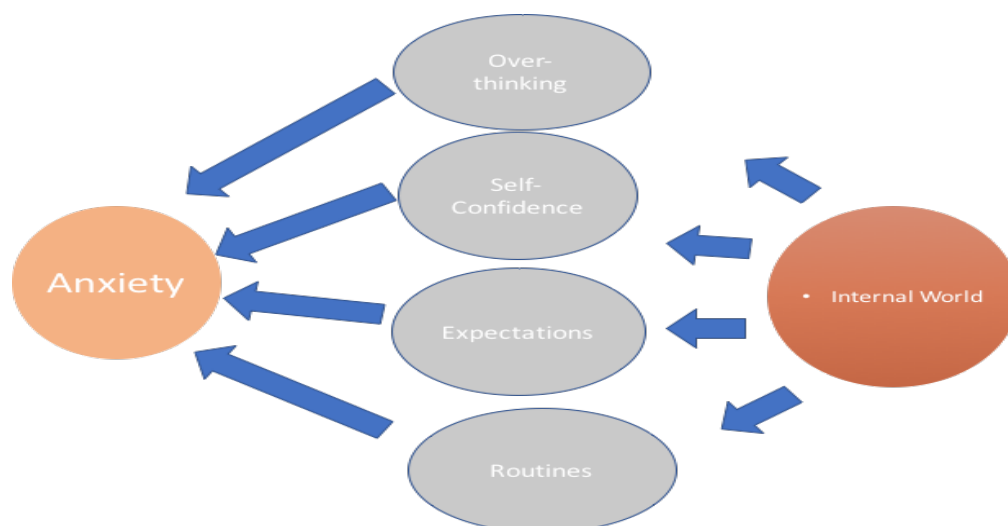


Figure 5.2 Athlete's Internal World and Cognitions

5.3.1. Overthinking

This research identifies *overthinking* as a theme that is associated with anxiety the participants experience before and during competition. It shows how thoughts influence feelings and behaviours, and vice versa (Jones, 1991; Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 1995; Perry & Williams, 1998; Mellalieu et al., 2009; Holt et al. 2014). For instance, Mary said, “*It’s a very mental game, most of the time, it’s your head, it’s how you think of it.*”

This is represented in Figure 5.3.

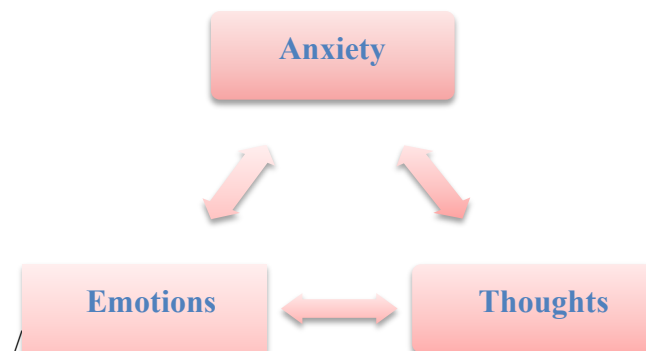


Figure 5.3 Emotions/Thoughts’ Relationship with Anxiety

Most athletes described their over -thinking as worry or concern about what would happen if they performed badly or lost; the mental/cognitive aspect of anxiety associates with negative expectations (Martens et al., 1990). This was the base for the description of cognitive anxiety and the measure of CSAI-2 in further research as discussed in Section 2.5. (Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 1995; Woodman & Hardy, 2003; Hanton et al., 2008; Tsopani et al., 2011). This was also one of the major components of anxiety, while trying to explain the anxiety-performance relationship in several theories and/or models, such as the multi-dimensional theory, the cusp catastrophe theory, and directional interpretation hypothesis for example.

Some athletes' experiences of anxiety were influenced by the demand of competitions, (Craft et al., 2003). For instance, Emily said,

"Sometimes I can control this thinking during the match and sometimes I can't, it depends on where I am exactly in the match."

In other situations, over-thinking may be considered as thinking ahead, wondering about how one would perform or how it would affect their ranking. For example, Peter said,

"I think a lot about ranking, and the players, and if this match I win, where I will go in my rank, and if I have a good role, or for example the seed that I am going to play, he lost, so then I keep thinking yeah now it's a good chance for me to use this opportunity to go deep in the tournament and win more matches."

The above challenges Marten et al.'s (1990) notions that focused more on the direction and perception of anxiety rather than only looking at its intensity. Such research categorized divided cognitions into positive and negative, showing how negative cognitions were debilitating for athletes versus positive cognitions and perceptions that were helpful for them, by measuring anxiety quantitatively (Jones, 1991; Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 1995; Perry & Williams, 1998; Mellalieu et al. 2009).

In my study I have revealed that even though the internal cognitions of athletes and their thinking processes influenced anxiety, it did not necessarily follow a binary form. This concurs with Jones' (1995) directional interpretation hypothesis and its later modification to look at how anxiety maybe facilitative for performance as well as anxious for athletes. In Peter's past example, even thinking about positive situations brought anxiety. In addition, John stated that the less he thought before the match, the less anxious he got but the less he also cared, which was not helpful for him. This opposes the binary categorization of positive

and negative perceptions, which could challenge the quantitative methods of measuring cognitive anxiety.

Jones's (1995) research suggested those who considered themselves in control of their thoughts were able to cope with their anxiety more. Also, Arnaud, Codou & Palazzolo (2012) consistently stated that when players perceived higher internal *locus of control*, they showed less competitive anxiety. This also goes with the Mindfulness-based interventions that have been used with athletes to teach them, not necessarily to control their thoughts, but to accept and become aware of the present moment (Pineau, Glass & Kaufman, 2014), thus focus more on the now while competing, which lessens the struggle with the anxiety experience.

Over-thinking, then, influences the anxiety experience of athletes, however, it does not always necessarily include negative cognitions and perceptions only. Some athletes experience anxiety, thinking about positive things and some athletes feel that thinking is helpful for them before matches even if it influences their anxiety.

This research also showed that most athletes felt they needed to control their *over-thinking* to manage their anxiety and perform better. For example, Peter, Emily and Jayne all felt over-thinking influenced their performance tremendously. They said they tried to evade thinking before and during a match and had learned from their coaches to shift their thinking to the ball. This again relates to Pineau et al.'s (2014) research on mindfulness.

The process to avoid *over-thinking* is not very clear and there is no threshold between thinking and *over-thinking*. It would be helpful when working with athletes to understand how they think and what these thoughts mean to them, looking into what may be useful for them and what may not before the match. According to these thoughts and their meanings to each of them, an understanding will be reached as to what influences their anxiety, rather than only categorizing these thoughts into positive and negative. Nevertheless, at a later stage

after understanding the meaning of these thoughts, MST maybe implemented to work on minimizing the thoughts right before or during the match.

5.3.2. Self-Confidence

Controlling over-thinking and thoughts is highly related to *self-confidence* in the sports literature as if *self-confidence* acts as a defence for the negative effects of cognitive anxiety (Neil et al., 2006; Mellalieu et al. 2009; Tsopani et al., 2011). In my study, *self-confidence* was associated with many participants' anxiety where some participants based their confidence on their ability to play competitively and some related it to reaching their expectations and goals.

In my study it has been shown that self-confidence was associated with *over-thinking* as the more confident or experienced the players felt, the less they over thought and the less anxiety they experienced. Self-confidence or lack of it then is a factor of cognitive anxiety and a major part of MST with athletes (Hanton et al., 2002; Hanton et al., 2004; Robazza & Bortoli, 2007; Tsopani et al., 2011; Koehn, 2013; Sharp et al., 2013). This concurs with the inclusion of self-confidence as an important mediator or a component in several anxiety-performance theories that influences athletes' anxiety experiences such as the multidimensional theory, directional interpretation hypothesis and catastrophe model.

In contrast, the findings did not reveal the relationship between *self-confidence* and *control*. For some participants, *self-confidence* was based on how frequently they won or performed well or whether they were playing well or leading during a match. Moreover, self-

confidence was mostly mentioned in relation to *feeling better* and *feeling more comfortable about oneself*, which helped athletes with their *anxiety experiences*.

“I believe that I have a certain level of confidence, but it can vary every day, like it fluctuates, so if this specific day my confidence is kind of low I’d be more anxious, if my confidence is higher than usual I’d be more prepared, not as anxious.” – Jayne

Thus, although mentioned by all athletes as important, the notion of *self-confidence* did not have a common meaning. It may be important to understand what *self-confidence* means to each athlete and how this affects their *anxiety experience*. Teaching athletes’ skills to increase their *self-confidence* may not be efficient without helping them to understand their anxiety experience.

5.3.3. Expectations

The results of my study showed that part of the thinking process for athletes was their *expectations*. Most athletes said that the *expectations* and goals they set for themselves make them *experience anxiety*, especially when they are not met. Some of the participants internalized them as their own based on their parents’ *expectations, hopes and dreams*. The participants seem to have understood and grasped these, without direct and explicit communication to them. In my sample, not only participants were influenced by their parents’ expectations, but also by what others anticipated of them.

Heidegger (1962) asserted that we come into the world as human beings, who exist with others and are influenced by them. However, we could be thrown into inauthenticity and anxiety if we tried to live up to the expectations of others rather than be ourselves, whether performing or training for others, or feeling anxious because of others’ reactions. This influences how true the athletes are to themselves, or how much they are competing or training

for themselves or for others, which may influence the anxiety experience of some of these athletes.

For example, Melissa's expectations influenced her experiences as she said:

"When I'm playing against someone who is higher in ranking or is more tougher than me, there are certain expectations that I'm not supposed to win this match, so if I win then this is defying what people expect me to, what the score is expected to be, mmm and also mmm I mean what I expected myself, also not just what others expect of me, what I expect for myself."

It would be worth noting while working with someone like Melissa to understand where the expectations are coming from and how much she is influenced by others' expectations. It could be further explored how much Melissa plays for herself and how much she is living in the shadow of others' expectations, which could affect her anxiety experience.

The findings also showed that some of these athletes set expectations for themselves, similar to those of others, as they wanted to reach certain goals. Bednar (2014) suggested that one should use their own potential, follow their passion in living, but should also respect others and balance between both. However, the findings revealed that some participants experienced even more anxiety when they did not fulfil their own expectations. This again is consistent with Heidegger (1962), who stated that we experienced anxiety more when we accepted and took responsibility of our own "*Dasein*" as it added more accountability for our own being in the world. With accepting our own "*Dasein*" trying to live an authentic life, this means being more aware of our own choices, which may influence the anxiety level more, as it throws more responsibility on the athlete.

Some participants 'labelled' themselves as *not good enough* or as *failures* when they did not fulfil their *expectations* as Melissa said:

"a lot of times I turn around [and look]at myself, [and thought] so if I fail him [coach] again so I'm a failure, I didn't do what's expected, it's all, it's all because of me."

She perceived herself as a failure when the expectations she set were not met. When focusing on negative cognitions, athletes should learn how to challenge their negative thoughts and work on positive self-talk and positive thinking (Hanton et al., 2002; Mamassis & Doganis, 2004; Birrer & Morgan, 2010; Harmison, 2011; Koehn, 2013; Sharp et al., 2013).

However, different athletes have different *expectations*. For example, in this study some participants' expectations were related to performing well, while others based theirs on winning regardless of performance, and others focused on standing out or defying odds. Thus, it is important to focus on athletes' *meaning making* frames, rather than only measuring them (Nesti 2011a & 2011b; and Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). Simpson et al (2014) proposed that before administering MST with athletes it was essential to learn more about their sporting experience.

Perfectionism has also been discussed with the athletes' expectations. Some athletes set very high goals of either winning the same player every time, not allowing anyone to speak negatively about them, always performing well no matter what or being a perfect student, person and athlete. Otherwise they blame themselves for not being good enough. Sophia, for example, said:

"This is the perfection I mean I mean, like keeping and beating the certain girls and not losing against them ever."

Perfectionism then is a factor that influences competitive anxiety with athletes. Stoeber et al. (2007) examined perfectionism from two perspectives and showed how reacting negatively to imperfections influences anxiety, while striving for perfectionism is positively correlated with cognitive and somatic anxiety. Also reacting to unfulfilling *expectations* was found to increase anxiety experiences (Koivula, Hassmen & Fallby, 2002; Stoeber et al., 2007). For instance, Sarah said,

“Because sometimes I want to be perfect and perfect is perfect and sometimes to be a perfect or (I mean) you think the ideal things put pressure on your mind.”

In many instances aiming for ambitious goals and *perfectionism* aided some athletes, in reaching them.

“Having high expectations of myself, being like no you’ll do fine.” - Emily

Stoeber et al. (2007) and Hamidi & Behsarat (2010) suggested that striving for perfection decreased negative thinking about failing and increased self-confidence. However, these studies were mainly quantitative and did not look deeper into what perfectionism and high expectations meant to the athletes.

5.3.4. Routines

My research findings demonstrated that all participants used routines to comfort them and aid them in managing their anxiety. This agrees with Samulski & Lopes (2008) who explored how athletes developed their own routines and rituals while competing to help them focus and control their emotions specifically when critical decisions were required. Similarly, Mesagno et al. (2008) suggested that the use of pre-performance routines decreased the choking and pressure some athlete’s experienced and enhanced performance under pressure.

“I do it all the time, even during practice because mmm, especially with the serve, I’ve had a few (I mean), mmm, problems last year that I couldn’t serve because I was so anxious and I was so scared and panicky, mmm, so I made up this routine and I found that this routine helps me not, avoid panicking before serving.” - Melissa

This is consistent with Mellalieu, Hanton & Shearer (2008) who called for teaching athletes to develop pre-competitive psychological preparation to manage their anxiety.

However, each participant in my study had their own routine and each routine had a significant meaning for each participant. Routines were done as a means of being prepared, which made some athletes feel more confident, some more relaxed, some more comfortable and some more secure. Mellalieu et al. (2008) likewise suggested that it was important to acknowledge that each athlete was different and that there should be an understanding of the meaning of each phase of the pre-competition routine. Grant & Schempp (2013) also studied athlete’s routines and pre-competitive behaviour by exploring the description and meaning of the routine for each athlete, helping athletes have more self-awareness of the development and meaning of these routines. For example, Lidor, Hackfort & Schack (2014) studied how athletes developed performance routines to feel more in control. The different influence of routine was highlighted when Jayne said:

“I think that most of my anxiety is related to things that I don’t like, I don’t, I like to be prepared, I like to plan in advance.”

While Emily said:

“The place where I put my towel during the breaks, I like to put it in a certain place that I like, I like to put the water and my juice in a certain place too [...] “I put them in the right place, I feel that I’m mentally comfortable.”

It is interesting to note that for Jayne, routine meant preparation, while for Emily it seemed to mean putting things in the right place. This could be interesting to explore further.

Some participants showed very inflexible and structured ways of carrying their routines, which were essentially done in the same manner every time. Some athletes explained how superstitious they became, especially during their matches. This agrees with Wakefield, Shipherd & Lee (2017) who proposed that superstition helped most athletes, however, sometimes it could be harmful.

Burger & Lynn (2005), similarly, suggested that superstition was common with major league baseball players. However, players also acknowledged that maybe it would not affect their performance. Nevertheless, they suggested that some athletes could be embarrassed by their beliefs, which was why they stated that it did not affect their performance. During my interviews, many participants smiled while speaking about their on-court superstition, which could agree with Wakefield et al.'s (2017) research that even though athletes followed certain superstitions, they felt that on some level it did not affect their performance.

“During the match, I have like very like like bad superstitions it's weird [...] it's pretty funny actually, I just do random things, I don't step on lines, I have to bounce the ball certain number of times before my serve, it just helps me focus.” – John

However, Wakefield et al. (2017) suggested that when superstition became harmful it was essential to teach athletes to shift to pre-performance routines to cope with their fears. This could indicate that it could be more beneficial for athletes to explore the meaning of these superstitions to them at some instances and develop some different more doable routines that do not depend merely on luck.

Even though routines, are not only internal processes that athletes have, and they are exhibited externally performing certain behaviours, these routines are highly related to the internal processes that athletes have and the meaning each athlete assigns to them, hence, how each routine influences the athlete's anxiety is based on this meaning. The athletes' internal processes and thoughts, then, influence their anxiety experience.

MST works on gaining skills to help athletes decrease or avoid negative thinking and improve their positive thinking through goal-setting, positive self-talk and other skills, thus decreasing their anxiety experience. However, this research has shown that the athletes internally process meanings differently and thus some may find notions like overthinking, expectations and confidence helping with their performance positively rather than hindering it, though their anxiety may be raised. This gives a deeper outlook to the notion of cognitive anxiety explored earlier, looking away from the binary positive and negative division of cognitions, and instead exploring the meaning for each notion.

5.4. The Meaning of Competition

While working closely to explore the internal processes of these athletes, the meaning of being a competitive tennis player emerges. It was marked that being a competitive athlete defined whom the participants are as beings. The meaning of competition is highly associated with what winning and losing means to these athletes, their identity and the choices they make for their sports, as shown in figure 5.4.

