



Flow in Horsemanship:

*A qualitative study on flow in
Icelandic Horse Equestrians*

Flow í hestamennsku:

*Eigindleg rannsókn á flow í íslenskri
hestamennsku*

*Lokaverkefni til BS gráðu í reiðmennsku og reiðkennslu við
Háskólann á Hólum*

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Hér með lýsi ég því yfir að verkefni þetta er byggt á mínum eigin athugunum, er samið af mér og að það hefur hvorki að hluta né í heild verið lagt fram áður til hærri prófgráðu.

(Carrie Lyons Brandt)

Abstract

The goal of this study was to better understand how Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow could be applied to Icelandic horsemanship. Flow in amateur riders, flow in training and competition, flow in teaching, and the possible negative effects of flow were all explored. Qualitative methodology was used and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Six informants were divided into three groups. The first group consisted of students in their second year at Hólar University. The second group were instructors that have taught at Hólar for an extended period of time and the third group consisted of professional trainers/competitors. Data analysis began with the transcription and reading of the interviews. The results indicate that a family background of horsemanship, or close relationships with other equestrians encourages flow in horsemanship. Flow characteristics emerged from the passages about training horses included challenge-skills balance, merging of action and awareness, clear goals, intense concentration, self-confidence, and flow as an autotelic experience. The intensity of competitive situations does not seem to negatively influence flow in most of the informants. Flow is also found in riding lessons and many of the informants discussed how students feel when a teacher experiences flow. This study raises questions about the possible negative affects of flow in horsemanship. It seems that equestrians are very committed to horsemanship but not necessarily addicted. Though this study it became clear that the vocabulary for discussing flow in Icelandic needs to be better developed. The extent to which these professional equestrians found flow across a variety of activities is impressive, but the sample was not large enough to provide true data saturation. This study has shown that flow occurs throughout horsemanship activities. In addition, these findings suggest how to enhance flow and enjoyment in Icelandic equestrians.

Úrdráttur

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar var að athuga hvernig kenning Csikszentmihalyi um flæði ætti við um íslenska hestamennsku. Kannað var flæði meðal áhugamanna, flæði í þjálfun og keppni, flæði í kennslu, og hugsanleg neikvæð áhrif flæðis. Eigindlegri aðferðafræði var beitt og gögnum var safnað með hálfstöðluðum viðtölum. Sex viðmælendum var skipt í þrjá hópa: Í fyrsta hópnum voru nemendur á öðru ári í Hólaskóla, annar hópurinn samanstóð af kennurum sem hafa kennt á Hólum til langs tíma, og í þriðja hópnum voru atvinnuknappar/keppnismenn. Gögnin voru greind með umritun og yfirllestri á viðtölum. Niðurstöðurnar benda til þess að fjölskyldu-bakgrunnur í hestamennsku, eða nán tengsl við aðra knapa auki líkur á flæði í hestamennsku. Við þjálfun hesta upplifðu viðmælendur í rannsókninni mörg einkenni flæðis, þeir greindu m.a. frá mikilvægi þess að jafnvægi sé milli þyngdar áskorunnar og þeirrar færni sem viðkomandi býr yfir, hvernig athafnir og vitund renna í eitt, skýrum markmiðum, mikilli einbeitingu og sjálfstrausti og að lokum hvernig þjálfunin sjálf væri einskonar umbun. Aukið álag svo sem í keppni virðist ekki hafa truflandi áhrif á flæði hjá flestum viðmælendum. Flæði kemur oft fram í reiðtímum og margir viðmælendanna sögðust greina það þegar kennari þeirra upplifir flæði. Rannsóknin vakti spurningar þess efnis hvort flæði í hestamennsku hefði hugsanleg neikvæð áhrif á einkalíf fólks. Hestmennska er ákveðinn lífstíll en hestamenn eru ekki endilega háðir henni. Það er ljóst að orðaforða til að skilgreina flæði á íslensku þarf að þróa betur. Að hve miklu leyti þessir atvinnu-hestamenn upplifa flæði á margskonar vettvangi er aðdáunarvert, en úrtakið var ekki nógu stórt til þess að hægt væri að alhæfa niðurstöðurnar yfir á aðra hestamenn. Tilvist flæðis meðal atvinnuknappa í hinum ýmsu aðstæðum var einnig könnuð og benda niðurstöður til þess að flæði spili mikilvægt hlutverk í hestamennsku.

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Introduction

In a recent issue of *The Icelandic Horse* published by the United States Icelandic Horse Congress subjects were asked why they rode horses. In the article one person explained that her riding was “...like a drug and the best thing that I ever do. The feeling when everything works, and the horse dances under you, when you can communicate with small signals... when you get a conversation going with the horse—is better than anything else (Sher, 2012).” Most people ride horses because they enjoy the experience. Being an equestrian requires large investments of time and energy. Some people feel those investments are justified because working with horses is so enjoyable. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a pioneer in the study of enjoyment. He designates the things that people enjoy the most as flow activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990). Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi (1999) have focused in particular on the occurrence of flow in athletic activities but have never applied the concept of flow to horsemanship.

The goal of this preliminary study was to better understand how and why flow occurs in horsemanship. Qualitative methodology was used and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The social contexts of the informants were investigated to better understand what contexts might encourage flow in horsemanship. Professional equestrians were also asked about their experiences as amateur riders and why they chose horsemanship as a profession to determine whether certain memories oriented the riders toward future flow experiences. This study also attempted to determine whether professional equestrians experienced flow while training horses and while competing. The interviews also explored the topic of flow in riding lessons and how that may affect a student's learning. Finally the possibility of flow becoming addictive and having a negative impact on equestrian's lives was studied. This study is the first study investigating these topics in Icelandic horse equestrians. The results suggest many interesting possibilities for future research.

Literature Review

For the past fifty years social scientists have been studying an interesting phenomenon in psychology called flow. Flow has been described in detail and its characteristics have been defined (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). After the concept of flow was defined researchers began to study extensively the relationship between flow and peak performance in sports (Jackson, Thomas, Marsh, & Smethurst, 2001). To date there have been no published studies exploring the occurrence and characteristics of flow in the equestrian world. However, there has been extensive research exploring the relationship between horse and rider. Emotional and physical characteristics of the rider and horse have been correlated with horse-rider team performance. This study makes the case for the relationship between the studies that have been done on the psychological aspects of the horse-rider relationship and flow theory. By bringing these two areas of research together we can gain a better understanding of the possible role of flow in horsemanship.

Flow

Characteristics of Flow

In the lives of some individuals certain activities stand out because they engage the mind and body in an intense way. These are what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was the first to call “flow” activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990, 1997). Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues have explored the conditions that produce flow in numerous activities. This research has shown that it is helpful to examine activities in terms of whether or not they produce flow, instead of whether they are officially described as “work” or “play.”

Numerous studies on flow in sports have been done but flow in equestrian athletes has not been explored extensively. Flow, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) is a mental state that occurs when a person is intensely focused and involved in an activity that they find challenging. Although flow activities vary widely among people, “... the experience of people totally involved in what they are doing is characterized by a common set of features...” (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 15) that cause the activity to be intrinsically rewarding.

In 1999 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Susan Jackson published *Flow in Sports: The keys to optimal experiences and performances*, which applied their research on flow to sports activities. In this book they define nine characteristics of flow activities: challenge-skills balance,

merging of action and awareness, loss of self-consciousness, clear goals, unambiguous feedback, intense concentration, self-confidence, time transformation, and flow as an autotelic experience. They discuss these characteristics and their occurrence in sports. These characteristics defined by Csikszentmihalyi & Jackson (1999) have been the foundation for current research on flow and can be applied to a study of flow in horsemanship.

The most basic characteristic of flow is the challenge-skills balance. In order to achieve flow in an activity the participant's perceived skills need to be challenged, but success should not be impossible (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Challenges can come in a variety of forms and the same activity can be challenging in different ways. In horsemanship there is the additional challenge of dealing with the unpredictability of an animal. No two horses are alike and often even the same horse may act differently in different environments. Csikszentmihalyi refined the definition of this characteristic of flow when he realized that there was not a completely linear correlation between increases in challenges and skills and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). In recent research Engeser & Rheinberg (2008) found that the perceived importance of an activity and the individual's personal characteristics both influence the perceived challenge-skills balance. In studying the challenge-skills balance in horsemanship it is important to take into consideration the complex relationship between the challenge-skills balance and other factors when evaluating flow experiences.

Another important characteristic of flow is the merging of action and awareness. When "...the difficulty is just right, action follows action in a fluid series, and the actor has no need to adopt an outside perspective from which to consciously intervene" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 85). Successful equestrians often describe feeling at one with their horses and being able to react instantaneously to the horse's movements (Brandt, 2004). Loss of self-consciousness is closely related to this flow characteristic. This sub-conscious mental state allows an individual to act with spontaneity and effectiveness during a flow activity (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Clear goals and unambiguous feedback combined with intense concentration are also crucial to experiencing flow. Csikszentmihalyi & Jackson (1999) found that flow subjects needed to have clearly defined goals. These goals could then be modified as necessary during an activity. The modifying of these goals is directed by unambiguous feedback. This feedback can come from the athlete's physical consciousness or from a teacher or audience. Concentration is often so intense in flow that people report not remembering anything or anyone, unless it

pertained directly to what they were doing. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) found examples of these flow characteristics by interviewing informants who pursued intense activities such as rock climbing. It will be interesting to see whether equestrians report the use of goal setting by seeking more challenging horses and higher levels of competition or expertise. Although equestrian flow experiences have not been extensively researched, effective concentration in equine athletes has been quantitatively studied. Meyers, Bourgeois, LeUnes, & Murray (1999) found that elite equine athletes had better concentration skills in comparison with sub-elite equestrians. To investigate flow in equestrians it will be important to evaluate concentration in terms of goal setting and unambiguous feedback.