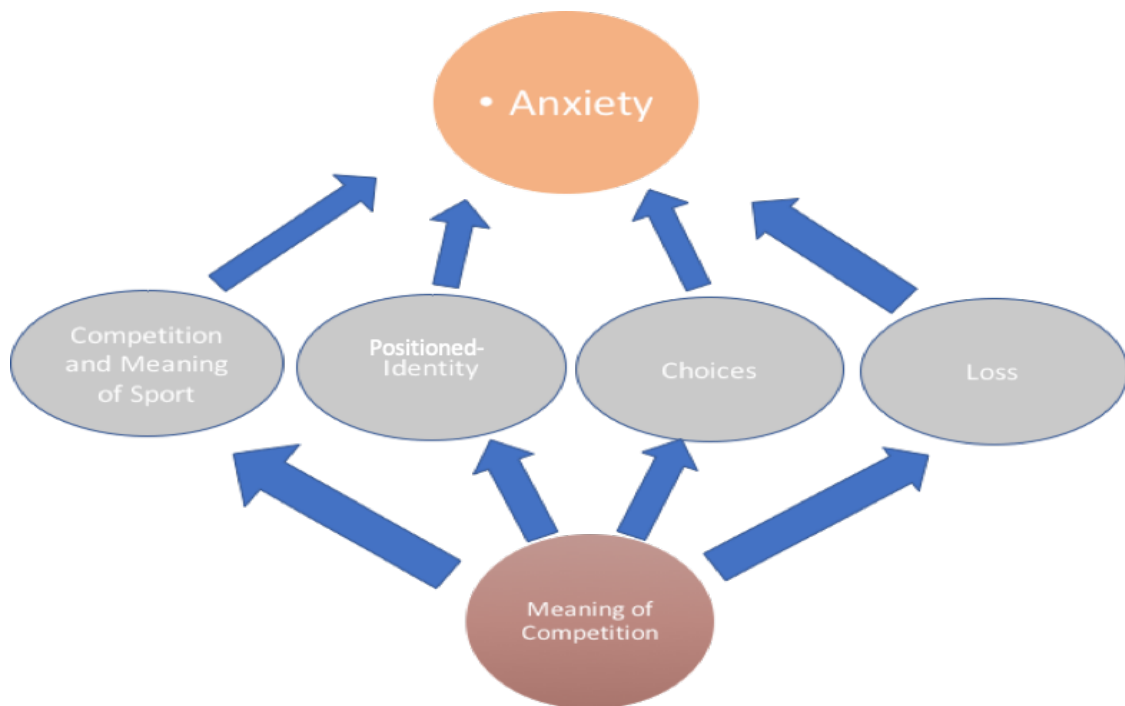


Figure 5. 4. The Meaning of Competition and its Components

5.4.1. Competition and the Meaning of Sports

The findings described competition as giving meaning to the lives of the athletes since it was the whole point of playing. Different participants, however, assigned different meanings to the word competition. According to them, competition can be a part of who a person is or all what counts. Some see it as purpose, some as improvement and some consider it everything. These results are consistent with Frankl (1992), who suggested that the search for meaning was a primary drive for man. Also, they are in line with Van Deurzen & Adams' (2011) explanation of the spiritual dimension of being and how beings have a value system, meaning, and purpose while existing in the world. Frankl (1992) suggested that sports gave meaning to an athletes' life, in which he/she was free to relate to their sport in their own way. Sarah said,

"It means everything, I can't imagine my life without competing."

Ronkainen et al.'s (2013a) research, similarly, focused on the personal and spiritual meaning that athletes assign to their sporting experiences, and how sports became like a spiritual practice for these athletes at times. This agreed with Azimirad & Jalilvand (2012), who suggested that when athletes had a clear goal in life, they took a positive attitude towards competition. Many participants in this research expressed that being challenged and improving gave meaning to their lives, even though it might be anxiety provoking for them. This coincides with Frankl's (1978) proposition that athletes need a certain level of tension and that playing sports competitively provides them with it. Peter said:

"If you don't have a goal or a challenge in front of you then it's pointless to play."

The findings also relate to Ryba (2008), Nesti (2011a), Nesti (2011b), Tamminen et al. (2013) and Ronkainen & Nesti's (2015) research. They found that understanding how sports played a role in an athletes' life, helped him/her understand their experience more. It aided in making decisions of continuing in the professional world or not, helped them grow as beings, and influenced their choices and authenticity.

As suggested by the participants, competition is considered the core and essence of all players. If this core and essence is threatened, anxiety emerges. Tillich (1952) and May (1950) related anxiety to the threat of losing the core or essence of the individual. Similarly, Samuel (2013), Lundqvist & Sandin (2014) and Ryba, Ronkainen & Selanne (2015) suggested that athletes formulated their meaning and identity based on their athletic achievement and found it difficult to form an identity outside sports, in other areas of life. This may indicate how losing a competition maybe a threat to the athletes' identity.

Peter said, *"Tennis is almost my everything, it is my job, how, everything to me."*

Nesti (2011b) criticized the fact that many sports psychologists did not focus on the meaning that athletes give to their sports, stressing how important it was for understanding athletes and their experiences. Ronkainen et al. (2013a) also expressed that spirituality in terms of meaning was lacking in the sports psychology field, suggesting that the more the athlete's worldview coincided with the demands of the sports, the greater his/her experience was. Thus, as Thompson & Andersen (2012) proposed, athletes would prefer to be with a coach, who would aim at understanding them more and listen to their experiences rather than try to fix them. This gives room for using existential psychology to understand this greater meaning (Watson & Nesti, 2005), suggesting there should be an exploration of what the sports and competition mean to these athletes.

5.4.2. Positioned-Identity

Identity was highly discussed by all participants, even though that was not the focus of this research. Identity as shown in 5.4.1 is highly related to the meaning of the sports. All athletes stated that tennis was a major part of their identity, if not all of their identity in this period of their lives. This is similar to what Samuel (2013), Lundqvist & Sandin (2014) and Ryba et al. (2015) looked at in their research, showing how it was difficult for the participants to separate themselves as athletes from who they were as people. This had affected their anxiety and how they coped with life. Similarly, in this research, John said,

"Tennis is basically like all I do so there's nothing like school, I don't know like, there's nothing really that gets me, gets me as much as tennis."

In this study, findings showed that some athletes only based their identity on how they performed or how they were as tennis players. But others, like Sarah, related their identity to

different aspects rather than just being an athlete. In their research, Carless & Douglas' (2013) looked at the dangers of having only one athletic identity. Likewise, Martin & Horn (2013) suggested that focusing on a one-dimensional identity for athletes might lead to burnout. Thus, it would be worth noting how different athletes develop their identities- whether one-dimensional or multi-dimension- and how differences among them might influence their anxiety experiences.

My results also revealed that it was very difficult for athletes to imagine their lives without tennis. However, some athletes felt the need to stop tennis professionally or competitively after university as they were at a crossroads and needed to think of a career. This again agrees with the dangers of only forming one identity based on being a competitive athlete as mentioned by Gilmore (2008) and Carless & Douglas (2013). They suggested it made retiring very difficult for the athletes, who based their identity on sports only, unless they learn to form new identities for themselves. This corresponds to the idea of identity position by Hiles (2007) suggesting that identity is more fluid, changing according to what makes meaning to the person in their current position, although athletes may find it difficult to let go of their athletic identity. This also agrees with Ronkainen et al. (2018) who proposed that in order to work holistically with athletes there needs to be a space for athletes to express their identity formation and experience that may change over time.

In addition, the findings highlighted the differences between the athletes, who lived abroad and played competitively for their colleges and those who were living and studying in Egypt, while competing separately. Differences were found in how they managed both their academic and athletic life. This could be similar to Ronkainen et al. (2016), who reviewed how athletic identity had been conceptualized and how participating in competitive sports influenced the athletes' holistic identity through looking at how the culture and other factors played a role in identity formation.

The experiences of anxiety for athletes were proven to be highly-related to the way athletes form their positioned-identity, especially those who based who they are currently on being competitive tennis players. In this case, athletes may experience increased anxiety, fearing they would lose this identity by losing a match or not performing well, or losing the sport altogether. This indicates that in order to understand the experiences of anxiety for athletes, it would be vital to understand how they identify themselves in relation to tennis and what it means to them in their current context.

5.4.3 Choices

As tennis plays a huge part of the athletes' identity, the choices these players made reflected what being a competitive tennis player meant to them. Even though anxiety was associated with competition and competition was challenging for all athletes, nearly all athletes found competition very enjoyable. Lundqvist & Sandin (2014) and Ronkainen et al. (2018), similarly, suggested that most athletes felt joy while competing and prioritized this sport even if happiness was not experienced every single time. This is in line with Van Deurzen & Adams (2011), who proposed that life with its experiences was filled with paradoxes and that anxiety emerged with these paradoxes. One of these could be that playing tennis competitively gave as much joy to players, as much as it was strenuous.

As previously mentioned, Frankl (1978) stated that humans were always in search of tension in their lives. Playing competitive sports created some kind of tension that the participants of my study enjoyed and sometimes needed.

Melissa said, *"I love playing, mmm, (I mean) competitively because competition is what (I mean), what it's all for, (I mean) I practice for the competition, I put all these hours training for the competition and it also, it gives me mmm a sense of I don't know how to describe it, ya I feel confident when I compete, (I mean), mmm, it gives me also purpose."*

Athletes choose to put themselves in challenging situations even though they bring anxiety, suggesting that suffering and sacrifice is part of the athletic spiritual journey as discussed in 5.4.1.

It is apparent that the choices the athletes make for tennis influence their anxiety sometimes on and off-court. Athletes have used the term sacrifice for describing their off-court choices, feeling they have to perform better to prove it is worth it even though it increases their anxiety. For example, Jayne said:

“I felt like why sacrifice everything that you’ve worked so hard for just to be a regular person, because I feel like when you have this much, or just to be like the rest of your friends. I have always like to stand out.”

Similarly, Nesti (2011a) proposed that existential psychology focused on what sports meant to athletes and how this influenced their choices, bringing up the notion of authenticity. It also relates to Heidegger’s (1962) notion of ‘*Dasein*’ and how part of being is the awareness that we are free to choose with the given limitations, and that having the freedom to choose brings up anxiety. Anxiety, thus, is related to authenticity as it forces human beings to make authentic choices and live a more authentic life (Wulfin, 2008).

Authenticity in sports was discussed in several pieces of research which reflected how existential psychology had a lot of room in working with athletes (Bednar, 2014; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). For example, sometimes an athlete may experience anxiety as they make some of their off-court choices such as sacrificing some instant pleasure like going out at night, seeing family, or traveling for leisure in an effort to reach their goals for next day or next event. Even though this is a free choice for an athlete, it may still influence their anxiety experience.

One of the participants also stated that he did not like to make choices in his career, as he did not like to take responsibility if anything went wrong. This reflects how one may experience even more anxiety when trying to move away from their freedom to choose as

suggested by Heidegger (1962) and mentioned in 5.4.3. Jayne's example also relates to Heidegger's (1962) notion of living an in-authentic life if the need to stand out is to satisfy others and not her. It is interesting to explore how much she is living a life that is authentic and how much this may influence her anxiety experience.

Other on-court choices that may influence the athletes' anxiety relate more to instant decision-making that an athlete takes during the match, such as choosing to stay in the present ball and focus rather than dwell over past points, choosing to playing all out when losing and choosing on which shot to hit. These all fit with Heidegger's (1962), Nesti's (2010) and Ronkainen & Nesti's (2015) notion of agency and freedom that as long as human beings have freedom to choose and are aware of these choices, they will experience anxiety while choosing.

The findings also revealed that many of these athletes struggled to balance between academic studies and tennis as mentioned earlier. Many make ongoing choices that change depending on the priorities for that day and this influences their anxiety experience.

Mary said, *"If I don't have enough time, I have a lot of tests to do and I'm just short on time, I have practice, I have meetings, I have a lot of things and I just don't have time to finish that stuff so maybe I stress a little bit, I get anxious."*

Again, this relates to the concepts of authenticity of Heidegger (1962) and Nesti (2010). It also agrees with Bednar (2014) who stated that athletes learn to make fast decisions. However, it is easier for athletes playing college tennis in the United States to manage than those in Egypt, which would be interesting to explore in another study. This reflects how different settings and contexts affect the anxiety experience of athletes on and off-court.

Additionally, many players, like Melissa, have expressed how they experienced anxiety as their college years were about to end since they had to choose a career path and

decide whether they would continue to play tennis for fun or professionally. As discussed earlier in 5.3.3 this again relates to the notion of authenticity (Wulfing, 2008). Nesti (2011a) proposed that some athletes continued in the athletic life, even though it was not an authentic choice for them. This results in more anxiety as they live an inauthentic life. Many researchers have also looked at career ending decisions and how this influences athletes' anxiety, using existentialism to explore what the athletes want in their future and what their choices are (Nesti & Sewell, 1999; Nesti, 2011a; Tamminen et al., 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2013b). This also coincides with Bednar's (2014) idea of athletes learning to make fast decisions but struggling when forced to stop their careers.

Anxiety for athletes then has been shown to be related to the choices that athletes make both instantly and long-term on and off-court. This reflects a sense of the *agency*, a freedom of choice, that these athletes have despite the difficulty they go through trying to choose between conflicting things, or to decide between an authentic and an inauthentic one, which may make them experience anxiety. In order to understand the anxiety experiences for athletes then, there should be an understanding of what choices these athletes have to make and what these choices mean to them.

5.4.4 Loss and Ending

Loss was a main theme discussed by all participants in relation to anxiety. However, participants have experienced anxiety differently according to the type and the meaning associated with their loss. For example, Sarah saw loss as losing everything related to her goals, while Emily described it as missing something like her fitness or mental state or a feeling that she was not good enough. Measuring success and failure was not equal for all athletes, as they assigned different meanings for winning and losing (Frey et al., 2003).

Frankl (1978), as discussed in 5.4.1, suggested that how we choose to relate and give

meaning to a situation was a unique character of our being and that if we could not change a situation such as loss, we could change the meaning we give to it. For athletes, it has been suggested that sports give meaning to their lives (Watson, 2011; Ronakinen et al., 2013a; Ryba et al., 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2016), thus it would be vital to explore what meaning athletes assigned to their loss and their life and how this influenced anxiety.

In this thesis, many participants highlighted how they took the responsibility and blamed themselves when they lost. This greatly influenced their anxiety, like the notions of death and ending (Yalom, 1980 and Heidegger, 1962), for death was always there; it influenced how we lived, as if we were always living towards death. Yalom (1980) talked about death anxiety and the fear of death and how it influenced the individual's internal experiences. He suggested that death anxiety was at a deep level and that there were other more superficial layers of anxiety that might be triggered by death. On one of the levels, ending a match or losing a match may be considered as a form of symbolic death, even if it is not a physical form of death (dying). It is a symbolic form of mini dying, which could trigger anxiety and even grief for some athletes. In addition, he introduced how being mindful and aware of one's own death may throw more responsibility on the individual for their own being and the choices they would make.

Heidegger's idea of moving towards death along the time dimension was explored by Phoenix et al. (2007); as time is always present: structuring the matches, the beginning, the ending, and the time to rest in between. Heidegger's notion of temporality and thrownness in the world with the idea of ending at a point can be applied with a tennis athlete entering a match knowing that it will end at one point, with the uncertainty of the outcome, which may influence their anxiety experience. An athlete is *thrown* in the match, uncertain about many things such as their performance, their opponent's performance, the weather, and/or their body's tolerance

for example. However, they need to perform under any circumstances, which may influence their anxiety during this performance.

This process may be repeated in every event an athlete plays influencing their anxiety experience differently. In a symbolic way this also may relate to the time to event paradigm that shows how the anxiety experience is influenced by time as athletes experience more anxiety close to the match. This may relate the intensity of the anxiety experience before the match, proposed by this paradigm, to the awareness of the idea of time and thrownness into the match and how this influences athletes variably.

Similarly, Ronkainen & Nesti (2015), Ronkainen & Ryba (2017a) and Cooper (2003) also further revealed the metaphor that death in sports was inescapable by either losing, getting injured or retiring. It influenced the choices athletes made while playing competitively, as discussed previously; we are responsible for our choices as we become aware of our death, we are free to choose. During the match we can choose how we want to play until the match ends. This might explain why players blame themselves when they lose, as if they were responsible for their loss as their choices. This phenomenon was discussed with some of the on-court choices in Section 5.4.3, as Peter stated,

“Blame for me it’s a big word because, (I mean) to take responsibility of my actions and that’s why I have if I do something wrong then I have to blame myself to next time, if I am putting this situation to handle it in a different way, or better. That’s why I blame myself if anything wrong. If I don’t blame myself then I think I think I will be careless that ok I lost a match.”

In contrast, the results show that loss is experienced as a learning process even if attached to blame and responsibility.

John, for example, said, *“Still when you lose you still gotta learn from what you did,*

you gotta figure out like what you did wrong, what the opponent did right to like think things that can make you win next time.

This concurs with the concept that changing is acknowledging one's role and responsibility in change (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011); the person is responsible for his or her actions and for changing them to further develop. Similarly, John used his losses to learn, accept his responsibilities and challenges for future times and to understand what he needs to focus on and change. As Frankl (1978) suggested that even when someone cannot change a situation, they can try to change themselves and how they view the situation.

One may consider a match as part of life itself. An athlete may deny his or her responsibility and role in relation to performing badly or losing. This in turn will not allow for him or her to learn from their mistakes and grow. On the other hand, an athlete may try to learn and grow from each match by taking responsibility for their actions and trying to do better in future matches. Thus, even if athletes cannot change a situation, they can learn to reflect back and process what happened.

There is also an element of expectation that appears with the experience of loss in this research. Many players blame themselves when they lose, as they did not perform as expected, similar to authenticity discussed in 5.3.3. (Heidegger, 1962), and how it influences the experiences of anxiety for athletes. It is worthwhile to explore how the experiences of anxiety differ with different expectations and whether there is a difference between expectations set by oneself and those set by others.

In addition, loss was experienced by a participant as a checkpoint or a reason to assess the meaning of what he was doing and how much it was worth his effort like the notion of meaninglessness and how we crave meaning as human beings (Yalom 1980), the loss is a loss of meaning. Yalom (1980) suggested that humans need meaning in their lives and that

meaninglessness may be the source of some of the human's crises.

This notion is relevant to athletes, who sacrifice some aspects of their lives to win and to perform well since their sports give meaning to their lives. However, losing matches in their careers may cause them to question whether all the training and sacrifices they make are meaningful to them anymore. For example, as suggested by John, the concept of losing breaks him down and leads him sometimes to question the meaning of what he is doing. If an athlete loses the meaning of their sports, to them, their attitude or actions would influence their anxiety experience. It is like the loss of identity, which has been discussed in 5.4.2 (Gilmore, 2008; Carless & Douglas, 2013; Martin & Horn, 2013; Samuel 2013; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014; Ryba et al., 2015).

This was highlighted when John said, *“When you're losing sometimes, it can break you down, it can, you think about quitting, you think about like why am I even doing this”*.

Loss has also been discussed when participants mentioned ageing and how much it might influence or was influencing them already. This again is consistent with Yalom (1980) and Heidegger's (1962) concept of death and ending and how there will be an ending at one point to their career discussed earlier. Ronkainen & Ryba (2017a) have looked at ageing and injuries as being a symbolic death. This brings up all the existential givens, such as being thrown in the world with the awareness of one's death and ending, in which ageing is an existential given that an athlete has to deal with and at the same time has the freedom to give meaning to or to redefine the meaning of life (Ronkainen et al, 2013b; Ronkainen & Ryba, 2017b).

Sarah said, *“I'm getting older and they are getting older and there are upcoming younger girls that are better, with a higher potential, so I become worried that a day would come where I would for example lose to a girl who is much younger than me.”*

As mentioned previously the idea of dying, ageing or retiring, may influence the choices that many participants make on their way to becoming competitive tennis athletes (Yalom, 1980; Heidegger, 1962; Cooper, 2003; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). Heidegger's (1962) notion of temporality can also be applied to ending the sports career; this critical point may influence the athlete's anxiety. As the closer an athlete is approaching the end of their career, the more anxious they become, and their choices may be influenced by their anxiety in a different way. For example, Peter's outlook on ageing influences how he chooses a certain approach to handling his body and tennis as he said,

"It makes me want to be more taking care of my body, because I know the more you get old, the more you will get injured, the more you will need to work even more to, to be able to compete with the young."

The findings also pointed at the idea of ending one's career and the apprehension of how athletes live their lives after stopping tennis, as discussed in 5.4.3, influences their being in the world. For those participants, who felt they might stop playing competitively after finishing college, the anxiety was higher. This is similar to the research that explored the threat and anxiety for athletes, who have only based their identity on their performance and how they live after retirement (Gilmore, 2008; Carless & Douglas, 2013; Martin & Horn, 2013; Samuel 2013; Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014; Ronkaïen et al., 2013; Ryba et al., 2015).

Ronkainen et al. (2013b) looked into the meaning athletes have to change when they look beyond their athletic life and transition to another. They stated that there had been calls for athletes to base their identities in a more holistic manner. Ronkainen & Ryba (2017b) added that when athletes retire, they are forced to give new meaning to their lives.

This is highlighted when Mary said, *"I guess I am going to mature more but I don't know if I am going to be looking at tennis from another perspective, so I might be the same, I really*

don't know."

The knowledge of ending one's career might help athletes to become authentic and to do their best while playing (Yalom, 1980; Heidegger, 1962). This may mean that the closer an athlete gets to the end of their career, the more an athlete would think of how important sports are for them and how they want to proceed with it. An example is what Melissa mentioned about approaching the end of her college years. This motivated her to try her best before she quitted.

While trying to understand the anxiety experiences of these athletes, it has been clear there should be an exploration of the meaning of being a competitive tennis player to each of the participants, as it is the essence of their anxiety. Notions such as competition, identity, choices and loss seem to interrelate, showing how playing competitively reflects how they relate with the world and how they define their being within their current position in the world. This way of being in the world resonates a lot with the existential way of looking into being as suggested by Ronkainen & Nesti (2015). They stressed that athletes were thrown into their world with existential givens such as symbolic death (loss, ageing, retiring, or getting injured), freedom of choices (both on and off-court), responsibilities, and limitations and with these givens they tried to live an authentic life that had meaning to them.

Thus, notions such as meaning-making, authenticity, agency, freedom and limitations are all highlighted in this research opening up the space for the use of existential therapy/counselling while working with athletes. This does not necessarily mean letting go of MST with athletes but using the existential approach to dig deeper into the meaning and the core of anxiety before providing practical skills to help work on anxiety on court.

5. 5. Inter-Relating with Others within the Athletic Context

Another dimension affecting the anxiety experiences of athletes, as shown in the findings, is the way athletes inter-relate with others within their sports context. Others such as coaches, parents, teammates, and opponents may influence athletes' anxiety, while tennis athletes may also experience anxiety while feeling alone on the court or in their sporting experience as shown in this section and figure 5.5.

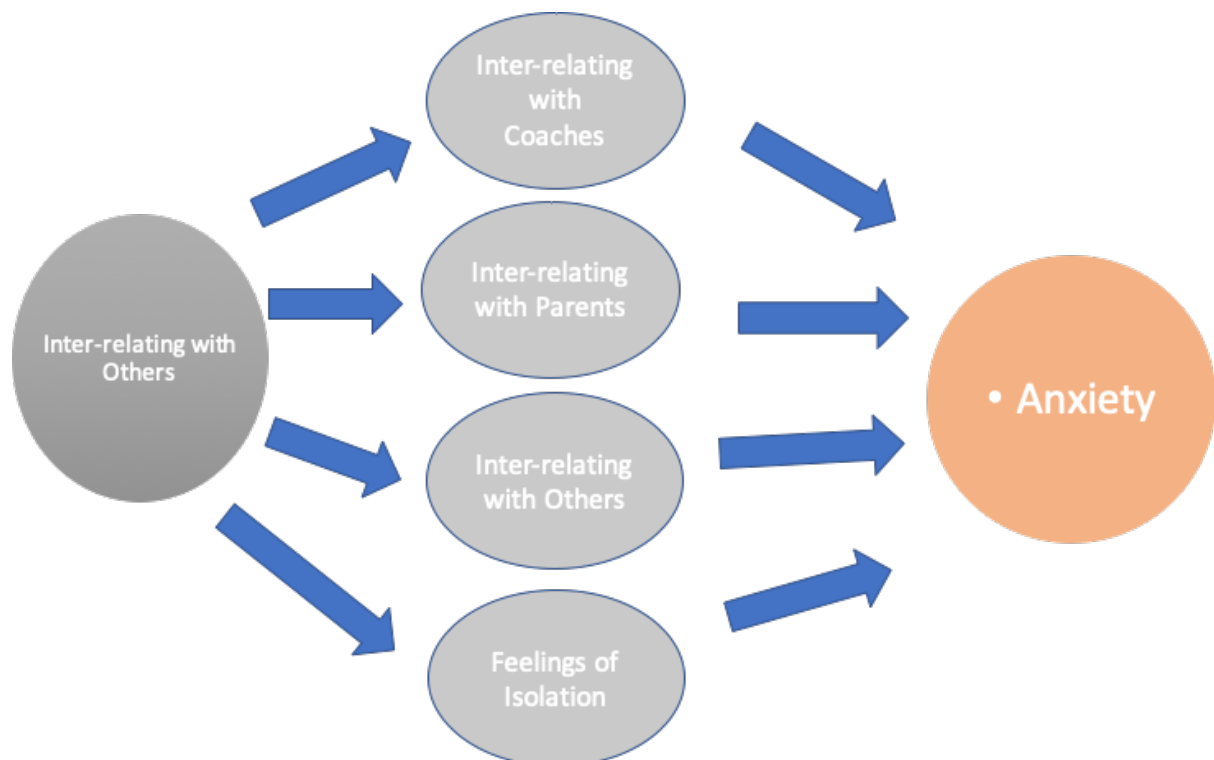


Figure 5.5 The Inter-Relational World

5. 5. 1. Inter-Relating with Coaches

Athletes are highly influenced by their coaches before, during and sometimes after their matches, which have been shown to influence their anxiety experience. This is consistent with Heidegger's (1962, p.150) notion of "being-with"- others in the world- which means that we inter-relate with others. It indicates that even when athletes are playing on court alone, they are constantly being with and thinking of others. For example, when a

player enters the court for a match, he or she connects with others such as the opponent, the referee, their coach, and possibly the spectators too. This constant relationship influences these athletes' anxiety experiences and choices at times. Sharp et al. (2013) proposed that coaches influenced the athletes' life a lot, in which some were helpful and some were not. The findings reflected how the support many athletes received from their coaches during the matches influenced their anxiety experience, making them less anxious while playing. So even though the tennis players are mostly alone in the court, they are relating with their coach, thinking about what they think, looking at them to be motivated or possibly thinking of an alternative tactics for example. This was captured when Sarah said,

“If I’m winning it will make me give more, if I’m losing maybe it stops me, if I’m losing it will shake me awake, it will make me start focusing again.”

Mamassis & Doganis (2004) and Gearity & Murray (2011) suggested that coaches had a great deal of impact on the anxiety of athletes, positively. This is reinforced more with McDonough et al.'s (2013) research as they looked at how coaches when involved and educated about the MST program for young athletes influenced these athletes' experiences and anxiety. Similarly, some participants stated that they felt the need for the coach's support and motivation after a match, sometimes even more than during the match, as it became frustrating to train after their losses. On the other hand, some athletes expressed how anxious they became if the coaches commented negatively during the match.

These results agree with the research done on how coaches' communication influences the athletes' anxiety (Kačúr, 2016; Ramis et al., 2017). Although the research was not done directly on communication during matches, Ramis et al. (2017) suggested that when coaches had controlling styles, athletes experienced more competitive anxiety and experienced more worry. Mamassis & Doganis (2004); Kačúr (2016) also added that the way

coaches communicate with athletes influenced their anxiety and self-esteem, which will be discussed.

“In the training, he doesn't usually watches, watch, sorry the matches, during the practice, for example you are not exerting enough effort, you are not, this kind of talk doesn't give me much confidence and motivation.”- Sophie

The findings also showed that some athletes experienced anxiety based on the expectations their coaches had of them, especially when they did not manage to follow a certain plan discussed earlier during the match. This could agree with Ramis et al. (2017), who suggested that when coaches became too authoritarian, athletes experienced pressure and anxiety. The study also stated that controlling coaches made athletes change their attitudes towards competition, experiencing more anxiety before and during matches. This was captured when Melissa said,

“I feel like if I don't, if I don't do what he expects me to do or if I lose this match when he expects me to win, I would be kind of failing him as well.”

Gillet et al. (20010) proposed that the more coaches were supportive, giving players more autonomy and respecting their opinion, the more motivated athletes became. John, for example, explained how his coaches respected his choice of personal space after losing a match, saying,

“They don't really talk to me about losing because they're more professional, they know if they get on you when you lose or when you mess you, things are gonna be worse but if they try to help you, try to talk you through, do things that will make you less worried then you start to be motivated again”.

Lundqvist & Sandin (2014) also proposed that having trust and support from the coach, influenced that athlete's experience as it made him or her feel accepted as a whole being. One of the participants felt that the unfairness of the coach during many instances raised her anxiety before and during her matches, as she felt he favoured some of her teammates over her. Similarly, Gearity & Murray (2011) looked at how coaches, who were unfair made some of the athletes doubt their abilities. This could also be explained using Mellalieu et al.'s (2013) research, which suggested that when athletes had interpersonal conflicts with others, including coaches, teammates or managers, they experienced more anxiety on court, influencing their performance.

In addition, several participants showed how the coaches helped them gain more awareness of themselves and their thinking process, which helped them experience less anxiety before and during competition.

“Yeah my coach, he told me every time I open it up to him, I talk to him and then he told me that try every time you think of this, you start losing.” - Peter

This is consistent with Gearity (2012) and Sharp et al. (2013), who proposed that coaches should be encouraged to have more awareness of the athlete as players showing care and interest in them more than winning. It is worthy to note that much of the research was done on younger athletes, while this research has looked at adolescent and adult athletes. Chan et al. (2012) suggested that the age of the athlete played an important role in the degree

of influence others had on him or her, stressing that for younger children coaches affected their enjoyment of the sport, while for adolescents it related more to competency.

5.5.2. Inter-Relating with Parents

The findings have also highlighted parents' influence on athletes before and during competition. They revealed that athletes were sensitive to their mothers' reactions, which influenced their anxiety during performing. Bois et al. (2009) had a similar conclusion, proposing that parents played an important role in their children's sporting experience. Similarly, Harwood & Knight (2009) suggested that parents might have a negative influence as suggested by coaches and athletes in youth sports. Kaye et al. (2015), however, suggested there were not enough studies on parents' influence on athletes as many as those done on coaches.

Harwood & Knight (2009) discussed the negative impact of parents on athletes, saying that it was related to the amount of stress these parents faced while engaging in the obligations and commitments related to this sport, specifically with a sport like tennis.

Some athletes worried about not fulfilling the expectations of their parents, especially with the effort placed in this sport. This agreed with Harwood & Knight (2009), who suggested that parents might tend to place more expectations on their children, as they placed a lot of effort and commitment in a sport. The findings also reflected how these expectations might influence the anxiety of these athletes. Bois et al. (2009) and Kaye et al. (2015) also carried out similar studies, looking at the relationship between the perceived expectation from parents and the athlete's pre-competitive anxiety, together with the relationship of anxiety with the parental involvement. This was clear in this research as for example Emily said about her mother,

“I see her sitting and I feel that no I want to win because I don't want to make her upset with

me, not upset with me, I don't want to make her upset in general, because she is the one who is affected the most by the matches."

In contrast, the findings also revealed that some athletes found that their mothers were strong motivators for them.

"I think it would decrease my anxiety, my anxiety like, because she was very reassuring no matter who I was playing, she was just very reassuring." - Jayne

My findings agreed with Harwood & Knight (2009) and Chan et al. (2012) stating that parents, especially mothers, were the main providers of support and encouragement before, during and after a match, influencing their adolescent's anxiety, positively.

The results also showed that some athletes found that the expectations placed on them by their parents had been helpful to them at times. Likewise, Bois et al. (2009) stated that placing expectations on children and believing in their abilities might increase their self-confidence and decrease their anxiety. Kaye et al. (2015) stated that some of the somatic anxiety experienced by children with parents with high expectations might not be always negative, as the experiences in the body maybe experiences of activation.

The findings reflected that athletes were more influenced by their parents when they were younger, stressing that their parents were sources of motivation or stress for them. But this influence, they stated, diminished, as they grew older. Chan et al. (2012), suggested that mothers had a great influence on their children between the age of 9-12 years old, while peers and coaches had more influence as they grew older. Mary made that clear when she said,

"When I was younger, maybe I would stress out more that I have to win, I have to win, my parents are watching, mmm, like there is more pressure, when you grow up, you are more mature."

The findings have reflected that mostly female athletes were the ones, who discussed the influence of their parents, specifically the mother, while one of the male athletes spoke briefly of his father. This may be consistent with Bois et al. (2009) who suggested that the involvement of parents influenced female tennis athletes more than their male counterparts. However, it is worthy to note that for this research, female athletes are more represented than males, which does not allow for generalization. Yet, the research purpose was not to generalize, but rather to understand how inter-relating with others may influence the anxiety experience of athletes.

5.5.3. Inter-Relating with Others

The findings have revealed that teammates, opponents or referees also had influence on the participants' anxiety experiences. Evans, et. al. (2012) suggested that most individual sports were in a way also group sports, in which athletes train in group settings, despite having to compete alone, against other teammates. Thus, there is always a group dynamic involved that can influence athletes even though it is an individual sport.

The findings have showed that some participants experienced anxiety with tough opponents, however, some felt more motivated to play better and be challenged. Arruda et al. (2017) stated that athletes might experience more anxiety when they perceived the environment of the competition as more challenging or threatening to their status. This is similar to the results of this study, as many athletes felt anxious before and during the competition if they lost to younger opponents or opponents they usually beat. On the other hand, the findings indicated that some athletes got more motivated when they played tougher opponents as they hoped to win. Guillen & Sanchez (2009), likewise, stated that athletes experienced less anxiety when they were playing higher levels of competition.

Another finding indicated that one of the participants experienced less anxiety when

she played abroad and did not know the opponents she would play against. This again is in line with Arruda et al. (2017) that having knowledge of the opponent and knowing that they are strong may increase anxiety for athletes. This is demonstrated when Mary said,

“I don’t know the girl and it’s not gonna make any difference if, like I don’t know her so I can’t think of the match before playing it, I have nothing to think about.”

However, it is worthy to note that Arruda et al.’s (2017) research measured the physiological manifestations and biopsychological stressors and did not show how athletes were influenced or how they experienced anxiety.

The findings demonstrated that playing for a team influenced the anxiety experience as many participants felt responsibility towards the team and a sensation of blame when losing for it. This is in line with Heidegger’s (1962) notion that we are always in the world with others.

“If I win, everyone would say yeah [Peter] saved us, or we are one good team and that you, I find a way to win, no matter how it is, and then I saved the ship because if, you know, we’re a team and we’re on a ship and if it sink, then we all die.” – Peter

However, some participants expressed how when playing for the team, they felt a shared sensation, where winning or losing of any team member seemed like winning or losing for oneself. This agrees with Evans et al.’s (2012) research that proposes that playing for a team involved several dynamics between the athlete and the teammates, the coach, the player and the teammates, which might all influence the athletes’ anxiety.

On the other hand, one of the participants expressed how her teammates’ attitudes influenced her anxiety experience. This is also consistent with McDonough et al. (2013), who

suggested that having interpersonal issues, such as comparing oneself to teammates or conflicts with the coach for example, might influence the athlete's anxiety experience.