Most athletes that experience flow believe that they can achieve the goals they define. This characteristic of flow is referred to as self-confidence (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Self-confident athletes are not worried by the idea of failure and believe in their skills to overcome specific challenges. Recent behavioral research on equestrians has shown that a riders confidence in the horse is positively correlated with the riders self-efficacy (Beauchamp & Whinton, 2005).

Another characteristic of flow is transformation of time. Athletes may experience the feeling of having endless time or may feel as if time has flown by (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). For example a long distance runner may report the positive feeling of a race “flying by.” Horsemanship is a very intense sport and equestrians are often very focused during certain time periods, such as when competing. It will be interesting to investigate whether equestrians transform their experiences of time.

The observations of the characteristics of flow as defined by Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi (1999) have been used to identify flow in a variety of sports and activities. For example, Hefferon & Ollis (2006) interviewed nine professional dancers using semi-structured in depth interviews. This study showed that dancers experienced intense enjoyment when dancing. They were motivated to continue dancing primarily because they enjoyed it. In addition the dancers in the study experienced characteristics of flow such as self-confidence, loss of self-consciousness, and transformation of time. A similar interview based qualitative study approach could be used to begin to investigate the role of flow in horsemanship. To date there have been no published studies on flow theory and flow characteristics in horsemanship.

What Influences Flow

Recent research has gone beyond describing the characteristics of flow, and has investigated a range of factors that influence its occurrence and intensity. In their qualitative study on dancers Hefferon & Ollis (2006) were able to specify a number of variables that the dancers in their study felt affected their ability to flow. Level of self-confidence, style of choreography, pre-performance routine, stage setting, and even make-up were described as influencing flow (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006). These factors are both personal and maybe be specific to a particular activity.

Recent research has shown that personality, mental state, and psychological skills can all influence an individual's ability to flow (Jackson et al., 2001; Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008; Keller & Bless, 2008; Kee & Wang, 2008;). Engeser & Rheinberg (2008) found that the perceived importance of a situation can influence the extent to which an individual experiences flow. When interpreting data on flow experiences in horsemanship it is important to consider these other influences on flow.

Personality has been shown to influence a person's ability to flow. Keller & Bless (2008) did two experiments on flow in people playing a computer game similar to Tetris. They found that for action oriented people flow experiences were more pronounced (Keller & Bless, 2008). Other research has explored similar ideas. Engeser & Rheinberg (2008) discovered that people with a high hope for success experienced the most flow during activities that challenged their skills. In comparison people with a fear of failure experienced less flow in such situations (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008). These factors compliment the part played by the skill-challenge balance.

Jackson et al. (2001) have shown a relationship between the optimal state of flow and an athlete's positive self-concept and psychological skills. They emphasized the need to develop positive athletic self-concepts and psychological skills in athletes, because of the strong correlation between these skills and both flow and optimal performance. The psychological skills and self-concept of equestrians have primarily been studied in relation to anxiety and competitive success (Beauchamp & Whinton, 2005; Meyers et al., 1999). Beauchamp & Whinton found that confidence in the horse (other-efficacy) increases the effect of self-efficacy of the performance of the horse-rider team. They emphasize the importance of building equestrian self-efficacy through increasing confidence in the horse. It is possible to hypothesize

that a rider who is confident in both themselves and the horse is more likely to enter flow. Meyers et al. (1999) found that “The more successful athletes possessed higher anxiety management and concentration skills than less-successful peers” (p. 405). Elite riders had better psychological skills. Psychological skills are correlated with an increase in flow (Jackson et al., 2001) therefore elite riders may experience higher levels of flow.

There are some resources available to horse trainers on the importance of developing psychological skills while training for equestrian sports. Steiner & Bryant (2003) discuss the mind, body, and spirit element of training dressage concepts such as, suppleness, contact, impulsion and collection. They explain how the rider’s aids, the cues given to the horse, are applied and discuss the optimal mental state of the rider during training. King (2004) describes psychological skills such as physical and mental relaxation, positive self-talk, positive visualization, confidence building, and release of performance anxiety for equestrians. These anecdotal resources suggest that psychological skills training may have a positive influence on equestrian performance as a trainer and competitor (King, 2004; Steiner & Bryant, 2003).

The challenge-skills balance of a situation and the importance of that activity can influence flow. Engeser & Rheinberg (2008) evaluated the occurrence and intensity of flow in three separate situations: an obligatory statistics course, computer game, and voluntary French course. They hypothesized that the influence of the challenge-skills balance on flow would be moderated by the perceived importance of the individual activity. Engeser & Rheinberg (2008) found that in very important activities, such as the statistics test in their experiment, flow was high even though the demand (challenge) was low. In less important activities flow was the highest during an optimal challenge-skills balance and decreased when the challenge was too low or high in comparison to the individuals skills. Therefore the perceived importance of an activity, influences the challenge-skills balance necessary for an individual to experience flow.

This refinement of the challenge-skills balance paradigm suggests many questions in understanding the role of flow in horsemanship. For example, if informants believe being a teacher is very important, they may enter a flow state with lower challenges than would be the case otherwise. This may explain how some highly skilled teachers may enjoy teaching beginner students. An analysis of qualitative data investigating flow across a variety of experiences at different challenge levels should test these new ideas about the challenge skills balance of flow.

Flow and peak performance

Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990; Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) emphasizes that the conditions of flow are constantly changing. Once a person has performed an activity repeatedly he is likely to become bored unless he finds new and more complex challenges. Flow activities lead people to progress in their fields by constantly enhancing their skills. Therefore flow is associated with expertise. Csikszentmihalyi has discussed this relationship between peak performance and flow since defining the concept of flow in 1975. Recent research has continued to find a relationship between flow and peak performance. Jackson et al. (2001) found a positive relationship between flow and optimal performance in a study done on 236 athletes from three sports: orienteering, surf life saving, and road cycling. Engeser & Rheinberg (2008) found a relationship between flow while studying statistics and high grades on a final exam. Flow leads to peak performance because the “functional state” of a person in flow is improved (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008). Therefore a person in flow is more likely to perform a task with ease and be motivated to participate in the activity again at a higher level.

The relationship between flow and peak performance can easily be studied in horsemanship. For example, professional riders compete each year in a series of increasingly difficult shows that help them progress towards qualifying for the most challenging and prestigious competitions in the Icelandic horse competitive circle. Peak competition should lead to peak performances.

Horse-rider relationship and flow

Any study on flow in horsemanship should take into consideration the relationship between the rider and the horse. Research in sport psychology has shown that the mental state of the rider is very important to equestrian success. Flow may also have a positive influence on performance (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008; Jackson et al., 2001).

Skilled riding requires practice, physical sensitivity and anticipation of the movements of the horse. Lagarde, Kelso, Peham, & Licka (2005) researched the complex physical synchrony between horse and rider pairs in an experiment performed on a treadmill. They found that developing a sensitive “feel” for the horse requires prolonged practice, because of the difficulty in synchronizing the coordination dynamics of such biomechanically different animals as a rider and a horse. When comparing a novice and advanced rider they found that: “Whereas the

novice's movements displayed transient departures from phase synchrony, the expert's motions were continuously phase matched with those of the horse. The tight ensemble synchrony between the expert and the horse was accompanied by an increase in the temporal regularity of the oscillations of the trunk of the horse" (Lagarde et al., p. 418, 2005). From these results it is obvious that riding horses requires practiced physical abilities and intense sensitivity or feel. It is likely that flow characteristics such as concentration and merging of action-awareness would help a rider achieve the necessary sensitivity and physical control. It is therefore possible to hypothesize that a mental state such as flow would help facilitate good riding.

A recent interpretive study describes two-way communication between horse and rider through the use of body language (Brandt, 2004). During in-depth interviews riders described how their thoughts were instantly translated from their mind to their body and how the horse then responded. In many ways Brandt describes comparable results to the findings of Lagarde et al. (2005). They both emphasize the complexity, sensitivity, and physical awareness required in a harmonious horse-rider relationship. Through the interviews in Brandt's study (2004) it is possible to better understand the rider's mindset. Several participants describe in depth their intense concentration and bodily awareness when working with horses. These descriptions are similar to flow descriptions in other sports where the athlete reports relying completely on their senses and bodily awareness (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Research has emphasized the importance of the riders "feel" for the horse in harmonious riding.

The emotional state of the rider can also influence horse-rider performance. Horses are very sensitive to human emotions. Famous horse trainers such as Monty Roberts refer often to the skill of learning to control emotions so that body language does not cause a flight or fight response from the horse (Roberts, 2002). If such emotions are transmissible between equines and humans then it is possible to hypothesize that a rider in flow might have a positive influence on the horse. Flow may enhance synchronicity or synchronicity may enhance flow, or the interaction may proceed in both directions between the horse and rider.

Equine and human heart rate data is a psychological measure that can indicate possible equine and human psychological states (Bridgeman, 2009). The relationship between equine and human heart rates measured simultaneously and in relation to other factors has been the topic of several studies (Hama, Yogo & Matsuyama, 1996; Bridgeman, 2009). Hama et al. (1996) found that throughout their experiment both horse and human heart rates increased upon initial

interaction and then decreased gradually to normal levels. Subjects with a negative attitude toward horses showed higher initial heart rates than subjects with a positive attitude. Horses also showed an especially high initial heart rate when interacting with the negative attitude group. The heart rates of the horses showed the greatest decrease when interacting with subjects with previous equine experience. If emotions such as a negative attitude are transmissible between humans and equines then it is possible that a rider in flow will positively influence the horse.

This idea is reinforced by the work of Bridgeman (2009). Bridgeman found an association between horse temperament as demonstrated by heart rate and the anxieties of riders in training and competition environments. He also observed some heart rate synchronization between the rider and the horse, especially in the training environment. While the synchronicity in the emotional states of horse and rider has been demonstrated in certain situations (Bridgeman, 2009) it is difficult to make a direct correlation with peak performances and flow. Studies of flow in horsemanship need to take into consideration this emotional connection between rider and horse. It will be interesting to investigate if synchrony between horse and rider produces flow, is the result of it, or both.