"You obviously want good teammates, who want good stuff for you, you don't wanna deal with people kind of hitting on you, so I mean we accept them but mmm without like, there is some anxiety from it." - Mary

The findings have also showed that others such as general fans or other people may also influence the anxiety experiences of athletes. This again highlights Heidegger's (1962) notion of being with others. Melissa confessed, *"I find myself more anxious when I'm playing in a court that is maybe in the centre court where a lot of people are watching and there is a big crowd, mmm, ya I get more anxious than when I'm playing in a court that is a bit far from the people."* In this case the participant's anxiety is highly influenced by who and how many people are watching her. This is consistent with Arruda et al. (2017) as they stated that players experience more pressure when they play in front of their family and friends.

5.5.4. Feelings of Isolation

The findings have demonstrated how some participants felt alone and how this influenced their anxiety experience. Lundqvist & Sandin (2014) proposed that some athletes felt isolated or withdrawn from others, which influenced their experiences of being elite athletes. This may also be in line with Ronkainen & Nesti's (2015) research as they proposed that athletes might experience loneliness at many instances in their lives, as they constantly travelled and left their family and friends. They suggested this might relate to loneliness and isolation in existential psychology, which could influence the athletes' experiences of anxiety (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015).

Yalom (1980) described different kinds of isolation, one of which is interpersonal isolation that is also related to this research, as competing in tennis and spending a lot of time

and effort for this sport may result in athletes being isolated from others contextually. However, the findings showed that sometimes this experience of being alone threw responsibility on the athletes as they felt they were solely responsible for what happened to them. Yalom (1980) introduced existential isolation, as being separate from the world, being alone in one's experience. He explained existential isolation as a person feeling isolation even when they related with others and how this might affect the person's anxiety. This is expressed by John:

"No one makes me worried really, cause no one is been harm me in any way if I lose, if I mess up, I just make my own decisions, if I win then that's for me, if I lose I just own up to it, no one really harms."-

It has been demonstrated that how others inter-relate with athletes and how athletes inter-relate with others within their athletic context, whether coaches, parents, teammates, and/or opponents, influenced their anxiety experiences on and off the court. This is again similar to the existential concepts that athletes, just as any human being, are always in relation with others in the world, even if they play alone on the court and that this inter-relation may influence their anxiety experience (Heidegger, 1962). In addition, the findings have also revealed that some of the anxiety experienced while relating with others could be related to the internal processes some athletes perceive from others such as expectations or any choices athletes are forced to do by their coaches. Nevertheless, it has been also shown that athletes also experience anxiety on the court as they feel alone in their experience, even though they may have others who support them from outside.

To summarize, the experiences of anxiety for athletes should be regarded in a multi-dimensional manner that should be individualized to each athlete. This multi-levelled

approach consists of several interwoven aspects, all influencing the anxiety experiences of athletes, as shown in figure 5.6. For example, the way anxiety is manifested physically for athletes' influences their anxiety experiences. This cannot be regarded solely as *physical manifestation* and *sensations*, but rather there are cognitive processes within the athletes that influence these physical experiences. How athletes *over-think*, what they think of - the *expectations* that they have of themselves, the *expectations* that they perceive, the *expectations* that placed on them, how they view their *self-confidence*, and the *routines* they build are all interwoven, influencing how these athletes experience anxiety.

The way each athlete perceives and understands their anxiety experience differs according to different *meaning* each athlete has in relation to others their sport, *competition*, *positioned-identity*, *loss*, and their *choice*. Athletes are not alone in their world, even though they may compete *alone* on the court, they still *inter-relate with others* and others influence their anxiety within the sports context, as shown in figure 5.6.



Figure 5.6 Multi-levelled View on Anxiety

Athletes' anxiety experiences should be examined in terms of their physical dimension while exploring their *physical manifestations* and *sensation* of anxiety, their personal dimension while looking at their *internal processes*, their spiritual dimension by exploring the *meaning* of their world and their social dimension by exploring how their *inter-relational* world influence their anxiety, in which all of these dimensions may be interconnected together in different ways for different athletes, as shown in figure 5.7. Athletes, then, exist in their sports' world within several dimensions, the physical, personal, social and spiritual (Van Duerzen, 2010), each individual can be viewed within these dimensions at any particular time; the dimensions are interwoven differently for different people (Van Duerzen & Adams, 2011). This suggests the relevance of working with athletes using the existential approach.

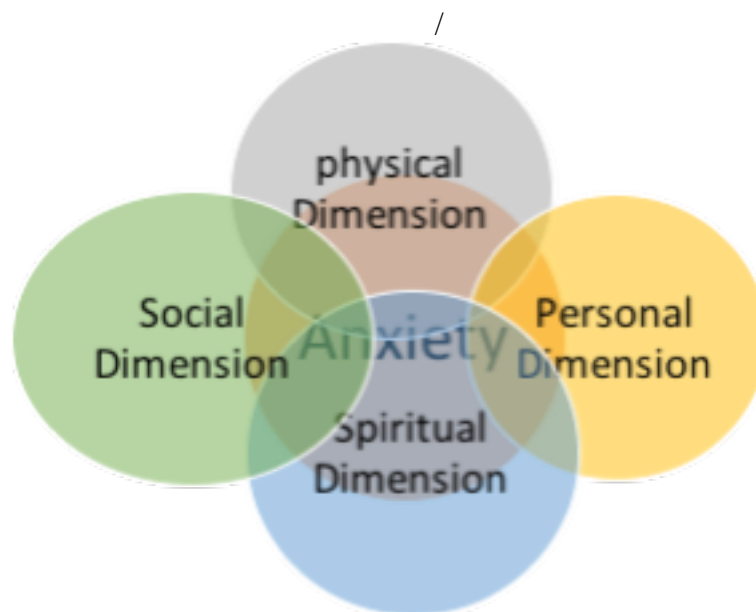


Figure 5.7 Existential Four-World Model

Being an athlete is very much similar to being in life. The language used in tennis is also present in everyday existence such as the words: service, love, break and advantage, as if every match is a mini example of life (Agassi, 2009). Even the way the match is structured into points that become games and then sets and how they are all interconnected together in a

way that any point maybe the turning point, similar to the day every second becomes minutes then hours and all involve our choices. Athletes are, thus, *beings* who *exist* with the *givens* of the *world*, such as *death* and *ending*, such as *inter-relating* with others in the world, having *choices* and *agency*, having limitations and responsibilities and while being in the world they experience anxiety (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015).

The findings have also demonstrated that even though most athletes shared similar themes that have an influence on their anxiety experiences, each theme had a different meaning for each athlete, influencing the athletes' anxiety experience differently. This again illustrates the significance of using existential therapy and the phenomenological approach to explore the meaning of the anxiety experience for athletes, as it could fill the gap between the sports psychology literature and practitioners who work with athletes (Nesti, 2011a). Nesti (2011a) suggested that to comprehend what being anxious felt like for athletes, they needed to explain their own experience.

This is in harmony with Ravizza's (2002) research, which used an existential framework with the educational approach to look at the "athlete as a total person" (p.4), who needs to understand the meaning and purpose of their sport to them, educating them that in performance there will always be obstacles and failures and helping them learn to adjust and grow while facing these challenges. This calls for looking at the athletes as a whole person and not just as a performing being (Nesti, 2011d; Grant & Schempp, 2013; Zakrajsek et al., 2013).

The study, thus, appears to strongly support the integration of the existential approach while working with athletes. Even though MST has shown to decrease the anxiety symptoms for athletes and enhance their performance, it does not seem to be enough to understand the complexity of the anxiety experience of athletes, nor look at the individuality of such as

experience. In addition, it does not focus on the athlete as a whole being, even though playing sports is a way of being for these athletes and the essence of their anxiety experience. The next chapter will end by discussing the conclusions of this research and the implications and recommendations for working with athletes' anxiety.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

“Reporters often forget that athletes are human beings”, a quotation by Willie Stargell, a baseball player (2019), that reflects the findings of this research. The purpose of the research was to study the lived experiences of anxiety for Egyptian elite tennis athletes, mainly exploring the complexity of anxiety for these athletes. Even though most past research measured the intensity and direction of anxiety, looking at how anxiety influenced athletes in a binary manner (positively and negatively), this study pinpointed several influencing factors, looking at the full spectrum of anxiety without pre-assigned values, stressing the multi-dimensionality of the anxiety experience.

The findings indicated that the experiences of anxiety for these athletes go deeper beyond the notions of performance or competitive anxiety, as suggested in the past literature. Anxiety is multi-levelled, in which different dimensions, *physical, personal, social* and *spiritual*, are interwoven together and individualized to each athlete.

Anxiety is manifested *emotionally* and *physically*. These *manifestations* and *physical sensations* are influenced by the *internal processes* of athletes (*expectations, over-thinking, self-confidence* and *routines*), which are influenced by the *meaning of competition, winning, loss, positioned-identity* and *choices*, and influenced by *inter-relating with others* and *oneself* within the sports context. It is actually difficult to divide or understand anxiety by looking at only one factor or dimension without the other.

Athletes also exist within the four dimensions (*physical, personal, social* and *spiritual*) just as any human being. Even though the main focus of the research was on the

anxiety experiences, how the athlete exists in the world emerged as a theme in this research. Athletes are not only performers, but also human beings. Their anxiety is a normal experience, influencing them as a whole. Anxiety, similar to the existential perspective, is experienced as these athletes are *thrown into the world* with *givens* such as *death, freedom, choices, limitations and responsibilities*.

Billie Jean King said, *“Tennis taught me so many lessons in life. One of the things it taught me is that every ball that comes to me, I have to make a decision. I have to accept responsibility for the consequences every time I hit a ball”* (QuoteTab, 2019).

Anxiety, thus, needs to be addressed as a challenge that requires learning and understanding and not minimizing or removing as suggested in some research. The starting point in understanding anxiety is through meaning and the meaning of any anxiety experience is complicated and involves the whole life of the athlete. This is where the integration of existential therapy and MST could be vital in allowing the athletes to compete, and in understanding the athletes’ whole lived experience of anxiety. MST gives the athletes the skills to manage their anxiety so that they can perform and function better as athletes; existential therapy allows to understand a deeper level and consider anxiety across the four domains, which would help athletes develop not only as performers, but as whole beings. Brining both approaches together as a whole package for athletes enables them to embrace their lived condition of being human in the world.

Before ending this thesis, I will highlight the implications for the application of counselling psychology using the existential approach and professional practices for athletes

and coaches. I then address the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research in the field of sports and sports psychology. I have already discussed some of my reflexivity process in the methodology chapter earlier, I will discuss more about how my relationship with tennis has changed throughout this research journey at the end. The next two sections will first demonstrate the implications for counselling psychology (with an existential approach) and sports psychology respectively.

6.2. Implications for Counselling Psychology Practice: An Existential Approach

The complexity and depth of the experiences of anxiety for athletes emerging from this research, which follow an existential framework, adds to the implications for counselling psychology. These findings can be applied to any performer, be it a musician, dancer, or even a student, struggling with anxiety. Athletes, as suggested by Champ et al. (2018), spend most of their youth years competing and focusing on their performance, which makes up the most essential years of their development and identity formation, influencing how they grow and develop overtime. Counselling psychologists may help athletes, or performers, to their client population who would benefit from their work rather than limiting their practice within the clinical population, especially within the NHS context in the UK. How athletes create meaning beyond their career span is a counselling task. Counselling psychologists can help athletes understand what positioned-identity they developed and help them develop a new positioned-identity for their different career or life stages. Counselling psychologists can also guide athletes throughout their life transitions, aiding them in understanding their worldviews, beliefs and values and the meaning of their lives (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011).

Athletes, like human beings, share the human condition of existential angst (Van Deurzen, 2002). Athletes also face the existential givens such as ending, loss, choices,

responsibilities and limitations. These givens can be reflected in their lives on a bigger scale, such as the possibility of ending their careers, of getting injured, the limitations they may have with their time, their team, their finances, and their coaches' attitudes, in addition to the responsibilities that they have. On a smaller scale, tennis athletes also face givens even during their matches. For example, the match has an ending score, and an ending with loss for one of the opponents. They have choices they need to make during their matches, which will influence their performance and score; they have limitations not only with losing, but with playing against an opponent they do not like, a referee that is unfair, weather conditions that they do not prefer or a surface they do not feel comfortable playing on. Counselling psychology may help athletes better understand their givens, what they mean to them and how they influence them, whether on the small scale of the tennis court or on the bigger scale of their lives. These givens may be influencing their anxiety experiences not only during their competition, but in their daily living. The existential approach does not necessarily follow a certain technic of working but demonstrates the idea that there are existential givens and realities, part of the human conditions, that influence beings. Existential counselling challenges the concept that the self is fixed, proposing that exploring the relationship of beings to these givens may allow athletes understand the 'self' better (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011).

A clear example of the implications for counselling psychology, is what Andy Murray stated in the news (10 Jan, 2019). Murray announced the probability of retiring soon due to a debilitating hip injury. As he announced the unpredictable news he was tearful, not knowing how or when his career will end. Such an athlete, who had made it in the top four worldwide and was still young, might have to face an abrupt, unpredictable, and uncontrollable ending to his athletic career. This change will not only influence Murray the athlete, but the human being. With this transitional phase, the existential given of ending his career, he may

experience changes in his identity, and other existential aspects may emerge. This instance shows the significance and contribution of incorporating counselling psychology and the existential approach.

The existential approach suggests that the self is the outcome of how a person relates within the four dimensions, which are constantly changing as well (Van Deurzen, 2010; Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Counselling psychology is interested in the subjective experience, understanding the person's unique experience, looking at their whole context and focusing on how to help them grow and be empowered (Cooper, 2009). Counselling psychology using the existential approach may benefit athletes understand more how they exist within the four dimensions. For example, questions such as: How the athlete experiences anxiety? Is this athlete more focused on one dimension more than the other? If this were the case, how would this dimension influence the athlete? How do athletes relate to their bodies at different stages in their careers? If they were recovering from an injury or an illness, how would they experience their body and how would this experience influence their anxiety? How does the physical environment influence them and their anxiety experience? Do they experience anxiety when they play in the morning, afternoon, or at night; when they play in the wind, rain or sun; hard, clay or grass court? All these questions may help athletes gain a better understanding of themselves and their anxiety experience, allowing a therapeutic space for athletes to understand and challenge themselves to face their anxiety.

6.3. Implications for Sports Psychology

The themes and dimensions of anxiety that emerged from this research add implications to the sports psychology field. Sports psychology works on understanding and changing the behaviour, thoughts and emotions of athletes to improve their performance or decrease their stress (Tod, 2014). This field is highly influenced by the sports elite environment

that focuses on performance enhancement (Eubank, Nesti & Cruickshank, 2014), which is highly competitive (Mcdougall & Nesti, 2015). Even though sports psychology is more tool-oriented, aiming to teach practical skills that focus on improving performance (Henriksen, Diment & Hansen, 2011), it has been suggested to work more holistically with athletes, however, none of these studies were specific to tennis athletes (Ravizza, 2002; Nesti, 2004; Henriksen et al., 2011; Eubank et al., 2014).

Sports psychology would benefit more from integrating existential notions with MST. This will add to the richness and diversity within the field of sport psychology (Stelter & Roessler, 2005). Jacob (2013) suggested that existential coaching has been a field that can integrate existential concepts with more solution-based approaches. Existential coaching, similar to existential therapy, allows the practitioner to stay with the experience of the client to gain a rich description and understand the client's world through his or her own eyes. In existential coaching, the client is active in the process, working on forming and implementing their goals (Langdridge, 2012), which could satisfy the athletes' needs in many instances.

Sometimes athletes may not have very clear goals or may struggle with who they are, and the stage of their athletic career. For example, a few athletes felt they needed to soon decide whether they will stop or continue competing. This may have been affecting their anxiety for some time, as their career may be about to end. Landridge (2012) suggested that existential counselling works on clients, who may not have clear goals and who need to work more on understanding what they need and what they want. It also works for those who find it difficult to change their way of being, not only in relation to their performance but also in relation to their personal life (Landridge, 2012). For instance, Andy Murray, might have to change his whole way of being (positioned-identity), from a professional athlete and to a new being (with a new role). This would require learning new skills, new roles and a new

positioned-identity as a new journey unfolds. Coaching, meanwhile, does not usually focus on psychological problems and the notion of living an authentic life (Landridge, 2012), which is where existential counselling can fill the gap, providing athletes the space to grow and learn about themselves (Jacob, 2013).

Thus, it would be beneficial for sports psychologists to familiarize themselves with the existential approach, since at times athletes may need more than just enhancing their performance. Sports psychologists may benefit from understanding the whole context of the athlete, and to create mental skills around the athletes' lived world experiences. For example, before setting goals, which is a requirement for tennis athletes or any athlete (Crespo, Reid & Quinn, 2006), sports psychologists may try to understand what this sport means to these athletes, what competing means and what winning and losing means. This exploration will help them understand the athlete's goals in context and understand what it would mean to them if they do not reach their goals. In addition, working on motivation (Crespo et al., 2006 & Tod, 2014), could be more effective if sports psychologists had a better understanding of the meaning behind playing, and being motivated or demotivated.

Sports psychology may benefit from exploring the origin and meaning of athletes' thoughts and expectations, before categorizing some into debilitating thoughts that require restructuring, in an effort to control negative thinking (Crespo et al., 2006). This may help some athletes change the meaning they give to some of their thoughts. Furthermore, relaxation, and visualization techniques help athletes manage and control their anxiety, thus focusing more on performing during match play (Crespo et al., 2006).

This research showed that each athlete experiences and embodies anxiety differently. Sports psychology, then, may use the breathing or visualization exercise differently after exploring where and how anxiety is manifested and embodied with each athlete. This can be done by using the breathing to focus on specific body parts, to help each athlete manage their

anxiety based on their experience. This way of integrating an existential perspective may personalize these mental skills to work on each athlete's experience.

Mcdougall et al. (2015) also proposed that sports psychologists need to consider the different cultures and demands of each sport, their stakeholders, and their influence on athletes and coaches. The existential framework can also help sports psychologists look into how athletes relate with others and with the sports environment, which again may be directly influencing their performance.

In the end, this research provides sports psychology a different lens of working with athletes, as it sheds light to a new perspective of working that has been introduced in the literature, but not yet implemented with athletes. Even though this research is not the first to propose integrating an existential approach to working with athletes, this is the first to look at tennis athletes, their anxiety experiences and different ways of incorporating MST with an existential approach for them.

It would also be beneficial for coaches to learn more about the athlete as a whole being, not just as a performer. Their influence may at times push athletes to form an identity based on their performance, which may create great anxiety. It would also help coaches understand the necessity of agency and individuality of athletes and give them more freedom to choose for themselves their authentic paths. The next section will discuss the limitations of the study.

6.4. Limitations of the Study

There have been several limitations to the study that could have yielded different results if they were handled differently. The first of which is basing the study on a very small sample that varies in the career stage and living contexts.

The study initially aimed at purposive sampling to obtain as much homogeneity in the sample. However, the sample picked differed in context and stages of their tennis career and their aim of playing, which could have influenced the findings of the study. Although generalisation of data was not intended from the start, it ended up with a small sized sample with different contexts, which is considered a limitation.

I initially aimed at having an equal number of male and female athletes, which again did not materialize, as most of the research participants were female. This did not allow for any deeper analysis of the differences between female and male athletes' anxiety experiences, although the aim of the study again was not to infer or generalize any information. The aim was to mainly dig deeper and have a clearer insight into the complexity of the anxiety experiences of those professional tennis athletes.

Another limitation is the language barrier. Even though all athletes studied and spoke in English, English was not their mother tongue. Conducting the interview in English could have affected how well the athletes expressed themselves versus how they could have if the study was conducted in Arabic. However, if I would have administered the interview in Arabic, the translation process could have changed the meaning of the words, especially that the probing depends on the language used.

One of the limitations could have been using the words 'hindering performance' as a criterion for choosing participants. I initially chose this as a criterion, but the more I went along with the research findings the more I questioned whether it was right to add such a criterion from the start. Since my findings suggested that anxiety was a normal experience, I wondered whether using different sampling criteria might have yielded different results or not. Thus, it is recommended that future studies allow any player, who experienced anxiety without necessarily hindering their performance, participate to narrate their accounts of their experiences.

I expected that participants would speak about spirituality, which was surprisingly not brought up. Spirituality came up in terms of routines and meaning but did not come up in terms of flow experience, nor in terms of any spiritual practices that some athletes may do in relation to their anxiety in sports. Even though, this was one of the dimensions that I was looking at, I did not probe, capitalize, or ask directly about it, which might have generated different results if I had explored further. This could be one of the limitations of using the four-world model.

Finally, I have not also explored how the participants may have felt knowing that I was an ex-tennis player or that my children play tennis. I am not sure if all the participants knew this information. However, this may have posed a limitation to the research if they changed any of their responses based on that. After pinpointing the limitations of this study, I am going to suggest some recommendations for future research.

6.5. Recommendations for Future research

In future research, it would be important to carry out similar research across different cultures to see if the findings are applicable across cultures. In order to generalise the results, it would also be viable to carry out a survey based on the results of this research to gather larger sample of a diverse population.

It would also be interesting to explore the application of integrating both existential therapy and MST skills, balancing between both approaches to meet the needs of each athlete using a qualitative approach to understand how these approaches influenced athletes. It would be also interesting to explore the differences between male and female athletes and their various experiences, whether in the meaning of tennis for them or in their anxiety experiences. Another area of research that would be interesting is to explore differences of

experiences between Egyptians who play college tennis and those who continue competing and studying in Egypt and how this may influence not only their anxiety but also their perspective and experience of tennis as a whole. In addition, looking at the different experiences of anxiety between individual and team players.

6.6. My Journey with Tennis Throughout this Research

Reflecting on my journey with tennis alongside this research, it had been an amazing one. When I first came up with the topic, I had stopped competing for many years and have struggled to play consistently as I lost the main purpose of playing for me, which was *competing*. After stopping competition nearly 18 years ago, I decided that I would turn to running to maintain my fitness level in case I ever felt I wanted to go back to tennis, but I had lost the passion and joy of playing tennis when I stopped competing. I had also lost the sense of playing one of my main strokes, my backhand, which was very frustrating for me.

Once I started researching the topic, I started reading Agassi's (2009) book, which provided me with the resonance between an athlete's life and their performance. This book illustrated how the performance of Agassi was influenced by his life in general, in which he struggled more on-court as well as off-court. In addition, his quotation in section 2.8. really reminded me of how tennis resembled life and how it was and has remained to be a big part of my life. Thus, I decided to go back to training once a week, focusing mainly on feeling my backhand stroke. The more I read about the existential approach and the resonance between playing competitively and existing in life, the more I related to the research, and the more I felt like playing tennis again.

Throughout the past three years, the meaning making experience of tennis for me has shifted from pushing myself to regain my backhand stroke to enjoying the mere hitting of the strokes. This resonates with Ronkainen & Ryba's (2017b) research that explored how ageing athletes started to experience a new meaning for their sports rather than only caring about the

competitive part. Even though, I still enter the courts feeling that tennis runs in my blood and forms a huge part of my identity, I learned throughout this research to enjoy it for what it is, for the experience I get on the court, for the movement of the strokes, and for just rallying constant balls.

Although I struggled with getting myself to play points against players, I found myself asking questions similar to how I would ask an athlete, like: *what am I really scared of? And what would it mean to lose to someone younger?* I found that really helped me to try to push myself to acknowledge and stay with my anxiety and helped me to relate to tennis in another way that fits my context and where I am now as a *being in the world*, a new '*positioned-identity*'.

In the beginning of this research, I was enrolled onto the program, in the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, to train to be an existential psychotherapist. My research was thus mainly focused on adding the existential approach into working with athletes. Towards the end of the research process, this position shifted as my appeal to the British Psychological Society (BPS) for the Graduate Membership for Chartership application was successful. This enabled me to enroll onto the Counselling Psychology Doctorate programme with the trainee membership for the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology. This did not change my role as a *researcher* in integrating an existential approach in practice (as the data collection and analysis stages were already completed), but it necessitated a shift in my focus when considering the implications to the field of counselling psychology, on reflection and reflexivity, on evaluation and re-evaluation in terms of its impact, future research and practices, and how I locate myself when I become a counselling psychologist. I have already tried a five-week interactive group that incorporates an existential framework with MST for younger athletes, which I am aiming to develop more in the future. This experience taught me that even younger athletes may really benefit from this approach. I Introduced mental skills

and exercises after asking them phenomenologically about their experiences, trying to individualize the counselling on who they are, even in a group setting (See Appendix M). In addition, I have incorporated this integration while working with few adult athletes individually. Many athletes are currently working with mental/life coaches in Egypt, however, I hope that I would be able to incorporate my work as a counselling psychologist with athletes in Egypt using an existential integration to open up a space for athletes and parents to better understand who they are as athletes and beings with understanding their performance, helping them through their life transitions.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Age :

Gender :

National Rank :

International Rank (ITF or ATP):

Previous Psychological Support :

1. How long have you been playing tennis professionally?

2. What does playing tennis competitively mean to you?

What does winning mean to you?

What does losing mean to you?

3. What does anxiety in tennis mean to you?

4. Is this different than how you experience anxiety elsewhere?

How so?

5. How does this experience of anxiety feel in your body?

Where does it feel? What does it mean?

6. What affects the level of anxiety before or during a match

Weather, environment and/or court surface? Could you explain how?

Does it differ before or during the match? How different?

7. Do you feel the anxiety in tennis maybe impacted by others?

Who are those others? Coach, parent, teammate, opponent?

How does it impact?

Does it differ before or during a match? How so?

8. How do you prepare before a match?

Can you describe the process?

Can you talk me through it?

How does this make you feel?

What does it mean to you?

9. What are some of the choices you had to make competing or playing competitively?

How did you feel about these choices?

How do you feel about them now?

How do you feel they might have influenced your anxiety?

10. How does your view of your career as a tennis player in five years affect your anxiety?

What challenges would you face if you continued playing?

What would it mean if you don't make it?

Appendix B

Transcript Example

I: How long have you been playing competitively?

P: competitively, since I was mmm ten, *ya3ny* [I mean], I competed for the first time when I was nine, just one tournament and then when I was ten I started to compete regularly

I: Ok and how long have you been playing tennis?

P: since I was five

I: since you were five, ok, and what does playing competitively mean to you?

P: mmm it's *ya3ny* [I mean], it's a chance for me to apply, *ya3ny* [I mean], what I learn in practice, *ya3ny* [I mean], I practice to compete, mmm, so *bardo* [also], *ya3ny* [I mean], I love playing mmm *ya3ny* [I mean] competitively because competition is what *ya3ny* [I mean], what it's all for, *ya3ny* [I mean] I practice for the competition, I put all these hours training for the competition and it *bardo* [also], it gives me mmm a sense of I don't know how to describe it, ya I feel confident when I compete, *ya3ny* [I mean], mmm, it gives me also purpose, *ya3ny* [I mean] I set goals and I work for them so it gives me kind of *ya3ny* [I mean] a project to do, I don't just play for the sake of playing

I: so mmm for you competition means that you will be able to apply what you set like goals for and it will give you a purpose to like mmm apply the things you've want to apply, you mentioned something about confidence, so can you describe a bit what does that mean to you?

P: *ya3ny* [I mean] when I set a goal for myself, I'm gonna work on, I want my ranking to be higher or I want to play better, or I want to defeat this person and if I do that then I feel more confident, my confidence has been higher and if I face any challenges along the way, *ya3ny* [I mean] the match is hard or *keda* [like this], and I, I go through them, it gives me like, *ya3ny* [I mean] I feel like I can do anything in life in general

I: so what does confidence mean?

P: believing in myself, believing that I can do something hard or difficult

I: ok and what does winning mean to you?

P: winning (hahahaha) it's either winning mmm winning against someone so winning a match, or just even if sometimes I lose matches but I feel like I win because maybe I mmm, I see them better like apply what I learn or I am closer to my goals so I can be *bardo* [also] feeling like a

I: ok so mmm winning, winning can be like either if you're winning an opponent, that's what you mentioned or even if you have lost a match but you feel that you were better mmm or that you were able to apply something that you were training for, it may make you feel that you are a winner too. I'm wondering what winning means, when you win, what does that mean to you?

P: winning means, it means mmm, I don't know (hahahaha) what does winning mean, it means that I've defied some kind of odds against me (hahahahaha)

I: mmm are there certain odds that you feel?

P: ya there are certain expectations masala, when I 'm playing against someone who is higher in ranking or is more tougher than me, there are certain expectations that I'm not supposed to win this match, so if I win then this is defying what people expect me to, what the score is expected to be, mmm and *kamaan* [also] mmm *ya3ny* [I mean] what I expected myself, *bardo* [also] not just what others expect of me, what I expect for myself, I expect myself to win this match so mmm, if I win it then it's bravo, and if I go in the match with someone tougher or higher ranking mmm there is this *ya3ny* [I mean], there is a small expectation of I have of myself, maybe *ya3ny* [I mean] you are not supposed to win this match so if I do win it then I defied my own expectations

I: so odds seem to be mmm more related to expectations for you, either expectations that people have mmm of you or the expectations of the ranking, like just the, the, the, numerical ranking or the expectations you put on yourself, so winning would mean that you were able to defy one of these expectations. What about losing, what does losing mean to you?

P: mmm, a lot of times, losing for me, *ya3ny* [I mean], I feel like it's mmm it's because I did something wrong, mmm, maybe ya sometimes the opponent is tougher and maybe I can't escape losing but a lot of times I, I mmm, it's because I did something wrong or I didn't do something I'm supposed to do or mmm, so I kind of blame it on myself a lot, mmm, ya

I: so losing seems to be, seems to mean that you did something wrong

P: ya

I: should have done something else, that's mainly what losing means to you, so when you hear the word anxiety in tennis, what does that mean to you?

P: mmm fear of something, for me *ya3ny* [I mean]

I: fear of?

P: of a lot of things, it depends, it varies from one situation to another mmm,

I: can you like

P: maybe fear of losing the match, fear of mmm, how can I describe this, *ya3ny* [I mean] for example people expect me to win this particular match so it's fear of not fulfilling this expectation, fear of failing to mmm to, to, do my, what I'm supposed to do, mmm, and sometimes it's fear of winning, if I'm playing against someone I'm not supposed to defeat and I find myself I'm leading and I'm close to winning there is this anxiety that, *elly howwa* [which is], ok so it's very close so it's a fear of losing lead, I guess *bardo* [also]

I: can you explore that a bit, what do you mean by losing the lead?

P: *ya3ny* [I mean] when I'm winning against someone I'm not supposed to win

I: what's, how do you feel during that moment, when you when you, are starting to win someone good?

P: lot of times I lose concentration, I feel rushed, I feel *ya3ny* [I mean] that I need to rush to finish this match, mmm so that I don't give her a chance to make a comeback *aw 7aga* [or anything], mmm, these are *ya3ny* [I mean] all that happens

I: so what happens is that you lose concentration and there is a feeling that you are kind of rushed so that there is no time for her to come back, and you mentioned the fear might

have three things, either fear of losing or fear of not fulfilling the certain expectation you have of yourself or others have of you

P: both

I: ok, and the third things is fear of actually winning because if you are winning someone that you aren't supposed to win, what does that mean to you?

P: mmm, I don't know *ya3ny* [I mean], it's not what I expected so when I find myself that I'm winning I start to get a bit mmm anxious because now it's *ya3ny* [I mean] it's very close so I lose concentration from just playing and just hitting the ball to I'm close to winning, I'm close to winning, I have to get, you have to get this *ba2a* [actually]

I: I'm wondering what does, mmm, it's very close mean to you?

P: because mmm *ya3ny* [I mean] I'm leading against someone that I'm not supposed to be leading in this match, so

I: so what does that mean?

P: what does it mean *ya3ny* [I mean] in terms of score

I: no for you

P: for me *ah* [yes], *ya3ny* [I mean] I'm doing something I didn't expect myself to be doing, I didn't expect to be leading in this match and I find myself leading so it's kind of like, I find myself surprised at myself

I: ok, so it's just surprising that you are in the lead and then there is this sensation that you have to rush and you have to finish quick

P: ya

I: ok, so is this different than how you experience anxiety elsewhere outside of the court?

P: mmmm, what do you mean anxiety outside of the court

I: *ya3ny* [I mean] I mean outside of tennis, outside of competition, is this similar because you mentioned anxiety has to do with fears in different areas, fear of losing, fear of not fulfilling expectations, fear of winning, is this different than how you experience anxiety in other areas in your life?

P: mmm (*took time to answer*), I don't know, I don't experience anxiety that much outside of tennis, mmm, *ya3ny* [I mean], there is anxiety that normal people experience *howwa* [is] anxiety in exams or maybe from going on stage or giving a presentation mmm

I: what are these anxieties related to like the exam or the presentation?

P: mmm, (hahahaha), I don't know, I'm trying to relate it somehow (*felt she needed to relate it*)

I: I mean the anxieties coming from, in these like exams and presentations, they are coming from?

P: they are mainly coming from certain expectations *bardo* [also], mmm, mainly from myself, mmm, *ya3ny* [I mean] I experience anxiety more when I'm giving presentations or being in the spotlight, not *ya3ny* [I mean] during exams *awy* [that much], mmm so that happens when I'm mmm because I don't like being in front of people, all eyes are on me *fa* [so], so this can be maybe a bit of stage fright more

I: I was wondering if this kind of anxiety is by any way similar to the anxiety you might experience on the court while competing?

P: I find myself more anxious when I'm playing in a court that is maybe in the center court where a lot of people are watching and there is a big crowd, mmm, ya I get more anxious than when I'm playing in a court that is a bit far from the people

I: so what makes you more anxious in the central court when there are more crowd?

P: what makes me more anxious?

I: ya, ok, what makes you more anxious on the center court than a big court that is at the end?

P: when I feel that a lot of people are watching I feel that there are somethings I'm supposed to do and not supposed to do, so I feel a bit restricted but in, when I'm playing in a court that is a bit far off or a bit emptier *ya3ny* [I mean] I feel kind of more free to play how I want mmm and to play how I feel like winning

I: ok, can you describe a bit this restriction that you might be feeling sometimes?

P: mmm it's the same one that I feel when I'm maybe on stage when I'm giving presentations, I don't really think about them but I find myself mmm reacting to them, *ya3ny* [I mean] I'm more tense, mmm, I'm more aware of people that are around than *ya3ny* [I mean], it makes me lose my concentration *bardo* [also], *enno* [that is] I'm more aware that people are watching so I have to play well so this puts pressure on me to play well so I start to tense up and mmm and not really think of the match itself, I start really thinking about other things, I noticed maybe people who I know like old coaches or my coaches now or my teammates, or the parent of some player that I know and I know what they expect me to do, so this *bardo* [also] puts pressure on me to play in certain way

I: so I was wondering if this restriction, tension, pressure, does it, where do you feel it in your body?