Equestrian competitive anxiety

Peak performance is of the utmost importance during equestrian competitions. Professional success in Icelandic horses often hinges on competition results. For example, showing a horse and receiving high scores increases a rider's recognition and respect. Competitive success can create teaching jobs and opportunities to sell more expensive horses. Unfortunately because of the immense pressure to succeed anxiety in some equestrians may disturb or prevent flow and therefore the likelihood of peak performance. Research has found a negative relationship between anxiety and flow. Although this relationship has not been investigated in horsemanship, several new studies have focused on the topic of equestrian anxiety in relation to performance results. In any study on flow in equestrian competition it is important that the possible negative effects of performance anxiety on flow be taken into consideration (Kirchner, Bloom & Skutnick-Henley, 2008).

Bramsen (2007) found a moderate inverse relationship between flow states and anxiety. As anxiety decreased in female collegiate rowers flow states seemed to increase. Bramsen also found a positive relationship between self-confidence and intensity of flow. Kirchner et al. (2008) came to similar conclusions in their study on flow and performance anxiety on ninety

undergraduate music majors. They found a significant negative correlation between flow and performance anxiety. Kirchner et al. (2008) emphasized the importance of creating performance conditions that foster flow as a strategy for minimizing musical performance anxiety. For example, choosing music that does not exceed the musician's skills may help facilitate flow and therefore lessen performance anxiety. They also recommended the interpretation of anxiety or arousal as helping to facilitate good performance. The flow characteristics of concentration and self-confidence also seem to play an important positive role in the interpretation of anxiety or arousal as facilitative in dressage and show jumping equestrians (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010, 2011). From these results it is possible to conclude that performance anxiety and flow are closely related. Methods for reducing performance anxiety should include creating a situation ideal for flow as well as interpreting anxiety as facilitative and increasing self-confidence.

This study will ask informants to describe competition experiences as a youth or beginner rider and as a professional. This will explore the topic of flow in different equestrian skill levels. Although little flow research has been done on equestrians with different levels of experience, the related topics of competitive anxiety, concentration, and the psychological skills of advanced and novice riders have been topics of published research. Meyers et al. (1999) found that successful equine athletes had better anxiety management and concentration skills in comparison to their less-successful peers. Wolframm, Shearman, & Micklewright (2010) found that advanced riders had "greater processing efficacy and task-specific concentration" (p. 333) in comparison to novice riders. It is possible to speculate that an advanced rider has greater skills, more experience, and therefore greater self-confidence. This may enable advanced riders to interpret anxiety in a more positive fashion. Since elite equestrians seem to have greater psychological skills and less performance anxiety it is possible to hypothesize that they also experience more intense flow. A goal of this research is to begin to integrate the findings on psychological skills and performance anxiety among equestrians with the research on flow.

Teaching and Flow

People start riding for many reasons. For example, many young girls love horses or think they are beautiful. Love and beauty should provide a foundation for flow but according to Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow that is not enough (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). There always need to be new skills to learn and challenges to overcome. For many, riding lessons may provide the context in which new challenges occur and skills are learned (Pretty & Bridgeman, 2006).

Flow has been shown to occur between teachers and their students. Bakker (2005) found that flow in music teachers is significantly related to flow among their students. In Bakker's view "...students 'caught' the flow experience of their teachers in a partly conscious and partly unconscious way." This concept is often referred to as contagion. Bono & Ilies (2006) studied the contagion of charisma and positive emotions in terms of leadership. They found that a leader's emotional expressions have a direct effect on the mood of their followers. In addition "...Both leader's emotional expressions and follower mood had independent effects on perceptions of leadership effectiveness and attraction to a leader" (p. 330). Therefore positive emotional expressions are contagious, and as Bakker (2005) found, the state of flow in teachers is related to flow in their students. The mental state of flow and enjoyment of an equestrian teacher may be contagious; helping the student experience enjoyment and flow when learning to ride. It is also reasonable to suggest that if the flow experience by the teacher enhances the flow of the student, that the teacher in turn may be affected by the flow he has created in the student.

In his dissertation John Gunderson (2009) studied elementary school teachers that were recognized for their successful teaching and found that their students were more likely to achieve flow than the students of teachers that had not been recognized for their teaching. Gunderson evaluated each teachers performance and the extent to which they experienced flow through the examination of various flow characteristics. He found that the effective teaching group set more specific and in-depth goals than the random group. He also reported the detailed "...Awareness of the subtle changes in their classrooms that all of the teachers in the effective teaching group demonstrated..." (Gunderson, 2009, p.79). The effective teaching group showed other characteristics of flow such as deep concentration and recognition of classroom challenges.

Applying flow theory to riding lessons should help in the understanding of the specific mechanisms whereby riding instructors communicate their sense of enjoyment to their students. It should be meaningful to evaluate the experiences of equestrians as students and teachers. Riding teachers need to be very patient as the rider slowly develops physical and mental control. Clear goals, intense awareness of the student and horse, recognition of the students skills and challenges, full concentration, and other flow characteristics should help facilitate successful instructing of equestrians. In addition, teachers in flow who find teaching and riding intrinsically motivating and enjoyable are likely, through contagion, to produce the same qualities in their students.

Possible negative effects of flow

In most research the positive effects of flow have been emphasized. A possible negative effect of flow is that people may become so immersed in an activity that they ignore other important aspects of their lives. In his early research on flow Csikszentmihalyi (1975) argued that people needed to develop flow in several different parts of their lives. He wrote that if flow existed in only one area it had the potential to become "...a rigid isolating system instead of a growing, integrative one... (p. 139)."

In a recent study on big wave surfing Partington, Partington & Olivier (2009) found an association between flow and dependency on surfing. In their study of famous big wave surfers they found that although the surfers experienced the expected positive consequences of flow, they also exhibited a dependency on surfing. Many of the surfers in the study described surfing as addictive. They reported the constant desire to increase the size and difficulty of the waves they were surfing in order to continue experiencing flow.

The need to increase challenges to meet the new level of skills obtained is part of what causes flow to be associated with expertise and peak performance. On the other hand when does this search for challenges become extreme and addictive? Is dependency necessarily a negative thing? When should the line be drawn between addiction/dependency and commitment/dedication? Partington et al. (2009) suggest that flow is not good or bad but may be associated with both positive and negative consequences. There can be too much of a good thing. At what point does flow become an addiction or have negative affects on a persons life. We need to critically examine flow activities in horsemanship in order to determine both positive and negative affects.

Methodology

Flow is an experience not a behavior. An outside observer cannot see flow. In order to understand flow we must ask people to report what they experience. For this reason much of the research on flow has been based on interviews done in qualitative studies that encourage people to report what they experience. This is sometimes called the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013). In their study on flow in dancers, Hefferon and Ollis (2006) explain that this approach allows the researcher to accurately portray experiences of the dancers. The current study also uses a phenomenological approach through interviews to better understand the

complexities of flow in horsemanship. This methodology limits this study in that it is not possible to generalize the results to an entire population as is often done in quantitative studies (Collis & Hussey, 2009). On the other hand this methodology offers an exploration of flow, and the variables that may influence the occurrence and intensity of flow, in the lives of a small group of elite equestrians.

Sampling Method

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling methods were used. In a convenience sample subjects are chosen because they are easily accessible (Berg, 2007). In this study some informants were chosen over others due to their geographic proximity and willingness to participate. In a purposive sample the researcher chooses subjects because they are judged to have specific characteristics that the researcher wishes to include in the study (Berg, 2007). This is also referred to as criterion sampling (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). In this study basic knowledge about Icelandic horsemanship along with other resources, such as competition results, was used to select subjects according to a specific criterion. The criterion for the selections was expertise. The sample consisted of three groups: Students in their second year at Hólar University (Informants C & D), instructors that have taught at Hólar for an extended period of time (Informants E & G), and professional trainers/competitors (Informants A & B). Examining an elite group of riders helps illustrate how flow occurs under ideal circumstances even though the results cannot be generalized to a population.

Participants

Interviews were done with two informants from each of three groups, making a total of six informants. The two informants in each group consisted of one male and one female. The informants ranged in age from 21 to 46. The interviews were recorded on an Olympus camera specially designed for high quality sound recordings. Most quantitative studies use a flexible research design because "...the number of required subjects usually becomes obvious as the study progresses..." (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). This concept is generally referred to as data saturation (Marshall, 1996). Data saturation is achieved when the interviewer begins to hear the same descriptions over and over again. Due to time constraints a set number of informants was designated in advance. After the fourth interview data saturation was observed to a certain extent.

The first group interviewed in this study consisted of two equestrian students in their second year at Hólar University, who are studying for a B.S. í Reiðmennsku og Reiðkennslu (B.S. in Horsemanship and Instructing). In the results these two informants are referred to as Informants C and D. Hólar students have achieved a level of expertise by being accepted into the school. The two students interviewed were recognized as excellent riders and had in general received good scores on their ridden tests. These two students also offered special insight into flow in equestrian students because they receive instruction on a daily basis. In addition, since these two informants are younger than the other informants in the sample, they may more easily recall the instruction they received when they were first beginning to ride.

Hólar teachers are very often successful professional trainers in addition to being experienced instructors. The second group of informants in the study was two teachers chosen because they were among the most experienced teachers at Hólar and had also been recognized as elite riders in competition. In the results these two informants are referred to as Informants E and G. The responses of this sample group offered possible insight into both when and how teachers experience flow during riding lessons and when and how flow occurs in training and competition.

Two professional trainers, who have been successful in competitions and recognized as having a high level of expertise, constituted the final group of informants. In the results these two informants are referred to as Informants A and B. These informants were a woman and man that had been in the finals at Landsmót 2012 and have been competitively successful for many years. They were in part because of their geographic convenience and willingness to participate. The female informant was one of only several other women in this field who has competing successfully at the top levels throughout the last couple of years.