P: mmm mostly in my chest and legs

I: ok

P: and ya, so my legs become really tensed so sometimes they start shaking and I wouldn't really move properly because they are so tensed, mmm I start breathing a bit more faster rate, so I feel like my chest is maybe a bit tight and mmm and the way I play itself, it starts to differ *ya3ny* [I mean], the way I play is not lose and free, I start to be a bit more tensed when I play so this shows *bardo* [also] in my strokes and in my footwork and *kol el 7agaat* [everything]

I: and you mentioned expectations a lot of times

P: ya hahahaha

I: I would like to explore more what expectations, I don't know if there is a difference between having expectations put from others or from yourself but I would like to explore more what they mean and if it is different?

P: mmm

I: mmm what, what, what, does it having expectations on you?

P: I can start by expectations I put on myself, *enno* [that is], I, I, train a lot and I, I, have maybe certain mmm expectations of how I play and who I would maybe defeat mmm, and mmm what score I'm supposed to either win or lose *ya3ny* [I mean] mmm and *bardo* [also] I think of what goals I set so if I, if I have this goal in mind that I want to be in the top ten for example and this is maybe I'm playing the last tournament in the season and if I win this match then I get enough points to get in the top ten, and this happened with me few years ago, so I have certain expectations of myself, I train a lot and I defeat this person, but it also puts pressure on myself, ok, ok, I'm expected to, to, to, win this match, I have to win this match

I: so, what is I'm expected mean to you?

P: from others or from myself

I: you started by yourself so I will ask about yourself first

P: I expect myself to win a certain match, this means that mmm *ya3ny* [I mean] I, I, should win it, I, I, deserve to win it from all the hard work I have to put in, mmm, the player in front of me I see as, I see myself that I am better than her so I should win it, mmm, I know how to defeat her, I know what tactic to use, so I still could win this match, it's all about like should

I: and what would happen if you don't what would that mean to you if you don't, if you don't do the 'should'?

P: again that I that I did something wrong, that I didn't, I wasn't focused enough, I didn't try hard enough

I: so it sounds like if you did not then either you did something wrong or you did not do something enough, how does the experience of anxiety, is it first of all, is the anxiety more before or during the match?

P: I guess more during,

I: during, ok, so how, how do you experience anxiety in your body, like where in your body do you experience it?

P: mmm, like I said in my chest and legs

I: ok, ok, mmm what affects like your level of anxiety before or during the match, what are the different things, I can give you an example, like the environment, the court surface I don't know

P: I find that I am more anxious when I'm playing against a player that I have defeated before (*interesting the use of word defeat*)

I: ok

P: mmm I become more anxious than when I'm playing that I have lost before mmm, I, when I'm playing in a court I've never played in before, so this, now it happens rarely because I've probably played in all courts in Cairo and during the match when I find a lot of people are watching so I'm a bit more anxious

I: so the three things that you mentioned until now is when you are playing against someone that you have won before, before when you used to play in a court that you didn't know, that you never have played before in, and the third thing is when people are watching, so when you play against someone that you won before, what's the anxiety about?

P: because I have this expectation of myself that I should win this match again because I won it before so why not win now

I: so does it differ before the anxiety before or during like in this situation?

P: mmm sometimes it does and sometimes not, sometimes before the match, I'm calm and ok but mmm sometimes mmm I find myself *ya3ny* [I mean] you mean the anxiety physically *ya3ny* [I mean] how it manifests physically

I: ya it would be good to explain a difference between the physical and what's the other one

P: like mentally

I: ok is there a difference between the physical anxiety and the mental anxiety, is there a difference for you, because you mentioned the anxiety physically versus mentally so can you explore a bit what you mean by physically versus mentally?

P: sometimes I'm not mentally anxious, I'm not, I'm completely like ok, I don't, I'm not, I'm not afraid of playing I want to play mmm, but I find myself mmm, my hands are maybe shaking, my hands are sweating, my chest is a bit tight, this is before the match

I: ok

P: so a lot of times, I don't get why my hands are shaking, I'm completely ready, I'm trained for this, I'm ok, so I don't really think *ya3ny* [I mean], I don't, *ya3ny* [I mean] there is not a lot of anxiety mentally but I find my body reacting to as if I'm anxious and during the match as well, during the match mmm I'm ok, I maybe winning or like, so maybe like at the beginning of the match mmm I am ok and I am ready and I like there is no problem mmm but I find my, my, legs are tense or stiff, I find myself mmm I can't maybe keep the rhythm because I'm anxious or

I: so it seems that you do feel sometimes there is a difference between your mental mmm anxiety and what you are thinking about versus how you are experiencing it in your body, sometimes you might feel that your hands are shaken or sweaty or your legs are stiffening up weather before or during the match but you feel that you're mentally not like, not thinking about it a lot or not anxious about it but there might be a difference so mmm you mentioned like if you're playing against someone that you won before the anxiety would come off from the expectations that you have to win her again that's what you mean right, mmm and this kind of anxiety is experienced in the way you have described even if you are not mentally thinking about it but physically you might be feeling it, what about in a court that you didn't play before?

P: mmm at first I am a bit overwhelmed I guess, I feel like my senses are a bit heightened *ya3ny* [I mean] but once I get used to it, I guess, *ya3ny* [I mean] it starts with bit, I'm a bit more aware of all my surroundings so that makes me sometimes lose concentration or lose track of the ball sometimes, not really think of the match itself but think about the, I'm not used to this surface mmm, the fence is too, too, close mmm, the sun is too bright, the trees are behind me *keda* [like this], this is maybe from the beginning to the middle of the match, it depends on the match itself *bardo* [also], sometimes I will I will still till the end of the match, I will think about all these things, think about when she is playing, for example, when she is playing the serve, I will be looking at what's behind her because I'm not used to this, sometimes it goes away during the match and sometimes not

I: ok, so what you mean by the, anxiety comes from being more aware of what's around the surrounding mmm, how you are experiencing the court itself, what's behind the player, you're more aware of what's going on around that it makes you lose focus on what's going on in the match, that's what you mean, mmm do you feel that your anxiety might be impacted by others in the tennis, so you mentioned the opponents but I'm not sure about coaches, teammates, parents?

P: *ya3ny* [I mean] the anxiety comes from

I: might be impacted, might be influenced by others whether your coach, your parents, your teammates

P: ya definitely, mmm, not so much from my parents, *ya3ny* [I mean] I don't feel that they expect me to win this but I feel like my coaches mmm more than my teammates

I: ok

P: mmm because the coaches I, I, work with them and I train with them so mmm so in turn they expect me to win certain matches mmm winning and perform in a like I used to, like, they expect me to apply what we did in practice through the matches, or what we discussed before the match, sometimes we would discuss what we do during the match before it with words so there is this expectation to win

I: so it sounds like with your coaches mainly the anxiety might be impacted with your coaches mainly due to the expectations of the things that you should be applying or you have trained on or something like that mmm, does the anxiety differ during or before the matches, is it influenced by the coaches?

P: mmm I would say both

I: so can you describe like before the match how it would be?

P: before the match if I'm still waiting for the match to begin, my coach and I would make sometimes mmm discuss the player I'm playing against maybe come up with a like a general plan of what I would do during the match, mmm and I think about that during the match so during the match, I think about ok, so he expects me to follow this plan, he expects me to do this, we talked about it before the match so I should do that, so that comes up *bardo* [also], during the match

I: how does that feel, that the coach might be, the coach is expecting or might be expecting something, how does that feel?

P: I feel like if I don't, if I don't do what he expects me to do or if I lose this match when he expects me to win, I would be kind of failing him as well

I: so you were saying that it feels that you might fail to do what he is expecting, what's the feeling itself because that's what goes on in your mind but what's the feeling itself?

P: mmm what's the feeling itself, mmm, maybe fear of, fear of disappointing him or fear of failing him, especially if mmm if I've been kind of, *ya3ny* [I mean] if I've been losing a lot of matches in a row so that's fear of failing him again

I: how does the fear feel?

P: mmm I don't know

I: *ya3ny* [I mean] do you have a certain of the fear or a certain sensation you get in your body when you experience fear?

P: mmm (*long pause to answer*) I don't know (hahahaha)

I: and what would it mean to you that you did not fulfill what he expected, or did not fulfill what he was expecting of you?

P: I turn it, a lot of times, I turn, a lot of times, I turn around at myself, so if I fail him again so I'm a failure, I didn't do what's expected, it's all, it's all because of me

I: mmm is the anxiety impacted by, mmm certain opponents, other teammates also?

P: mmm certain opponents that I played with before that I have defeated before mmm *bardo* [also] opponents that are maybe stronger than me or tougher than me that I've played a lot of great matches with them, there is this *bardo* [also] again expectations that I would perform as high as before

I: ok, and how do you prepare before the match?

P: you mean if I have any routine that I do

I: ya ya

P: mmm not much *ya3ny* [I mean] I don't prepare a lot before the match mmm I try not to think about the match itself, I just try to focus on just playing

I: how do you do that?

P: mmm I sometimes, I start to think about mmm matches that I've played before that I've done well, I can visualize it, I can see myself playing like loose without any tension mmm I listen to music, mmm, before mmm like I try to not think about this, because there are a lot of expectations on me so I try not to think about those but it still comes up, so I try to think about other things like how well I played the night before or mmm I start to visualize other matches that I've played where I played great, where I, I, sometimes talk about other things with my parents or my teammates, start discussing what happened during that day or that morning to not think about things

I: so it seems that it's more important to not think about the match mmm and kind of whether talk about other things with your teammates or your parents or visualize yourself playing good before, mmm, mmm, or listen to music before that's all before the match right?

P: ya

I: is the visualization or the music is something that you do before every single match?

P: no sometimes I don't even have time because sometimes I go from classes straight to the match so I don't have time to do all this so mmm, but if I'm waiting and the match is still, I still have a lot of time before so maybe I do those things

I: what about during like the match do you have a certain routine or do you have certain things that you need to do?

P: ya, before I serve I, *ya3ny* [I mean] I have a certain routine that I do right before serving, do you need details *ba2a* [actually] on what I do

I: ya

P: I, I, ok so what I do is that I go to the baseline, mmm, with my legs first, *ya3ny* [I mean] I position my legs first and then I bounce the ball only once and then I play the serve right after bouncing, mmm, so I can't bounce and then wait a few seconds I have to serve right

after it, mmm, ya and I, I, don't look at the opponent, after, like I would (hahahahaha) so I would position my legs on the baseline, I would look where the opponent is or where I want to serve and then I would bounce and then play the serve

I: how does that make you feel this routine and the serve?

P: I do it all the time, even during practice because mmm, especially with the serve, I've had a few *ya3ny* [I mean], mmm, problems last year that I couldn't serve because I was so anxious and I was so scared and panicky, mmm, so I made up this routine and I found that this routine helps me not, avoid panicking before serving

I: so how, how does it make you feel?

P: because I do it every time, it makes me feel like it's reassuring

I: it seems that it is reassuring that you that you will play well

P: it reassures you that I'm gonna play the serve well

I: it reassures you that you will be playing the serve well and what does that mean, you mentioned the panic what's the feeling?

P: I wouldn't say calm I would say mmm reassured, *ya3ny* [I mean], *ya3ny* [I mean], maybe more secure

I: ok so what about the visualization or the music, how do they make you feel before the match?

P: before the match mmm

I: you mentioned that you do before the match, I don't know if you do visualization during the match too?

P: no

I: so before the match how do they make you feel?

P: the thing with visualization is that sometimes it makes me more anxious and sometimes it makes me less anxious

I: ok

P: sometimes when I'm visualizing maybe past matches that I played and performed well, it makes me more anxious because it raises my expectations of myself, mmm but when that happens I just I stop it, I turn to something else, but other times it's mmm, it gives me some confidence in myself *enno* [that I] mmm I've played a tougher match than this, I've performed well even when I was under this kind of pressure, so sometimes it gives me a little boost of confidence that I could do this

I: ok, so sometimes it can raise the expectations mmm that can make you more anxious but sometimes it gives you confidence that you have performed well at tougher time so you can do this

P: it really depends on how I'm feeling even before I start visualizing, if I'm mmm, if I start and I'm already a bit anxious then maybe it makes me more anxious but if I need like, if I feel like I'm mmm too *nonchalant* [calm] *keda* [like this] *ya3ny* [I mean] not really caring about the match so this gives me a bit of a boost

I: so the anxiety is even affected before like, like before the visualization according to how you are thinking about the match, whether you care or you're super anxious or you don't care

P: so yes, a lot of matches, I really care about and I really want to win them and other matches, I, I, go in and, I don't really care what happens in the match, I don't care if I win or lose

I: when does that happen, when you go in the match and you don't really care?

P: it happens when I, when I don't have a certain expectation of myself during that match so I am for example, mmm playing against someone so is too good like I, there is no chance that I can win this match, so might as well, just go in and enjoy it, other times when I am really like when I'm fully in shape and I've been practicing really well and I have been playing really well for a while or if I just maybe won a tournament the week before so I feel really confident so I'm *ya3ny* [I mean], *ya3ny* [I mean] I don't go in with anxious thoughts, I go in a bit more confident with myself

I: so when you're more chilled or when you're less anxious is when there are no expectations and with the no expectation so it's either the opponent is too good that you feel there is no chance so might as well just go and play or when you are really in good shape when you feel or you've just won a tournament that you feel you are doing well or there are less expectations, so what are some of the choices that you had to make in order to compete, or continue playing competitively?

P: lot of sacrifices mmm I used to play music, I stopped because I couldn't find time to practice that with the daily practices plus University works so I don't really have time so I had to choose between music and tennis so I chose tennis, mmm a lot of times I choose tennis over sleep, and I sometimes choose going to practice instead of study so what other choices (hahahaha)

I: ok, so how did it make you feel to stop music for tennis for example?

P: I was sad of course because I wasn't playing music but I love tennis even more so I wasn't that sad after a while, I knew that I made the right choice

I: so how do you feel about it now?

P: mmm, now I still miss my music and I'm still sad that I had to quit, mmm, but when that, when I start to think about that I just remind myself that this is what I love more,

I: what kind of music were you playing?

P: violin

I: how do you feel about when you choose tennis, over studying and over sleep mmm, how do you feel about that?

P: mmm I don't always mmm *ya3ny* [I mean], when I, when I for example if I'm not sleeping more and I still go to practice I feel even more motivated because I'm going to practice even though I have a lot of things to do, or if I need sleep, so it gives me even, even, more *ya3ny* [I mean] more motivation to practice well and mmm and it gives me, it makes me love it even more because I'm doing this instead of like important things

I: so do you, how do you feel they influence your anxiety these choices you have taken?

P: mmm I don't know *ya3ny* [I mean], they don't know really affect my anxiety a lot, sometimes I when I start thinking about mmm that I stop playing music for example to do this and to play tennis and I'm not performing well for a while then I start to doubt myself, you chose this over music something that you also love so it might make me more anxious to play better

I: how does it make you more anxious?

P: because I'm cause I'm I've quit playing music to do this so this this *ya3ny* [I mean] (*took long time to think*) mmm so it makes me like want to be better because I, because I left something else to do this so I shouldn't be wasting time and I shouldn't be staying at this kind of level, I should be getting better

I: so it puts more since I chose tennis over something that is already very important then I should be doing better, that's more what happens and how it might affect your anxiety in a way

P: yes

I: ok, how does your view of your career or whatever, your view of being a tennis player, competitive tennis player in five years affect your level of anxiety?

P: nowadays, it makes me more anxious because mmm I keep thinking about, especially in the next five years, mmm, I keep thinking about my, even playing in my, to my best now, I should be, I should play my best now

I: what challenges would you be facing if you continue playing in five years?

P: mmm competitively mmm, financial challenge mmm, I will have to work as well, mmm, tennis is expensive so I have to work alongside competing so that's *bardo* [also] a challenge, mmm, and there is also *ya3ny* [I mean], what I will do after graduation with my degree for example, mmm, I think that sometimes in the picture I'm gonna have to make another choice whether to continue playing tennis or just play for fun or just quit altogether for other things

I: how would that be, that you might need to make other choices after couple of years?

P: *ya3ny* [I mean] I would mmm, I would maybe want to pursue another career so it would take a lot of my time so I have to choose between like that career and tennis

I: and what would it mean if you don't continue or you don't make it after five years or you don't continue competing after five years?

P: what would it mean, mmm, I don't, I wouldn't want that to happen but mmm I might be, I might have to do it even though I don't want to do it so that would be *ya3ny* [I mean] that would upset me of course more and mmm ya I would be upset because I love competing so now if I had to mmm, if I have to *ya3ny* [I mean], if I have to choose other things over tennis, mmm, and over competing *ya3ny* [I mean] then I would be very upset over that (hahahaha)

I: what would that mean to you that you're choosing other things over competing?

P: it means that even though tennis is like very big part of my life, there are things that are more important mmm for me *ya3ny* [I mean] and for my family *bardo* [also] as well

I: so it's like, it's kind of like mmm, tennis is, there are other things that will be more important than tennis in that stage of your life. Have you ever had any psychological

interventions, I'll call it with, psychological interventions, any psychological interference or support or something, support, have you received any psychological support whether for tennis, outside of tennis?

P: in tennis, we've had but that was few years ago, we've had a mental toughness coach a few sessions on mental toughness mmm and outside of tennis I mmm I went to counselling for, for, a few months that's outside of tennis

I: has it, mmm, like for example the support you had in tennis, the mental toughness influenced your anxiety?

P: mmm ya at the time, I remember that it did influence it because, ya3ny [I mean] I learned how to do things, I learned for example visualization technique and I learned the pre-point routine and it helped me till now, I still remember some of the things that we learned

I: what do you mean the pre-point routine, the one of the serve?

P: ya

I: do you do it in any other stroke?

P: a lot of times, it's not, it's not every single point but if I'm playing and I find myself more, I just turn around and go to the fence and then turn around again just to slow myself down and this is what I learned *bardo* [also] ya, this is what I apply

I: ok, and you don't need to give any details but and you can refrain from answering and the counselling that you have taken outside of tennis, has it influenced your anxiety?