The advantage of having three categories of informants was that each of the groups had the potential of offering a different perspective on the research questions. The three different groups allow for triangulation of informants. Triangulation provides the opportunity to view flow from a variety of perspectives. This is a way of corroborating evidence. Gay et al. (2006) point out that the strength of qualitative research is collecting information from different types of informants.

Semi-structured interviews

Informants were interviewed about their experiences as professional equestrians. In structured interviews only specific questions are asked. In unstructured interviews a researcher follows whatever ideas an informant brings up in a conversation about a particular topic. In this study a semi-structured interviewing (Gay et al., 2006) method was used. This technique begins with a specific list of questions, but encourages researchers to ask follow up questions on anything interesting that an informant brings up. It provides both structure and freedom of inquiry.

Seidman (1998) recommends interviewing informants three times with 3-7 days between each interview. The reasoning behind this method is that “People’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them (Seidman, 1998, p. 11).” The questions asked in the first interview focus on the informant’s life history, while the second interview explores the informants more specific and recent activities. The third and final interview investigates the meaning of those activities (Seidman, 1998). Due to time restraints in this preliminary study it was unrealistic to attempt to interview the informants three times, although that would have been ideal. However the interviews still focused on the three aspects of experience suggested by Seidman: context, events and meaning.

The length of the interviews in this study was of great concern. Seidman (1998) recommends an interview length of 90 minutes and emphasizes the importance of having a time frame so informants know what to expect and can allot the appropriate amount of time in their schedules. Many horse trainers in Iceland are notorious for having tight schedules; therefore the questionnaire was designed so the interview would take approximately an hour. Interviews were arranged at convenient times for the informants and the time commitment required was always explained in advance. The length of the interviews in this study ranged from 45 minutes to over an hour.

Seidman (1998) discusses interviewing as a relationship. He believes that each interview reflects the personalities and backgrounds of both the participant and the interviewer. The relationship between the interviewer and the informants in this study was particularly unique. The interviewer had intimate knowledge and experience of Icelandic horses because she had ridden since the age of seven and worked extensively as an Icelandic horse trainer and instructor.

In addition she was a current third year student at Hólar University studying for her B.S. in Horsemanship and Instructing. This made her a more understanding interviewer than a complete outsider. On the other hand her similarities to the informants may have also blinded her to certain issues and biased the way she conducted the interviews.

The difficulties of obtaining valid data from interviews are indicated by the problems of observer bias and observer effects (Gay et al., 2006). Observer effects occur when the behavior of an interviewer influences an informant in ways that he is not expecting. For example, once an informant begins to understand that a researcher is especially interested in a particular subject like flow, he may exaggerate his interest in that topic. Observer bias occurs when a researcher allows his interests to influence the interpretation of data. Throughout this study the interviewer attempted to minimize observer effects and biases. For example, while interviewing she tried to create thoughtful probes related to the topic of research without encouraging the informant to respond in a particular way.

It is important that the interviewer keep "... enough distance to allow the participant to fashion his or her responses as independently as possible" (Seidman, 1998, p. 80). The interviews for this study were conducted in a professional manner even though some of the informants were fellow students or current teachers of the interviewer. Despite this the unique relationship of the interviewer with the informants in this study may have effected how the informants responded to the questions.

Because interviewing involves a relationship between the subject and the interviewer it is important to be conscious of what influences both individuals and their relationship may have on the interview. Because of this an interview diary was kept. Immediately after every interview a written evaluation of the interview was created.

Language

The informants interviewed felt most comfortable speaking Icelandic. In addition, Icelandic horsemanship has very specific words that describe riding and horses that do not exist in English. Icelandic was the first language of all but two of the informants in this study. These two informants had lived in Iceland for over three years and were fluent in Icelandic. Therefore all six interviews were conducted in Icelandic.

The interviewer was born and raised in the United States and therefore English was her first language. During the last four years she has spent in Iceland she has become fluent in

Icelandic. One disadvantage to having the interviews in Icelandic was that although the interviewer was fluent and comfortable her vocabulary and ability to ask specific questions might have been impaired in some situations.

Another complication was translating the interview transcripts to English. It is not uncommon for researchers to "... report the language of the participants as spoken in the mother tongue to honor that language and the thought patterns inherent in it. They then provide a translation immediately following the portion spoken in the mother tongue" (Seidman, 1998, p. 88). In this study the majority of the transcripts were kept in Icelandic and only parts of specific interest were translated to English.

The term flow is a native category in English. The word flow was selected because English speakers commonly use it to describe intensely enjoyable activities. The term developed because it was the most commonly used expression that people spontaneously used to describe situations of intense enjoyment. In each interview the informants were asked to consider how the concept of flow might be expressed in Icelandic. This, in addition to the other questions throughout the questionnaire, will help us understand how people talk about flow in various aspects of horsemanship and help us to develop an Icelandic vocabulary for flow.

Data Analysis

Each interview was carefully transcribed so that the text could be easily studied and analyzed. Seidman (1998) recommends three basic steps when analyzing qualitative interview data. A similar method of data analysis was used in this study. First each transcript was carefully read and passages of interest were marked. Then these passages were grouped into categories and those themes were compared between informants. Seidman (1998) emphasizes letting the categories arise from the passages because creation of categories beforehand would bias the research. Although this sorting process is done primarily through the researchers intuition it is important that the researcher be able to articulate the basic criteria for the process. After categories had been developed thematic connections were interpreted in and among the different categories (Seidman, 1998).

Results of the Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was undertaken in order to examine the effectiveness of the interview questions in eliciting responses from informants and for the researcher to examine her skills as an interviewer. The informant chosen for the pilot study was a professional horse trainer, teacher at Hólar University, and successful competition rider. Therefore the informant shared many of the characteristics of the informants who will be the focus of this study.

The interview questions were successful in producing information about flow. Only one example will be given here. When discussing her work as a trainer the informant stated:

It's because of the variety of challenges that you are faced with. You always get different responses from different horses... I find it rather easy to concentrate in general, but I never need to take a break when training. It's no problem to concentrate the whole time... I think it might be because one finds it so enjoyable...I think so.

Her statement first mentioned one of the most important characteristics of flow: the challenge-skills balance. She emphasized that it is the variety of challenges in horse training that keep her interested. This informant found it easy to concentrate, because she finds training so enjoyable. Many other statements made by the informant also showed that she had often experienced flow. The pilot study suggested that the interview questions had the capacity to produce information about flow.

By performing this pilot interview valuable experience and knowledge about interviewing methods was gained. The interviewer realized that she consistently asked too many questions at once. This caused confusion and meant that some questions were forgotten. Creating appropriate probes also proved challenging in some cases. The interview learned that waiting at least 2-3 seconds before probing the informant is very important. This wait time allows the participant to think and finish any thoughts that they have on the initial questions. It also encourages the interviewer to take the time to create thoughtful probes. It also proved challenging for the interviewer to not evaluate the interview as it was taking place. In addition, considering the flow model throughout the pilot interview helped the interviewer think about better possible probes to ask in future interviews.

A purpose of this study was to encourage research on the many ways in which people come to find riding enjoyable. The pilot study suggested that the language that people use when they talk about enjoyment or flow needed to be examined. Terms such as “flow” and “in the

zone” have become quite commonplace in the English language. However there is little information about how athlete’s might express themselves in Icelandic when describing flow experiences. This pilot study highlighted the need to think about the variety of terms that are used in Icelandic to talk about flow. Below is an excerpt from the pilot interview in which the participant attempted to describe what seems to be a flow experience.

How did you feel when you showed him?

Very good... I showed two horses at the same time (in this breeding evaluation) and they both qualified for Landsmót. My stallion and another mare that received 8.30 total... there was just something going on... everything was some how positive... I was fully self confident and felt the horse was “with” me... they were both very responsive... this was to “top” at the right time I think... that’s not always possible... It was just the right moment and that is why it went so well.

This informant seemed to have difficulty finding the right words and she hesitated often while making this statement. Another time, when describing what seemed to be a flow experience, she talked about feeling an “extra power.” A goal of this research that emerged from the pilot study was to describe the different ways in which Icelandic people talk about flow.

From the pilot interview it became clear that five additional questions could be added to the questionnaire to elaborate on certain aspects of flow. A question was added that asked informants directly about their pre-competition rituals and whether the pressure to win competitions influenced their ability to experience flow. Also the questions in the teaching section did not seem to cover well enough the idea of contagion. To clarify further whether an informant was dependent on flow in horsemanship in a negative way, a question investigating the capacity to vacation from horsemanship and still enjoy oneself was created. Finally to help understand the ways in which Icelandic people talk about flow a question added to the end of the interview after a brief explanation of flow. Below is a list of the questions added.

1. Do you have any pre-competition rituals?
2. Do you ever feel a pressure to win? Does this pressure make it more difficult for you to enjoy yourself during competition?
3. Do you feel that your enjoyment in horsemanship is something that students react positively too?

4. Do you ever go on vacations where you don't ride? Do you miss riding a lot then?
5. What words might Icelandic horse equestrians (in Icelandic) use to express flow experiences or the concept of flow? How would you translate the word flow into Icelandic?

Because only one pilot interview was performed no questions were removed from the questionnaire. The informant gave very interesting replies to the majority of the questions. The few questions, which did not provoke flow related responses, were not removed because it was likely that other informants would answer those questions differently and perhaps one of those questions would then prove important. One question about the transformation of time during competitions was shortened.

The pilot interview served the purpose of evaluating the efficacy of the questionnaire as a means of exploring flow in Icelandic horsemanship. Although flow was not asked about directly, flow experiences and characteristics were described in detail in the pilot interview. It seems that the pilot interview informant had experienced flow as a beginning rider, student, trainer, competitive rider, and teacher. The questionnaire proved to be a sufficient means of examining flow in Icelandic horse equestrians. The pilot interview also provided valuable experience in the use of interview techniques such as probes. New questions were added to the questionnaire that increased the likelihood of more exact statements in relation to certain aspects of flow.

Results and Discussion

The Context for Flow

The contextual questions of the questionnaire explored the social contexts that encourage enjoyment in horsemanship. Contextual or situational variables, such as the stage setting for dancers, have been found to influence the occurrence of flow (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006). In this study descriptions of the informant's backgrounds, families, and relationships were obtained. The informants were also questioned about their current social lives in relationship to horsemanship. In addition, informants were asked to describe what caused them, in the context of their life histories, to choose horsemanship as a profession.

In all six interviews an encouraging social context seemed to result from either the informant's family or from other close relationships. Half of the informants came from families deeply involved in horsemanship. For example, the uncle of one informant was one of the most successful riders in Iceland and another informant's family has been involved in horses for several generations. Informant C summarized his description of his family in the following fashion:

Informant C:

*Pannig að það gengur eiginlega allt út á hesta í minni fjölskyldu.
Therefore pretty much everything is centered on horses in my family.*

In comparison Informants A, D, and G described their parents as having little or no interest in horsemanship. Despite this, informants A and G were in an encouraging social context because they were in relationships with men that were very involved in horsemanship.

Informant G:

*Einar¹ er nú sá sem stendur næst mér og hann er nú mjög mikið í hestamennsku og er uppallinn og lifir bara fyrir hesta næstum því held ég.
Einar is the person that I am closest to and he is very involved in horsemanship and was raised riding horses. I think he almost lives for the horses.*

¹ All names of people and horses have been changed.

Although Informant D did not report being in a relationship with an equestrian, she was at the time of the interview attending Hólar University and was living in a social context that encouraged horsemanship. Although some of the informants did not come from families involved in horsemanship they ended up in relationships or contexts that were very involved.

When asked about their current personal lives all six informants said that a large majority of their friends were also involved in horsemanship. After some consideration Informant E guessed that he didn't have any friends that were not in some way involved in horsemanship. Informant A reported that although most of her friends were horsemen/women they often spent their time together discussing non-horse related topics. In comparison Informant C and Informant E described 90% of their discussions with their friends as being about horses.

Bakker (2005) found that job resources, including social support from colleagues, was positively correlated with optimal challenge-skills balance and therefore flow. It is possible to hypothesize that a similar correlation exists for equestrians. Being surrounded by colleagues or family, who also enjoy horsemanship, may increase the likelihood of experiencing flow.

When, how, and why the informants in this study decided to become professional equestrians was also explored in the beginning of the questionnaire in order to place these life decisions in the context of the informants life histories. Informants A and D described how a childhood passion for horses gradually developed into a career. Informant B focused very early on a career in horsemanship and started his own training station at the age of eighteen. In comparison, Informant C described not being interested in horses until he was in the 10th grade despite his family's deep involvement in horsemanship. He had difficulty explaining why his interest increased, but he described himself as "*...catching the bacteria...*" and "*...seeing only horses...*" Informant G considered higher education and Informant E graduated as a carpenter, but both chose horsemanship when they found that it was the activity they truly enjoyed. Although each informant made the decision to become a professional equestrian under different circumstances and at different times, the underlying theme was that they chose horsemanship because it was a profession they enjoyed it more than any other thing profession.

The general theme throughout the contextual question responses was that the informants explored or considered other professions but did not pursue them very far. In some cases the exploration involved getting a degree in subjects such as business, carpentry and education. In other cases professions other than horsemanship were considered, but never pursued. Informant

C described being interested in other sports and professions only before he became interested in horses. Informant D explained that she did not consider doing anything else because horsemanship was what she truly enjoyed and therefore what she wanted to pursue as a profession. Enjoyment was the key word in the statements made by the informants in this study. Enjoyment is also a key element of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

In a study on nine dancers Hefferon & Ollis (2006) reported one dancer experienced very little flow while dancing. The dancer was talented and successful, but did not enjoy dancing. This dancer had been forced to dance for therapeutic reasons due to a childhood injury. Hefferon & Ollis (2006) hypothesized that this was one of the primary reasons that this dancer did not experience much flow while dancing. In comparison all of the informants in this study chose to be professional equestrians because it was what they enjoyed. This may increase the probability of them experiencing flow in horsemanship.

From the contextual questions it is obvious that enjoyment is what caused these informants to pursue horsemanship as a profession. Perhaps if they had chosen riding for therapeutic reasons, they would have been less likely to experience flow (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006). A family background of horsemanship, or close relationships with other equestrians, seems to have encouraged their enjoyment of horsemanship. It is likely that being surrounded by a family or community of horsemen increased their likelihood of having positive experiences with horses, just as Bakker (2005) found that social support from colleagues increased the frequency of flow experiences for music teachers.

Flow as an Amateur Rider

In the second section of the questionnaire informants were asked to recall their experiences as amateur riders. Whether amateur riders experience flow is interesting in terms of better understanding what childhood experiences encourage individuals to become professional equestrians. The data collected in this study suggested the importance of a concept the researcher has termed “enjoyment orientation memories.” The results of this study implied that a childhood interest in horses, an “enjoyment orienting horse,” and “enjoyment orientation memories” all appear to facilitate future flow experiences. Early learning experiences associated with flow also often involved the flow characteristic of challenge-skills balance. Most of the informants expressed a passion for new challenges and the mastering of new equestrian skills. One especially interesting statement suggested possible contagion of flow between the horse and

rider as well as an observer. For the informant involved this was an inspiring early learning experience.

All of the informants in this study described being interested in horses as children. Several informants reported not remembering a time when they weren't interested in horses.

Informant E:

Það var, ég man aldrei eftir mér öðruvísi en að bara hafa áhuga á hestum...

It was, I can't remember anything other than me being interested in horses...

The intensity of interest varied among informants. Some were passionate about horses, while others simply enjoyed occasional trail rides. Informant G described childhood memories of imaginary games with horses and how she had planned on making room for a horse in the basement of their apartment building. In comparison Informant C explained that he did not have a passion for horses as a child but found certain horse related activities enjoyable. The intensity of childhood interest seemed to vary in part due to whether horsemanship was a family occupation or not. For example, Informant's B and C said they took horses for granted because horsemanship was a part of their family's lives. Despite this all the informants in this study were interested in and enjoyed horses as children.

When asked about a favorite horse from their first years as equestrians all the informants fondly described a horse that was special to them. Often this "enjoyment orienting" horse was described as challenging but talented. This may reflect the challenge-skills balance characteristic of flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The quote below is representative of this trend seen throughout all six interviews.

Informant G:

Já. Hann heitir Hákon. Og hann eiginlega svona hefur bara skipt alveg öllu máli fyrir mig. Hann kenndi mér alveg ótrúlega mikið og var mjög sérstakur hestur og svona lét ekki fara með sig hver sem er.

Yes. His name was Hákon. And he was very important to me. He was a very special horse and taught me very much, although it wasn't just anyone that could handle him.

Informant G went on to describe in detail the special relationship she had with Hákon. She explained how he was difficult to handle, but taught her many important lessons. Many of

Informant G's best memories from her first experiences in horsemanship involved this horse. In addition, she was successful in a variety of competitions on him. The horses described varied, but they were always challenging or exciting in some way. Often memories of success involved the particular horse mentioned. Sometimes that success involved competitions and other times simply involved important learning thresholds in horsemanship. Therefore the horses offered challenges, the challenges were met with newfound skills, and the result was success. The descriptions in the interviews are consistent with flow theory and the challenge skills balance as described by Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi (1999). It is possible to hypothesize that these "enjoyment orienting" horses were key to facilitating flow during these informant's first experiences as equestrians.

Informants often described their experiences as amateur riders as fun and exciting. This supports the idea that early flow experiences may have oriented the informants toward a future enjoyment in horsemanship. In the statement below Informant B explains why he enjoyed riding as a youth.

Informant B:

Öruggleg bara að fara hratt og leika mér. Þegar ég byrjaði að fara á hestabak þá ég fór bara á hestabak eins og aðra krakka fóru í fótbolta. Þau fóru í fótbolta til að hafa gaman, og ég fór á hestabak bara til að hafa gaman.

Probably just riding fast and having fun. When I started riding I rode just like other kids played soccer. They played soccer to have fun and I rode horses to have fun.

All three of the male informants described how they enjoyed the excitement of riding fast. Several informants discussed their enjoyment orienting horses in terms of their most enjoyable memories. Informant A explained that she enjoyed improving the horse she was riding. She said she didn't find just riding from A to B exciting. When asked why she enjoyed improving her horse she responded:

Informant A:

Af því að mér líður svo vel þegar ég finn muninn þá finnst mér ég hafa, þá kemur svona success fílingur skilurðu svona árangurs að hafa já, hafa gert eitthvað að hafa náð eitthverju. Það gat verið sko, þú veist alveg eins og í keppni þá er náttúrulega æðislegt að vinna ég hef oft sko, mér fannst alveg eins gaman að vera á bundnum hesti sem allt í einu

var orðin hreinn og mjúkur í beisli og svona þú veist mér fannst það ekkert minna leiðinlegt skilurðu eða ekkert minna skemmtilegt.

Because I feel really good when I feel a difference (in the horse) there comes a feeling of success you know, of having achieved something. It could be, you know like in a competition where it's of course delightful to win, but I've often, I've often found it equally enjoyable to be on a pacey horse that all of a sudden is clean beaten and soft in the bridle, I don't find that any less boring, I mean less enjoyable.

A factor in most “enjoyment orientation memories” is the challenge-skills balance characteristic of flow as illustrated in the statement above. Informant A enjoyed obtaining the skills to improve the horses she was training. For her riding has always been an autotelic experience, because she described small training improvements as being just as enjoyable as winning competitions.