P: ya it made me more aware of why I'm experiencing anxiety because mm I didn't know why I am anxious, or why my legs are shaken, or why I'm having these anxious thoughts so it made me even more aware of them so when I start now when I start to get anxious either before or during the match I would detect it, ok so you are feeling anxious because of this so I try to, this makes me try to resolve it

I: so in a way you got a better understanding of why this happens to you and you can detect in and work on it on the spot

P: ya

I: thank you so much

Appendix C

IPA Theme Template

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Lines</i>	<i>Key Text</i>						
Anxiety		anxiety is fear	fear depends on different situations	fear of losing	fear of not fulfilling expectations	Sometimes fear of winning	fear of losing the lead	outside of tennis normal anxiety
		anxiety in exams and stage	outside of tennis anxiety from expectations	from being in the spotlight	from being watched by many	not thought about but reacted to	experienced as tense even if not thought of	experienced in legs and chest
		legs tense up and shaky	chest tightens up and breathe faster	way of playing is different	affects stroke and footwork	do not play loose and free	more during the match	when playing against someone defeated before
		when play in a new court	difference between mental and physical	sometimes not mentally anxious but physically anxious	when anxious and body reacts don't know why	most of anxiety is not mental	view of future makes me anxious	
Physical Influence		Anxiety is experienced in legs and chest	Legs tense up and become shaky	Chest start breathing faster and chest tight	Different kinds of anxiety mental and physical	Difference between what thinking about and how body is feeling	Sometimes not mentally anxious but physically anxious (body is shaking and tight before the match)	When anxious body react, sometimes do not understand why physically anxious

		Most of the anxiety is not mental	During the match, I maybe winning or ok but I find my legs tensed and stiff	During the match, more anxious when play on a new court	When play in a new court, feel more aware of all the surroundings that are new	When play in a new court lose concentration	More anxious when not used to the surface/physical environment	Anxiety with new surrounding may fade away during the match depends on the match
		During the match, more anxious when play on the centre court	Counselling made me aware of why experiencing anxiety, I detect when I'm anxious more					
Competition		Chance to apply what I learn	Practice to compete	Love competition	Competition is what all for	Competition gives me sense	Feel confident when compete	Gives me purpose,
		Gives goals and project	If didn't continue competing will be very upset					
Winning		Winning has more than one meaning	Winning against someone	Could be when lose can feel like winner when get closer to goals or apply what learned	Means defying odds against me	If win someone tougher then defy expectations	When winning against someone not supposed to win, lose concentration, feel rushed, feel need to the match finish match	
Loss		Feels like did something wrong	Feels like did something not supposed to do	Most of time throw blame on myself	Sometimes cannot be escaped if someone is tougher			

Identity		Even though tennis is a big part of life, there are other things that might be important for me						
Routine		Routine try not to think of match itself, try to focus on playing	To focus on playing try to think about matches played before	I visualize myself playing smooth without tension	Listen to music	Try to think about how well played night before	Try to visualize when play well	Visualization sometimes makes me more anxious and sometimes less anxious depending on how I feel before the visualization
		Visualizing past matches that played well, more anxious because raises expectations of myself	When anxious from visualization, I turn to something else	Sometimes visualization gives me confidence in self that played a tougher match, performed well when under this pressure		Anxiety with visualization depends on how feel before the visualization	If a bit anxious before then makes me more anxious	If not care then gives confidence

		Sometimes don't have time to do music or visualization but if have time waiting then do those things	I do routine before serve	Was anxious before with serve, had problem with it so was scared and anxious	This routine helps me and avoid panicking	routine is reassuring	Routine reassures that will play serve well	When reassured more secure
Thinking		Routine try not to think of match itself, try to focus on playing	To focus on playing try to think about matches played before	Try not to think because of many expectations	Even though try to avoid thinking, thinking still comes up	Try to think about other things	Try to think about how well played night before	To avoid thinking talk about other things with parents and teammates
Expectations		When play against someone tougher and expectation not supposed to win	Have expectations on self and others have expectations on me	When win defy my own expectations or others' expectations of me	Anxiety is fear of not fulfilling the expectations	Expectations increase when leading against someone not supposed to lead, feel rushed and more anxious	Expectations increase when leading against someone not supposed because it is getting closer	Expectations when get close to winning means I have to get this
		When close to winning from someone not expected to win feel surprised that did something not expected	Outside of tennis anxiety comes from expectations from self and others	When being watched by others feel expectations have to be met	When coaches, teammates and/or players' parents watch me I know what they expect me to do so feel pressure	Expectations placed by myself	Expectations of myself of how I play	Expectations of who I would defeat

		Expectations of what the score is supposed to be	Expectations of what goals I set for myself	Expectations of how many points will win	Expectations of myself puts pressure on me	Expectations of myself to win this match	Expect means I should win or deserve to win after all hard work and effort	Expect means seeing myself better than the opponent
		Expect is because I know how to defeat the opponent or know the tactics	Expectations is all about the should	If do not do should then feel I did something wrong or not focused or did not try hard enough	More anxious from my coaches and teammates, because they expect me to apply what did in practice,	More anxious from coaches and teammates because they expect to perform and win	Coaches expect me to win	Coach expect me to follow the plan
		When coach expects me, I feel if do not do what is expected feels like failing him, disappointing him	If not do what coach expect fear of failing or disappointing coach,	If lost a lot then fear of disappointing or failing again	When not fulfil expectations, I turn around myself and call myself a failure	When not fulfil expectations blame myself	Anxious with opponents that played with or stronger or tougher that played well expectation that have to perform as well as before	Try not to think because of many expectations
		Visualizing past matches that played well, more anxious because raises expectations of myself	Future view of career makes me feel more anxious increases the should and expectations					

Confidence		When set goals and do good	When face challenge and pass it	When believe that can do difficult things	Care less when fully in shape, practice daily, or if won a tournament the week before so confident then not very anxious	If do not care about the match before the match then visualization gives confidence		
Choices and Sacrifices		Couldn't find time to practice music with practice and Uni so had to stop music	Chose tennis over music, sleep, studying	Sad with choice of stopping music	I miss my music and feel sad to quit	When start to think remind myself that love tennis more	Because of sacrifice more motivated to play well	Because of sacrifice love it more, because doing it instead of other important things
		Anxiety is more sometimes when I think of the sacrifice or what I stopped		If not performing well for a while doubt myself cause chose tennis over music	Because of choice makes me want to be better because left something else to do this, so shouldn't be wasting time	Due to financial challenges if continue playing so will have to work while playing which will be challenging	Increase anxiety because will have to make a choice about tennis in the future	Have to choose between tennis and career
		If have to choose things over tennis then will be upset	Even though tennis is a big part of life, there are other things that might be important for me					

<i>Influence of Others</i>		Experience anxiety when being in the spotlight	Experience anxiety when being watched by many inside of the court	Experience anxiety when placed in the centre court when it is crowded	Experience anxiety when being watched by many outside of the court	When people are watching I feel that there are expectations have to be met	When many people are watching the match feel expectations and feel restricted	When play in empty court feel freer to play
		When people outside of tennis in presentations do not think about tension but react to it	When people are watching inside or outside of tennis become tensed	When people are watching inside or outside of tennis become aware of people	When people are watching inside or outside of tennis lose concentration	When people are watching me play places expectations on me to play well	When people are watching me play puts pressure due to expectations	When people watch me play feel tense
		When people watch me play lose focus of thinking in the match and start thinking of other things	When coaches, teammates or players' parents watch me play know what they expect me to do so feel pressure	More anxious when playing against someone defeated before	More anxious during the match when a lot of people are watching	More anxious when playing someone defeated because expectation that I should win since won before	More anxious from my coaches and teammates, because they expect me to apply what did in practice	More anxious from coaches and teammates because they expect to perform and win
		Coaches expect me to win	Anxiety experienced with coaches is both before and during the match	Before the match, coach discusses player and come up with plan	Think about the coach's plan during the match	Coach expect me to follow the plan	When coach expects me, I feel if do not do what is expected feels like failing him, disappointing him	If not do what coach expect fear of failing or disappointing coach

		If lost a lot then fear of disappoint ing or failing again	Anxious with opponents that played with or stronger or tougher that played well expectatio n that have to perform as well as before					
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Appendix D

PESC Form




Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes



FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Application No.:	Click here to enter text.	Decision	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.
		:			

RISK ASSESSMENT *(complete relevant boxes):*

	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Signed by:	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> Programme Leader
Date:	Click here to enter a date.		

LETTER/S OF ACCEPTANCE/PERMISSION MATCHING FRA1 (RISK ASSESSMENT)

RECEIVED (SPECIFY):

	Date	From	Checked by
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ll	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	<input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics Admin
art	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	<input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics Admin
art	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	<input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics Admin

DBS Certificate(s) Required? *(complete relevant boxes):*

DBS certificate required?	C li c k h er e to c h o o s e a n it	Seen By:	Choose an item.
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	e m .		
DBS Certificate Number:		Date DBS Issued:	Click here to enter a date.

Summary of application (researcher to complete)

Title of Proposal:	Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A Phenomenological Exploration of Lived Experiences of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes
Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor	Dr. Simon Cassar
Name of Student Researcher(s) and student number(s)	Mai Kabbani M00475243
<i>Please click one of the following:</i>	

	Proposed start date	September 2016	Proposed end date	May 2017
--	----------------------------	----------------	--------------------------	----------

Details of any co-investigators (if applicable)

1. Name: Click here to enter text.	Organisation: Click here to enter text.	Email: Click here to enter text.
2. Name: Click here to enter text.	Organisation: Click here to enter text.	Email: Click here to enter text.
3. Name: Click here to enter text.	Organisation: Click here to enter text.	Email: Click here to enter text.

Topic/Research Area (tick as many as apply)

Methodology (tick as many as apply)

	<i>Are there any sensitive elements to this study (delete as appropriate)? If you are unclear about what this means in relation to your research please discuss with your Supervisor</i>	Yes
1	<i>first</i>	

<p>2</p>	<p><i>If the study involves any of the first three groups above, the researcher may need a DBS certificate (Criminal Records Check). PG students are expected to have DBS clearance.</i></p> <p><i>Does the current project require DBS clearance? Discuss this matter with your supervisor if you unsure</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Does the study involve ANY of the following?</p> <p><i>Clinical populations; Children (under 16 years); Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental or physical health problems, prisoners, vulnerable elderly, young offenders; Political, ethnic or religious groups/minorities; Sexually explicit material / issues relating to sexuality; Mood induction; Deception</i></p>	<p>No</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Is this a resubmission / amended application?</p> <p><i>If so, you must attach the original application with the review decision and comments (you do not need to re-attach materials etc if the resubmission does not concern alterations to these). Please note that in the case of complex and voluminous applications, it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify the amended parts of the resubmission.</i></p>	<p>No</p>

By submitting this form you confirm that:

you are aware that any modifications to the design or method of the proposal will require resubmission;

students will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until completion of your studies at Middlesex, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and your supervisor will be able to access the data);

staff will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until the appropriate time after completion of the project, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and other members of your team will be able to access the data);

students will provide all original paper and electronic data to the supervisor named on this form on completion of the research / dissertation submission;

you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and *Code of Human Research Ethics*.

2 Ethical questions – all questions must be answered

1	Will you inform participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, without penalty?	Yes
2	Will you provide a full debriefing at the end of the data collection phase?	Yes
3	Will you be available to discuss the study with participants, if necessary, to monitor any negative effects or misconceptions?	Yes

4	Under the Data Protection Act, participant information is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Will participant anonymity be guaranteed?	Yes
5	Is this research or part of it going to be conducted in a language other than English? <i>Note, full translations of all non-English materials must be provided and attached to this document</i>	No
6	Is this research to be conducted only at Middlesex University? <i>If not, a completed Risk Assessment form - see Section 8 – must be completed, and permission from any hosting or collaborative institution must be obtained by letter or email, and appended to this document, before data collection can commence. If you are conducting an online survey or interviews via skype or telephone whilst you are at Middlesex University you do not need to fill in the risk assessment form.</i>	No

If you have answered ‘No’ to questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 above, please justify/discuss this below, outlining the measures you have taken to ensure participants are being dealt with in an ethical way.

My research is on tennis players in Egypt, which is my home country. I will be following all the ethical guidelines required to ensure I am dealing with participants in an ethical way. I have taken the permission of the Egyptian Tennis Federation to use their office premises (see attached letter). I will ensure I have parents’ informed consent for players under the age of 21 as the law in Egypt would consider them minors. (Please see proposal page 23).

Please see attached risk assessment form that addresses measures taken to ensure participants are being dealt in an ethical way.

Are there any ethical issues that concern you about this particular piece of research, not covered elsewhere on this form? If so please outline them below

I am going to start by sending an advert on the Egyptian tennis federation website, explaining my research, however, if no one replies back or if I do not get enough participants, I am thinking of having flyers ready for coaches to hang on their noticeboards or leave them in the changing rooms, where the players are present. I am thinking of asking the coaches to send a blanket message on the WhatsApp tennis group (as the communication between coaches and players occur through WhatsApp and not through emails in Egypt) about the research and my contacts. I am aware that some players might feel the need to participate if their coaches sent a message versus just seeing an advert on the website. However, this will be a blank message with no coercion (just a notice about the research); in addition, I will explain to these players that they have the right not to participate if they do not want, or refrain from answering any question(s), and/or stop the interview when they wish. In addition, I will be using the snowball sampling methodology as the word of mouth is something that might be highly effective in Egypt, especially that the number of participants is not high.

The interview is unlikely to cause any direct harm to the participants, however, there might be a possibility that they may feel distressed after speaking about personal experiences. As suggested in the proposal and participant information sheet, I will check with the participant and if they wish I will stop the interview immediately. Participants will be told that they do not have to answer any question if they are uncomfortable in doing so. It is also possible that when talking or thinking about their anxiety, some of the players may become more aware of certain issues, which might influence with their performance later. I will tell them beforehand that if this happens they could ask for sources of support.

3 Research proposal

This section should contain sufficient information to enable the ethics committee reviewer to evaluate the ethical status of the research. A research proposal would normally be around 2 A4 pages in length (about 800 words) excluding references and additional materials. The headings below are indicative, and you may choose whether or not to use them.

Please Find Research Proposal Attached

Aims and Hypotheses/Research Questions

Please refer to page 3 in the proposal

Supporting literature and rationale

This section should include a brief discussion of previous research in the area which justifies your choice of topic, aims, hypotheses and research questions

Please refer to pages 6-18 in the proposal

Method

The four sub-headings under method (design, participants, materials and procedures) should contain details about the design, participants, recruitment (including how and from whom will informed consent be obtained), provision of information and, where necessary, deception.

Design

Please refer to page 19 in the proposal

Participants

Please refer to pages 22-23 in the proposal

Materials (if appropriate)

Procedures

Please refer to pages 23-25 in the proposal

Details of the procedures, and what the participant will experience as part of the research are critical.

Analysis

You should also include some discussion of how the data will be analyzed.

Please refer to page 24 in the proposal

Ethical Concerns and Challenges

Please refer to pages 25-28 in the proposal

References

*Full references and **any materials developed or adapted for this research** should also be included (this includes but is not limited to questionnaires, rating scales, and images). If due to the addition of these materials your file exceeds 3 MB, or if materials cannot be scanned for copyright reasons, they should be clearly identified in the research proposal. You need to provide references for Questionnaires which have been previously published/validated.*

Please refer to pages 33-39 for the references in the proposal

Please refer to pages 30-32 for the questionnaire in the proposal

S. Cassar

Mai Kabbani

16/5/2016

16/5/16

Dr Simon Cassar

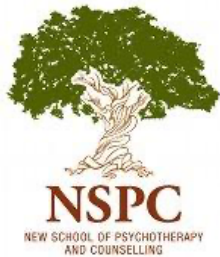
Mai Kabbani

Supervisor

Student

Appendix E

Change in Ethics Application



Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A
Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences
of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes



Request to Change in the Ethics Application

I would like to request that the ethics board would allow me to change the way I could approach my participants. I had earlier requested to place an advert on the Egyptian Tennis Federation website but I have only received two replies from participants during their off season, which ended in January. I am aware that most players are in the competition season so they might not be free this period. There are no tennis publications in Egypt; all communication or publications occur through the Facebook account of the tennis federation or through the tennis federation website, which I already posted my advert on. I would like to have flyers ready for coaches to put on their noticeboards or in the changing rooms in the clubs where players stay. In addition, coaches usually communicate with their players through the tennis group WhatsApp application here in Egypt, not through emails; thus, I could ask coaches to send a blanket advert on the team WhatsApp to inform the players of the research and my contacts. I would also like to add the snowball sampling method (word of mouth), as this method maybe effective in Egypt especially in a small community.

Appendix F

Risk Assessment



Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A
Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences
of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes



INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT FRA1

This proforma is applicable to, and must be completed in advance for, the following field/location work situations:

- 1. All field/location work undertaken independently by individual students, either in the UK or overseas, including in connection with proposition module or dissertations. Supervisor to complete with student(s).*
- 2. All field/location work undertaken by postgraduate students. Supervisors to complete with student(s).*
- 3. Field/location work undertaken by research students. Student to complete with supervisor.*
- 4. Field/location work/visits by research staff. Researcher to complete with Research Centre Head.*
- 5. Essential information for students travelling abroad can be found on www.fco.gov.uk*

FIELD/LOCATION WORK DETAILS

Name: Mai Kabbani	Student No M00475243 Research Centre: (staff only)	
Supervisor: Dr. Simon Cassar	Degree course Professional Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling	

NEXT OF KIN Telephone numbers and name of next of kin who may be contacted in the event of an accident	Name: Phone:
Physical or psychological limitations to carrying out the proposed field/location work	None
Any health problems (full details) Which may be relevant to proposed field/location work activity in case of emergencies.	None
Locality (Country and Region)	Cairo, Egypt (Hometown)
Travel Arrangements NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas field/location work.	Travel Arrangements: Private Own Car Bupa Medical Insurance (BI-)
Dates of Travel and Field/location work	Autumn, Winter & Spring 2016-2017

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION VERY CAREFULLY

Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed (Col. 1). For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern (Col. 2).