Enjoyment orientation memories were often associated with descriptions of intense flow experiences in this study. For example, Informant C described his feelings after winning an Icetölt competition.

Informant C:

Þetta er eiginlega bara ólýsanleg tilfinning. Það er bara einhver algjör alsæla einhvernvegin. Kannski ekki allan tíman en yfirleitt kannski þegar þú ert búinn eða svona þegar er að ganga vel þá gengur allt upp einhvernvegin. Þetta er eitthvað svona, þú færð eiginlega bara gæsaþúð sjálfur sko.

It is really an indescribable feeling. It is somehow complete ecstasy. Maybe not the whole time but in general when you've done well or when everything is going well then everything just happens somehow. It's just something, you get goose bumps.

Having such an intense experience of flow, as a teenager should suggest the possibility of future flow experiences and therefore encourage persistence in horsemanship.

Another theme in this section of the interviews was the importance of positive learning experiences in finding flow. These experiences could be directly associated with the challenge skills-balance characteristic of flow as defined by Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi (1999). Often teachers facilitate positive learning experiences by creating challenging situations and assisting in the development of skills to meet those challenges. One of the goals of this study was to better understand what situations increased flow and learning for amateur riders. All of the informants described a great desire to learn as amateur riders.

Informant A:

Já mér fannst þetta svo svakalega skemmtilegt og ég bara þú veist, ég hafði svo mikinn áhuga. Og fyrir mér var þetta heldur ekki sjálfsagt af því að ég kem ekki úr fjölskyldu sem að var með hestamennsku þannig að ég var eins og ryksuga. Þú veist alltaf að reyna að læra.

Yes, I thought it was so much fun and you know, I just, I was so interested in horses. And I didn't take them for granted because I didn't come from a family of horsemen therefore I was like a vacuum. You know, I was always trying to learn.

The ways in which equestrian skills were obtained varied greatly among informants. Many described specific teachers or role models but experience and the horses themselves were considered the best teachers by some of the informants. For example Informant B explained:

Informant B:

Þú eltir þú lærir þú hlustar þú sérð og þú lærir eiginlega aldrei meira. Þú prufar þig áfram sjálfur. Ef þér er alltaf sagt eitthvað þá brennir þú þig aldrei á eigin mistökum. Að gera mistök eru besta kennarinn þá gerir þú þau ekki aftur.

You follow, you learn, you listen, you see and you learn very much. You try things yourself. If you are always told what to do you will never learn from your own mistakes. To make mistakes is the best teacher, then you never make those mistakes again.

Informant B and D both agreed that horses were very important teachers and many of the informants described their enjoyment orienting horse as being a primary teacher. On the other hand Informants D and G carefully described characteristics that they liked in riding instructors. Informant G described her two favorite teachers as being people she trusted and respected. Informant D explained that a teacher should be demanding but helpful and give the student a chance to find the “feeling” themselves. In other words she preferred teachers who challenged her but were helpful and let her try things out herself. Informant E made a particularly interesting statement when asked what it was he looked up to in the trainers he admired as a young rider and how they rode their horses:

Informant E:

Svona, sérstaklega hestarnir sem maður sá hjá Reyni og Albert. Það var svona hvað þeir voru frjálsgir, svona glaðir, og þetta var einhvernvegin svo létt og auðvelt og skemmtilegt. Virkaði bara gaman. Kannski fyrst og fremst það sem mér fannst

skemmtilegt og finnst svona eiginlega enn. Gaman að sjá ef að hesturinn er sáttur og liður vel hjá knapanum.

Especially horses that you saw Reyni and Albert ride. They were somehow free, happy, and the horses always looked light and easy and enjoyable. Looked like it was fun. I think it was primarily how enjoyable it all looked that I found inspiring and still do today. It is always fun to see a horse that is satisfied and feels good with it's rider.

It was possible to hypothesize that Informant E was admiring these two riders and their horses because they appeared to be flowing. In addition, this statement brought up the question of whether a rider in flow somehow transmits that enjoyment to the horse or if the horse transmits enjoyment to the rider. According to research on flow and contagion (Bakker, 2005) it is possible to hypothesize that Informant E was infected with the flow he saw in the riders he looked up to.

Positive early learning experiences helped develop the informants as equestrians and helped them learn to enjoy horsemanship. All of the informants were avid learners, but the ways in which they learned new skills and took on challenges varied. Teachers assisted some, while others learned from experience. Watching other inspiring riders, who appeared to be enjoying horsemanship, also seemed to encourage this process. These positive learning experiences from childhoods of professional rider's childhoods seemed to be directly associated with flow theory as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1975).

The importance of the challenge-skills balance characteristic of flow was obvious in enjoyment orientation memories and early learning experiences. Flow theory emphasizes the importance of increasing challenges incrementally (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The stories that professional riders told, about their experiences as young equestrians, showed more dramatic increases in challenges. Their flow experiences as children seemed to often involve a particularly exciting or difficult situation. They therefore tended to like fairly difficult but talented horses. Mistakes were considered by most of the informants simply as important experience rather than setbacks.

Of course the professional riders in this sample are self-selected. We do not know how many young riders gave up riding when they faced difficult challenges. However, it is interesting to speculate why the riders in this sample were able to thrive in the context of the challenges they faced. Perhaps they were able to surmount these complex and difficult challenges because riding was so highly integrated with the rest of their lives. It could be that

the cumulative support from family, friends and teachers enhanced the likelihood of learning from such things as difficult horses and mistakes. Bakker (2005) also found that social support from colleagues, supervisory coaching and autonomy contributed positively to the fit between the skills and the challenges faced in the work place. Families and friends in horsemanship seemed offer social support as well as coaching. Perhaps they helped young riders take on challenges and develop their skills.

These ideas suggest that we need to reemphasize the value of the social dimension of riding. The importance of social context is not necessarily a new idea in terms of flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) explains how goals need to be defined in terms of the individual but also in terms of the social context of that individual. Social context and enjoyment orientation memories encouraged these informants to continue in horsemanship and perhaps facilitated flow experiences. Understanding in what contexts amateur riders best learn equestrian skills, could help teachers guide young equestrians into situations where they are likely to experience flow.

Flow in horse training

The third section of the questionnaire explored the role of flow in horse training. Riders often go trail riding for pleasure or compete to demonstrate their skills and the quality of their horses. It is commonly understood that success in such activities is more likely to occur if a horse has been appropriately trained. Training is the day-to-day activity that supports everything else. If people enjoy training they are likely to be successful trainers as well as successful in other equestrian activities. This is because flow has been shown to be associated with peak performance (Jackson et al., 2001; Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008). A rider's mental state correlates with changes in equine heart rate patterns (Hama et al., 1996; Bridgeman, 2009) and competitive results (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2010, 2011).

Informants gave similar responses when asked to describe a moment while training when everything was going well. For example:

Informant D:

Það er bara frábært tilfinning. Það er þá, það gefur rosalega svona stóran 'kick' þá er mann... maður lifir af þessum 'kick' í nokkrir dagar jafnvel vikur. Og það er eiginlega... já það er það besta sem til er.

It's just a wonderful feeling. It gives you a big 'kick' and then you can live off that 'kick' for several days or even weeks. It's pretty much... yah it is the best feeling ever.

The similarity in responses suggested that all the informants have experienced flow when training horses. The intensity of the flow experienced, in what context it occurred, and how it was described varied greatly between informants. Informant G described how the context in which she experienced enjoyment had changed throughout the years. As her skills developed the things she enjoyed changed. On the other hand the intensity of her enjoyment did not change.

Informant G:

Ég held að þegar ég byrjaði þá var það svo ofboðslega stórt fyrir mig að geta bara verið á hesti einhversstaðar... Núna finnst mér það kannski ekki alveg jafn stórkostlegt af því að ég er svo mikið á hestbaki en ég held að ég hafi jafn gaman að því. Og ég finn svona að ég hef svolítið sama tilfinningin þegar ég er að upplifa að hesturinn hefur gaman af því sem við erum að gera og mér finnst hlutirnir takast að þá held ég að ég sé alveg jafn glöð eins og þegar ég var í skóginum...

I think when I started riding it was very exciting to just be on a horse somewhere... Now I don't find that as amazing because I ride so much but I still enjoy riding just as much as I did back then. I find that I get the same feeling when the horse I am training is enjoying himself and everything's going well. Then I think I'm just as happy as I was riding in the woods as a kid...

This passage emphasizes the necessity to understand better how the contexts in which flow occurs for an individual changes as they grow older.

Enjoyment and flow experiences were often associated with challenging situations or horses. Many of the informants said that the variety of challenges involved in being a horse trainer was the primary reason they found it so exciting. Flow is dependent not only on moving from simple to complex challenges, but in rapidly changing from one type of challenge to another (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1990, 1997).

Informant E:

Bara, þetta er, sennilega af því að, þetta er bæði fjölbreytt og svona krefjandi að vera að vinna við mismunandi einstaklinga og mismunandi verkefni. Þetta er ekki svona hefðbundið starf þar sem maður fer bara og sagar sömu lengd af spítu í tvo daga. Heldur er maður með fjöldann allann af mismunandi verkefnum.

Just, it is, probably because of the diverse challenges that different individuals, horses, and situations provide. It's not a traditional job where you do the same thing every day. Instead you have dozens of different challenges.

Several informants explained that this variety of challenges was one of the reasons why they found it so easy to concentrate when training. All of the informants reported finding it easy to concentrate during training sessions. Concentration is a characteristic of flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). However the fragility of flow is suggested by the fact that informants described occasionally losing focus as a result of being tired or being disrupted by phone calls. When asked why she thought it was so easy to concentrate Informant G replied:

Informant G:

Bara ég hef áhuga á því sem ég er að gera held ég.

I'm just interested in what I'm doing.

As concentration increases action and awareness begin to merge. Informant D described feeling as if she were inside a type of bubble or ball when she was training. She explained that she forgets what's going on around her and is in her own world. This is typical way of describing flow experiences (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Clear goals, another characteristic of flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), were prominent in responses to this section of the questionnaire. It seems that all the informants regularly made both general goals for a horses training as well as goals for specific training sessions. Informant B described how he was always planning and re-evaluating the next steps in training a horse and was sometimes awake all night thinking about the next training session. Many of the informants discussed the importance of constantly re-evaluating their goals to reflect their abilities, the abilities of the horse, and the situation. This is consistent with the idea that unambiguous feedback helps successful athletes constantly modify their goals (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Informant E described how he adjusted his goals to suit specific training sessions.

Informant E:

En síðan aftur er ég mjög fljótur að endurskoða þessi markmið, ef að ég met það þannig að ég ekki komist lengra eða þá að ég sé það að ég kemst engan vegin svona langt.

But then again I am very quick to review these goals, if I evaluate the situation and find that I can't improve the horse further or that I can't reach the goal I had planned.

The flow characteristic of self-confidence (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) was not mentioned often, but Informant B discussed the importance of self-confidence several times throughout his interview. In particular, he emphasized the importance of self-confidence in achieving success.

Informant B:

*Já mér fannst það en eins og ég sagði áðan ef maður hefur ekki trú á sjálfum sér þegar maður fer í verkefnið þá fara þau ekki...
Yes I find that, like I said before, if you don't believe in yourself when you approach a challenge then it usually does 't go well...*

Many of the informants seemed to be self-confident, but they also recognized their faults and saw opportunities for improvement. The informants were asked to describe a horse they found challenging and then were asked whether they had believed at the time that they had the appropriate skills to train that particular horse. All of the informants responded that at the time they were confident in their skills, but would definitely train the horse differently now.

Informant C:

*Sko þegar ég var að þjálfa hann þá fannst mér ég algjörlega geta höndlað þetta. En þegar maður hugsar þetta til baka í dag þó það sé ekki langt síðan hvað það var ótrúlega margt sem ég hefði viljað gera öðruvísi. En samt svo ótrúlega margt sem ég lærði á því að gera það eins og ég gerði það.
When I was training him then I felt that I could totally handle it. But looking back today, although it wasn't long ago, there are many things that I would do differently if I trained him today. But still I learned a lot from training him the way I did.*

From Informant C's statement it is obvious that he was confident in his skills at the time, but had more knowledge and skills now. Most of the informants discussed how much they learned from their past experiences even though they wouldn't use the same methods again.

The final theme that emerged from the training section of the questionnaire was that training seemed to be an autotelic experience for the informants in this study. As professional equestrians all the informants needed to make a living, but it was clear that training was an autotelic experience as defined by Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1999) – done for its own sake. Although to varying degrees, all the informants said that they looked forward to training and

working with horses every morning. When asked whether they trained horses for money all the informants responded in the negative.

Informant A:

Ég er að því að því að mér finnst það skemmtilegt. Ég fæ nú bara óbeint borgað fyrir það.

I do it because I find it enjoyable. Therefore I'm paid indirectly for it.

The informants admitted that they were paid for training and needed to make a living, but explained that wasn't what motivated them to train horses. Sometimes when things are done for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons the extrinsic ones (like money) crowd out the intrinsic ones (enjoyment), and this of course negatively effects flow (Deci, 1996). This was not found to be the case in this study.

In this section of the questionnaire we saw that trainers define skills and challenges in many different ways. Some challenges were defined in terms of goals that are broad, and others in terms of goals that were very specific. Past challenges were constantly being reevaluated. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1999) say that "it is not so much what the objective challenges and skills are in a situation that determines the quality of an experience, but what a person thinks of the available opportunities and her capacity to act (p. 6)." The equestrians in this study demonstrated the ability to maintain flow by constantly reassessing their challenges.

The flow characteristics that emerged from the training section of the questionnaire included challenge skills balance, merging of action and awareness, clear goals, intense concentration, self-confidence, and flow as an autotelic experience. These are all very typical characteristics of flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) and supported the hypothesis that the informants in this study experienced flow while training horses. The many reports of flow in training suggested that the day-to-day work of developing horses and riders is facilitated by flow.

Flow in Icelandic Horse Competitions

Competition offers opportunities for flow and presents difficulties in finding flow. On the one hand the preparation for a competition sharpens a rider's skill. The challenge of competing successfully pushes people to the highest levels of concentration (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The more people concentrate on what they are doing, the more likely they are to experience flow. On the other hand, the drive to succeed in a competition can lead to anxiety. A

negative relationship has been found between anxiety and flow in athletic sports (Kirchner et al., 2008). In addition, a positive interpretation of anxiety and the ability to focus are correlated with successful ridden performances (Wolframm & Micklewright, 2011). Once the attention of a rider is focused on himself and his worries, instead of the task at hand, he may not only fail to experience flow, but also become unable to compete successfully. Informant G described various factors that made it difficult for her to enjoy competing.

Informant G:

Já það er annað hvort vegna þess að mér er búið að ganga mjög vel á einhverjum ákveðnum hesti og þá er búist við að maður geri það aftur. Eða eigandinn býinn að leggja mjög mikið, kannski búinn að láta mig hafa hest í þjálfun í eitt eða tvö ár og ætlast til þess að ég vinni eitthvað. Þá finn ég fyrir því og það minnkar gleði mig að keppa.

Yes it is usually either because I have been successful on a particular horse before and people expect the same results again or the owner has put a lot into a horse, maybe has paid for training for the last two years with the goal of me showing the horse and winning. Then I sometimes find that I can't enjoy the competition.

This rider paid attention to past success, a horse she had previously ridden and the expectations of an owner. All of these things may be worthy of consideration, but according to the findings of Bramsen (2007) and Kirchner et al. (2008) the experience of flow could have been enhanced if they were put aside until after the competition.

By and large the informants in this sample seemed to constructively use the intensity provided by competitions. This may be because all the informants in this study were professional equestrians with extensive experience. Research has found that successful advanced riders better manage anxiety (Wolframm et al., 2010; Meyers et al., 1999) and have better concentration skills (Wolframm et al., 2010) than less successful or novice riders. Two informants said their competitive performances were “unforgettable,” and another said she could live for days off the excitement she felt in a competition. To illustrate this one informant described an apparent flow experience that took place in a competition on ice.

Informant B:

Það sem fer í gegnum hugann er að allt fari vel er og enginn slys detti ekki þetta er svakalegt adrenalin kikk að vera með svona hesti við svona aðstæður mér leið mjög vel og vissi hvað ég gat boðið honum án þess að fara yfir rauða strikið og hvað honum leið vel með það var bara mjög gott.

The primary thing that flew through my mind was to stay safe and not slip. It was an amazing feeling and big adrenalin kick to be on such a horse in such a situation. I felt great and I knew how much speed I could ask for without asking too much and the horse felt great.

When a rider in flow is completely focused on the task at hand time may be transformed so that it appears to be passing with extraordinary speed. This is another one of Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson's (1999) characteristics of flow.

Informant A:

Já og nei. Það er samt þannig að maður man rosalega mikið smáatriðin. Og man alveg að í þessari beygju gerði hann svona eða hinsegin hesturinn. En samt finnst þér að þetta líði bara svona (snaps her fingers). Og finnst þetta líða rosalega hratt. Þú veist þegar þú horfir á einhvern ríða gæðingakeppni t.d. þá finnst þér það vera alveg hellings tími en þegar þú ert þarna sjálfur þá gerir þetta svona (snaps her fingers). Samt mannstu hvert skref og alveg og hverja leiðréttingu og allt. Þetta er svona þínu afstætt.

Yes and no. You remember very clearly every little detail. And remember completely that in that turn the horse did this and then that. But still you feel like time passed like this (snaps her fingers). Find that it passes very quickly. You know, when you watch someone ride a gæðingakeppni program you feel like it takes forever but when you are on the track your self time goes by like this (snaps her fingers). Still you remember each step the horse took and all the corrections you made while riding. It's relative to how you think about it.

Similar statements were made by many of the other informants. Several informants spoke of time as flying by when they were on the track, but also remembering each step the horse took.

It is interesting that even winning a competition wasn't always satisfying, if a rider is not able to do as well as he hoped or did not experience flow. Informant E described winning his first competition and explained that he was not satisfied even though he won.

Informant E:

Já. Ég man eftir því. Og svona ef ég á að segja þér alveg eins og er, að þá var það, fannst mér það ekki rosalega gaman að vinna. Jújú ég vann, en það sem að mér fannst verst var að ég, að þá upplifði ég það þannig að hesturinn hafði ekki verið nógu góður. Hann hafði oft verið miklu betri.

Yes. I remember. And to tell you the truth, I didn't find it very fun to win. Yah I won, but the worst of it was I felt that the horse just wasn't good enough. He had often performed much better.

This equestrian had set high standards for himself and his horse. Many of the informants felt that they were only successful when they met their personal challenges and goals and experienced flow. To win a trophy may have been nice, but flow comes from surmounting challenges. In the next passage the same informant made it clear that neither winning nor losing led him to lose focus on the crucial issue of what he wanted to accomplish.

Informant E:

Nei ég finn ekki pressu af því. Nema þá kannski bara frá sjálfum mér. En auðvitað svona, stefni ég að því að ég er hrikalega tapsár og bara þoli ekki að tapa. En sko, einhverra hluta vegna þegar ég er kominn í keppni á hestum að þá snýst þetta ekkert endilega um það hvort ég vinni eða ekki. Ég geri mér alveg grein fyrir því ef að það eru betri hestar en hestarnir sem ég er með að þá vinn ég ekki. En þá svona reyni ég allaveganna að meira að hugsa um að vinna í rauninni sjálfan mig bara. Að gera aðeins betur heldur en að ég gerði síðast eða þar síðast eða eitthvað svoliðis. Alltaf að reyna að gera aðeins betur fyrir sjálfann mig.