Examples of Potential Hazards :

Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia)

Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.

Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.

Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (weils disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc), parasites', flooding, tides and range.

Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.

Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.

Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc), working at night, areas of high crime.

Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies, fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.

Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury.

Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage

Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task

If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE (specify here the exact name and address of each locality/organization)	2. POTENTIAL HAZARDS
<p>The Egyptian Tennis Federation</p> <p>Address of the premises: El Estad El Bahary Street.</p> <p>The New Building of Elathadat Elryadiah, 3rd floor, flat 8, Nasr City, Cairo, Egypt.</p>	<p>One-to-One interviews. (I will be conducting the interview on my own, however, this will not be lone working as there will always be others in the premises during the interview. I will set the interview at times when other people are present in the premises.)</p> <p>There might be a possibility that anyone of the participants gets angry, upset or threatening during the interview; if this happens there will always be someone in the building to call for help. I could also take one of the federation employee's phone number (who I know will be always there in the building) to call in case of any emergency too. I will always keep the phone next to me to be able to approach it in case I need to.</p>

The University Field/location work code of Practice booklet provides practical advice that should be followed in planning and conducting field/location work.

Risk Minimization/Control Measures PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY

For each hazard identified (**Col 2**), list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken (**Col 3**) to "reduce the risk to acceptable levels", and the safety equipment (**Col 5**) that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted (**Col. 3**), categories the field/location work risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high (**Col. 4**). Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of

the consequences of an accident.

An acceptable level of risk is: a risk which can be safely controlled by person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

Examples of control measures/precautions:

Providing adequate training, information & instructions on field/location work tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment prior to use. Assessing individual's fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved. Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.). Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances. First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements). Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.** Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organizations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organizations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of field/location work area.

Examples of Safety Equipment: Hardhats, goggles, gloves, harness, waders, whistles, boots, mobile phone, ear protectors, bright fluorescent clothing (for roadside work), dust mask, etc.

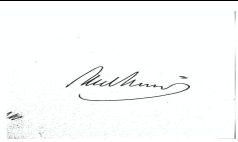

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

3. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	4. RISK ASSESSMENT (low, moderate, high)	5. SAFETY/EQUIPMENT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will make sure someone is present in the premises. 2. I will not take later appointments than 7 p.m. 3. I will be wearing appropriate conservative clothes. 4. I will always have a mobile phone with me and will call my spouse beforehand to inform him that I will be starting the interview and it might take up to two hours 	<p>Low</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will bring a mobile phone with me in every interview

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND SIGN AS APPROPRIATE

DECLARATION: The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.

NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the field/location work period and additional precautions taken or field/location work discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.

Signature of Field/location worker (Student/Staff)		Date:	16/5/16
Signature of Student Supervisor		Date:	16/5/16
APPROVAL: (ONE ONLY) Signature of Director of Programmes (undergraduate students only)	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.
Signature of Research Degree Co-ordinator or Director of Programmes (Postgraduate)	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.
Signature of Research Centre Head (for staff field/location workers)	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.

FIELD/LOCATION WORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes
(where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field
conditions:

<input type="checkbox"/> Safety Knowledge & Training?	<input type="checkbox"/> Awareness of cultural, social & political differences?
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal clothing & safety equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Suitability of field/location workers to proposed tasks
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical & psychological fitness & disease immunity, protection & awareness?	

2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to

<input type="checkbox"/> Visa, permits?	<input type="checkbox"/> Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Legal access to sites and/or persons?	<input type="checkbox"/> Suitability of field/location workers to proposed task?
<input type="checkbox"/> Vaccinations and other health precautions?	<input type="checkbox"/> Safety equipment and protective clothing?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Financial and insurance implications?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Travel and accommodation arrangements?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Health insurance arrangements?	<input type="checkbox"/> Arrival times after journeys?
<input type="checkbox"/> Civil unrest and terrorism?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emergency procedures?
<input type="checkbox"/> Crime risk?	<input type="checkbox"/> Transport use?
<input type="checkbox"/> Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?	

Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk

assessments:

Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the field/location worker participating on the field course/work. In addition the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.

RP/cc Sept 2010

8 1st Reviewer's decision

Click here to choose a decision

For Revise and Resubmit decisions, particular attention should be paid to the following:

- ☐ Section 1 details incomplete ☐ Clarity of Research Proposal
- ☐ Risk Assessment
- ☐ Professionalism and presentation of participant documentation (information sheet, informed consent, debriefing)
- ☐ Completeness of ethical approval form (individual questions requiring clarification may be identified here)

Additional comments from Reviewer 1:

Click here to enter text.

FOR DOUBLE REVIEW ONLY – Reviewer 2

Click here to choose a decision

For Revise and Resubmit decisions, particular attention should be paid to the following:

- ☐ Section 1 details incomplete
- ☐ Clarity of Research Proposal
- ☐ Risk Assessment
- ☐ Professionalism and presentation of participant documentation (information sheet, informed consent, debriefing)
- ☐ Completeness of ethical approval form (individual questions requiring clarification may be identified here)

Additional comments from Reviewer 2:

Click here to enter text.

Appendix G

Pamphlet



Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes

RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY

Mai Kabbani

(Existential Psychotherapist and Counsellor in Training)

This research will explore what it is like to experience anxiety before and during competition as an Egyptian Professional tennis player and how anxiety might be affecting performance and/or other areas in your life. To participate in this study, you will need to have any experiences of anxiety before or during competition that you feel might influence your performance at instances. You will also need to be between the ages of 18 years and 25 years old at the moment to be part of this research. For those between the ages of 18 and 21 years old, parental consent is a condition to make sure it is ok with them that you participate in the research. The interview will be conducted in English.

If you fit these criteria and would like to take part in this study you will be asked to come to a face-to-face, informal interview with the researcher. If you are interested in learning more about taking part, please contact:

MK1524@live.mdx.ac.uk

OR 01090836110

(This number is available Sundays through Thursdays from

10:00 a.m. to

8:00 p.m. starting September 30, 2016 to December 30, 2017)

Thank you for taking the time to read this flyer and most of all for being interested to take part in my research. Even if you are unable to participate in my research but know of someone who you think would like to be part of it please forward this flyer to them. This research project has received full ethical approval from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, and Middlesex University ethics panel. The research is supervised by Dr Simon Cassar.

Appendix H

Participant Information Sheet



Information about a research project:

Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A

Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences

of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes



Participant Information Sheet

Being carried out by: Mai Kabbani

Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling from NSPC
and Middlesex University

NSPC Ltd
Existential Academy
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London
NW6 1DR
UK

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

Dated: 14 May 2016

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the research?

This study is being carried out as part of my studies at NSPC Ltd and Middlesex University. Many tennis players experience anxiety before and during competition. Sometimes these experiences have been reported by players to hinder their performance. There has been a lack of understanding the experiences of anxiety for players both before and during competition. Previous research has measured how much players experience anxiety only pre-competitively without exploring the anxiety during competition and the understanding of the experiences.

This research aims at looking into anxiety both pre and during competition. My study is designed to explore anxiety and its effects on the player's life and how other areas of the athlete's life may influence anxiety too. You are being asked to participate because you have replied to my advertisement for players who have self-reported some experiences of anxiety while playing competitively.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I would like to interview you once; we will arrange the interview according to your convenience. The interview will last from 60-90 minutes and will contain several questions. You can refrain from answering any question if it will make you uncomfortable. I have the tennis federation's permission to use their office for the interview. All the information will be completely confidential. I will use a qualitative research method to extract main themes. The information from the interview will be combined with other information from other players in the analysis.

What will you do with the information that I provide?

I will transcribe the interview myself; I will not use your full or last name in the interview transcripts. I will be recording the interview on a digital recorder, and will transfer the files to an encrypted USB stick for storage, deleting the files from the recorder. All of the information that you provide me will be identified only with a project code and stored either on the encrypted USB stick, or in a locked filing cabinet. I will keep the key that links your details with the project code in a locked filing cabinet.

The information will be kept at least until 6 months after I graduate, and will be treated as confidential. Abstracts from your interview might be used anonymously in the thesis. In addition, if my research is published, I will make sure that neither your name nor other identifying details are used.

Data will be stored according to the UK Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

It is unlikely that participating in this research will cause you harm; however, talking about personal experiences may be distressing. If so, please let me know, and if you wish, I will stop the interview. It is also possible that talking about anxiety might make you more aware of it and if you feel this might impact your performance you can ask for sources of support. Although this is very unlikely, should you tell me something that I am required by law to pass on to a third person, I will have to do so. Otherwise whatever you tell me will be confidential.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We do not understand the whole experiences of anxiety for professional tennis athletes and it might be helpful for some athletes in the future to understand some of these experiences. Being interviewed about your experiences has no direct benefit although some people may find it an opportunity to reflect on their experiences or understand their own process of anxiety, and could find this beneficial.

Consent

You will be given a copy of this information sheet for your personal records, and if you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form before the study begins.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part, you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Who is organizing and funding the research?

This research is a doctoral research and is completely self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC research ethics sub-committee has approved this study

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

If you have any further questions, you can contact me at:

Mai Kabbani

NSPC Ltd

Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London

NW6 1DR

UK

MK1524@live.mdx.ac.uk

01090836110

(This number is available Sundays through Thursdays

from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. starting September 30, 2016 to December 30, 2017)

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, you may contact my supervisor:

Dr. Simon Cassar

NSPC Ltd

Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London

NW6 1DR

UK

s.cassar@mdx.ac.uk

Or

NSPC Ltd

Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London

NW6 1DR

UK

Admin@nspc.org.uk

0044 (0) 20 7624 0471

Appendix I

Informed Consent



Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A
Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences
of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes



Informed Consent

Title of study: Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A
Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Anxiety for Professional
Egyptian Tennis Athletes

Academic Year: Third Year (Spring 2016)

Researcher's name: Mai Kabbani

Supervisor's name: Dr. Simon Cassar

Supervisor's email: s.cassar@mdx.ac.uk

1. I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.
2. I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.
3. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
4. I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

Print name

Sign Name

Parent's name (if applicable)

Sign Name

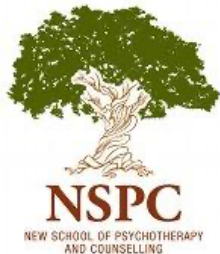
date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

Appendix J

Debriefing Sheet

Information about the research project:



Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A
Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences
of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes



Debriefing sheet

NSPC Ltd
Existential Academy
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London
NW6 1DR
UK

Researcher: Mai Kabbani

MK1524@live.mdx.ac.uk

01090836110

(This number is available Sundays through Thursdays

from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. starting September 30, 2016 to December 30, 2017)

Supervisor: Dr. Simon Cassar

NSPC Ltd

Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London

NW6 1DR

UK

Email: s.cassar@mdx.ac.uk

Date: 14 May 2016

Beyond the Notion of Performance Anxiety: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Anxiety for Professional Egyptian Tennis Athletes

Thank you for your time and effort in participating in this research. Your contribution might help us understand some experiences of anxiety for tennis players. There has been a lack of understanding the experiences of anxiety for athletes in a deeper sense, although several players have reported that anxiety influences their performance during competition. Therefore, an exploration of what anxiety feels and means to tennis players might be helpful to some of the players. In addition, there might be a further understanding of how similar and/or different the experiences are for different players, the differences between competitive and pre-competitive anxiety, and how other areas in the athlete's life may influence their anxiety experiences too.

In case you would like some further support you might find the following resources helpful:

Exist Counselling Education Network

Address: 13 Al Israa St. off Lebanon St.,

Floor 2, Flat 5

Mohandeseen, Giza, Egypt

Tel: (+202) 3346 9992

Fax: (+202) 3346 9993

Mob: (+2) 0106 277 1515

Email: contact@exist-counselling.com

(The center provides one-on-one counseling services for any anxiety issues)

Or

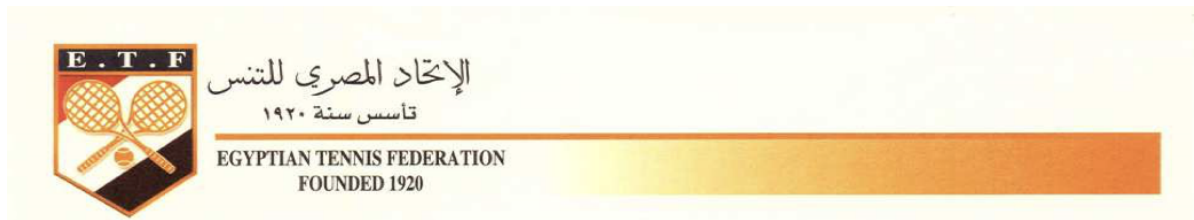
Gallwey, T. (2008) *The inner game of tennis: The classical guide to the mental side of peak performance*. United States of America: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

Wineberg, R. (2013) *Tennis: Winning the mental game*. USA: H.O. Zimman Inc.

(Both books focus on the inner game of tennis and how to focus on the mind and gain skills to work with the anxiety struggles during performances)

Appendix K

Federation Letter



TO whom it May Concern

Kindly be informed that the Egyptian Tennis Federation allows Ms.Mai Kabbani to use one of the offices to conduct her interviews with tennis players for her research on the experiences of anxiety for Egyptian professional tennis athletes".

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Issued by: Salma Adel Date: 15/5/2016

Sincerely,

Marwa Abd ElRahman
Acting Executive Manager
Egyptian Tennis Federation

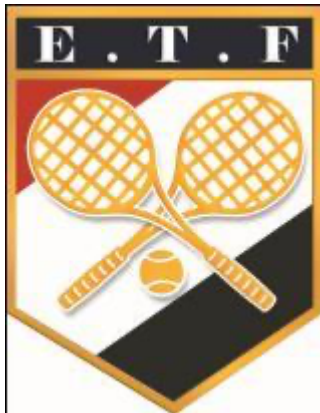


Address: El Estade El Bahary St., - Nasr City,Cairo ,Egypt.
The New Building of Elathadat Elryadiah ,3rd floor - flat No. 8
Tel.: (+202)24020673 / 3 lines
Fax.: (+202)24020667
E-mail: etf@urgentmail.com
website:www.egypttennis.com

شارع الاستاد البحري - مدينة نصر - القاهرة
مبنى الاتحادات الرياضية الجديد - الدور الثالث - شقة ٨
تليفون: ٢٤٠ ٢٠ ٦٧٣ / (٢٠٢) ٣ خطوط
فاكس: ٢٤٠ ٢٠ ٦٦٧ (٢٠٢)

Appendix L

Federation Confirmation



0291 سنت تأسيس

Egyptian Tennis Federation Established 1920

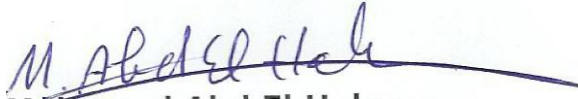
To: The New School of Psychotherapy and Counseling - United Kingdom

The Egyptian Tennis Federation hereby confirms that **Mrs. Mai Kabbani** who is currently studying her doctorate in psychotherapy and counseling at your gracious School is permitted to make her researches on lived experiences of anxiety for professional tennis athletes in Egypt, Also she has the right to place adverts through the Egyptian Tennis Federation to access professional tennis players in men and women.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Issued by: Mary Adel In: 15/10/2015



Mohamed Abd El Haleem
Acting General Manager
Egyptian Tennis Federation

Address: El- Estad El- Bahary Street – Nasr Sity , Cairo, Egypt The New Building of
Elathadat Elryadiah 3rd floor Flat No. 8 Telephone : (+202) 24020673 / 3 line
Fax : (+202) 24020667

: تلفون 8 شقت 3 الدور – الجديد الرياضيت الاتحادات مبني القاهرة – نصر مدينت – البحرى الاستاد شارع
97191043 (919) / 3 فاكس خطوط : 97191004 (919)

Appendix M

Interactive Sports Psychology Group

This is a five-week journey for young athletes to learn more about themselves as athletes and learn skills to understand and manage their emotions on the court.

Week one: An introduction for the group together trying to understand, what they like/dislike about the sport, how they feel while competing, what this sport means to them, what losing and winning means and what their short-term goals are as tennis players.

Exercise: Write a short-term (3 months) and a long-term (1 year) goal based on skills.

Week two: An exploration of some of their thoughts that they consider hindering them. What these thoughts are, what they mean to them. How and what they feel when they have these thoughts. Where do they experience these thoughts in their body? An explanation of the difference between positive and negative self-talk and their influence on performance, focusing on the importance of body language.

Exercise: Traffic light (sentences that reflect different light stops based on level of helpfulness)

Come up with three sentences that could be more helpful for them and starting using them in practice. Learn to change the wording of sentences to help athletes rather than demotivate them

Week three: An understanding of how/whether they feel pressure, tension or distress on the court. Understanding the different areas where they feel their tension and distress.

Exercise: Teach them a breathing technique to manage their emotions on the court, focusing on the body part(s) they experience.

Week four: An exploration of how they feel about others while performing, whether teammates, friends, parents and coaches and how this might influence their performance. What they notice in relationship to others on the court.

Week five: A recap session to explore what has been learned in the past four weeks and how they can apply it to their training and performance. Looking into what has been helpful and what has not in the group.

Exercises: Identify things learned about oneself in this group and skills they will take with them after this group.