No I don't feel that kind of pressure to win. Except from myself. Of course I always try to win and am a sore loser. I can't stand losing. But for some reason when I ride onto the track it doesn't matter as much whether I win or not. I understand that sometimes there are more talented horses on the track than the one I am riding and therefore I won't win. But then I try to focus on beating myself. I try to do better than I did the last time or something like that. Always trying to improve myself and my horse.

In the interview responses flow memories from competitions often involved a challenging horse. Many of the informants in this study described memorable competition moments when they managed to control a particularly challenging but talented horse as in the statement below.

Informant A:

Hátíð var mikið viljug og það var alltaf út á enda með hana. Þú þurftir að byrja hárrétt því ef þú gerðir vitleysu í byrjun þá var hún bara farin. Og það, ég gerði ekki vitleysu og það virkuðu báðir sprettirnir og það var algjör, bara flingur.

Hátíð was very willing and often stressed waiting at the end of the track for our turn to pace. You needed to start the sprint perfectly, if you did something wrong in the beginning you could lose control. Then, I didn't do anything wrong and both sprints went well, it was an amazing feeling.

Appropriate but exciting challenges increase the likelihood of intense focus and flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihayli, 1999). Many informants said that they found it very easy to concentrate while

competing. One emphasized shutting out stimuli unrelated to the competition, which is often described as a characteristic flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Informant C:

Það er ekkert annað, það er bara ég og þessi hestur og við erum að keppa.

There is nothing else, just the horse and I competing.

In competitions goals are clear and the challenges are high. Clear performance-goals are the type of goal most often associated with flow experiences (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Therefore the competition track is a likely place for flow to occur. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi (1999) point out that some flow experiences "...remain etched in the memory and provide the blueprint for returning to this optimal state" (p.4). They also say that finding flow can "...offer a glimpse of perfection" (p. 31). The results of this study supported these concepts.

Flow in Equestrian Instruction

This section of the questionnaire focused on determining whether professional equestrians experienced flow while teaching. Flow in equestrian instruction is important because a teacher's flow has been found to be contagious and may influence their students (Bakker, 2005). The informants in this study varied greatly in their teaching experience. The more experienced teachers seemed to recognize the intricacies of teaching and therefore the challenges. They seemed to experience more flow when teaching. Better understanding the factors that increase the likelihood of flow in equestrian instruction is important because it influences the learning experience of students.

The six informants varied greatly in the amount of experience they had as teachers. Informant C had very limited teaching experience, while Informant G reported teaching extensively for over 17 years. The time that each informant spent teaching also varied. Two of the teachers are currently employed as instructors at Hólar University. They reported spending about 50-70% of their time teaching and often taught all day from 8:00AM to 6:00PM during the school year. Informants A and B reported teaching clinics, but spent the majority of their time training and riding themselves. This wide range of experience meant that certain informants were more capable of answering questions about teaching than others. The informant's

occupation or situation in life also reflected their opinions on teaching. For example Informant B reported that he would rather train horses than teach and only enjoyed it if he felt he could help the student. In comparison, Informants E and G, who are full time teachers, expressed more interest and enjoyment in teaching. This led to the hypothesis that Informants E and G may have experienced more flow while teaching, because they had more experience. They were therefore more likely to recognize the complex challenges involved in equestrian instruction.

All of the informants reported that they found it most enjoyable to see improvement in a student that they were teaching. They seemed to enjoy teaching most when the student was positive and they believed that they could help improve the students skills as a rider and relationship with their horse. All of the informants experienced enjoyment in teaching to various extents, but Informants E and G seemed to enjoy it the most. In particular, a series of statements from Informant E seemed to suggest teaching as a flow experience. Informant E described in detail the challenges of being a riding instructor and showed an understanding of the intricacies of approaching both horse and rider.

Informant E:

Já, mér finnst það rosalega gaman.

Yes, I find it very enjoyable.

Af hverju?

Why?

Bara fyrst og fremst fjölbreytt. Rosalega krefjandi. En rosalega skemmtilegt að geta hjálpað fólki finnst mér. Að verða betri í því sem þau hafa áhuga á. En að sama skapi er það mjög erfitt andlega.

Primarily because of the diversity. Very challenging. But I find it very enjoyable to be able to help people to be more successful in the thing that they love. But it is a pretty challenging job mentally.

Af hverju?

Why?

Bara, Eins og ég segi, mismunandi verkefni og það er rosalega erfitt finnst mér að, eða já, það er rosalega erfitt að átta sig á því hvernig maður þarf að nálgast hvern einstakling. Og það sem er líka krefjandi er að það er ekki bara fólkið heldur líka hrossin. Og það er, við erum með sko, nemenda sem er kannski með tvo, þrjá hesta, tvo

hesta og þeir eru mjög mismunandi og þá þarf kannski að hjálpa honum á mismunandi hátt með hvern hest. Og hérna svona, það er aðeins, það er þínu flókið. Og síðan bara þetta, þessi mannlegi þáttur þú veist, hvað þarf ég að gera til þess að ná fram skilningi og ná sambandi við þennan nemenda og fá hann til þess að gera eins mikið og hann getur. Það er frekar erfitt.

Just, like I said, a variety of challenges. I find it often very challenging to find out how to approach each individual. And it is also challenging because it's not just the people but the individual horses. And... students often have maybe two to three horses and they are all very different and you maybe need to approach the student differently with each horse. And, it is a little, it is quite complicated. And then of course, the fact that each person is different you know, what do I need to do to connect to this particular student so that he understands and rides to the best of his abilities. It is rather difficult.

Flow encourages people to appreciate complexity, because flow experiences always involve seeking new challenges (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). In the statement above it was obvious that Informant E's teaching is not a standard product. He was always adjusting how he taught so that it suited the individual horse and rider team. The responses from the interviews supported the conclusions of Gunderson (2009), who found that successful teachers often set more specific goals and recognized more complex classroom challenges than less successful teachers.

Nearly all the teachers described teaching advanced students as more exciting than teaching beginners. Informant G explained that she found it interesting and even difficult to teach complete beginners, but that she found a really talented horse-rider pair a much more exciting challenge. This was to be expected in terms of flow theory. If flow encourages people to appreciate complexity and seek greater challenges, then it is likely that teachers would enjoy advanced students more than beginners. Advanced riders appeared to offer a greater variety of challenges to the informants. If a teacher does not find teaching beginner riders challenging and enjoyable it could cause a novice rider to enjoy the lesson less according to the concept of contagion (Bono & Ilies, 2006).

Uniformly the informants recognized that a teacher's mood was contagious. If a teacher enjoyed teaching and was engaged in the lesson this increased the likelihood of their student experiencing the same emotions. Bakker (2005) observed in his study that flow was contagious between music teachers and their students. Informant C responded in the following fashion when asked about mood being contagious during a riding lesson:

Informant C:

Alveg hiklaust. Ég er alveg viss um það. Og eins bara þegar ég hef sjálfur verið í kennslu að ef kennaranum finnst gaman að því sem hann er að gera þá verður allt svo miklu skemmtilegra og þú verður áhugasamari, sama hvað það er sem verið er að kenna í rauninni. En ef þú finnur að hann er aðeins áhugalaus þá finnst þér þetta ekki svona eins gaman og þú sækir ekki eins mikið í hann.

Without hesitation I'm sure of it. I know when I'm taking a lesson if the teacher enjoys teaching everything is much more fun and I'm more interested in what they are saying, no matter what it is they are teaching. But if I feel that the teacher is not interested then I don't find it as much fun and I don't pay as much attention.

The responses of the informants in this study suggested that the relationship between teachers and students was complex and that emotional contagion was not happening in only one direction. Informant E emphasized the importance of the student's attitude. The teacher could be positive and encouraging but if the student was negative it was difficult to keep the lesson enjoyable.

Informant E:

... ef að maður nær sjálfur að vera svona jákvæður og hafa aðeins áhuga að þá smitar það út frá sér. En það sem að svona, skiptir ekkert síður máli það er bara svona almennt innan hópsins hvernig mórallinn er þar. Skilurðu, það er ekkert, hefur ekkert minni áhrif eins og bara þegar maður er með hóptíma. Það eru kannski einn, tveir einstaklingar sem eru rosalega jákvæðir og spyrja mikið og svona í tímanum að þá smitar það rosalega út frá sér og en síðan kemur aftur næsti hópur sem að er kannski einhver, ég veit ekki, einhver spenna eða eitthvað, einhver sem að er fúll eða eitthvað illa fyrir kallaður að þá hefur það líka áhrif á hina. Og ekkert eiginlega minni áhrif heldur en kennarinn.

... if you are positive and are interested in what you are teaching, those emotions may infect your students. But still, the general morale of the group is not any less important. You know, especially during a group lesson the mood of the students can be quite influential. If there are one or two individuals in the group that are positive and ask a lot of questions during the lesson their attitudes are likely to infect the others in the group. And then in the next group there is maybe someone, I don't know, someone who is anxious, feels bad, or is pissed or something and that then influences the others in that group. And of course the teacher.

Informant G also emphasized how the mood of students could affect the mood of the teacher. The interviews showed that it is very important that the students and teachers both approach riding lessons open to challenges and with a positive attitude. If the lesson is enjoyable for the teacher and student it is likely that they both will experience flow. Flow has been shown to be contagious (Bakker, 2005) and this data supported the theory of emotional contagion as

researched by Bono & Ilies (2006). If a teacher or student experiences flow during a lesson, it is likely that their emotions will be infectious.

Dedication or Addiction

Horsemanship was often a flow activity for the participants in this study. Their responses illustrate their commitment and how important horsemanship was in their lives. While flow is a positive experience it can also be addictive in athletes (Partington et al., 2009). It is unclear whether the informants in this study were dependent or addicted to flow in horsemanship.

All of the informants reported spending an enormous percentage of their day in some activity related to horsemanship. An 8-12 hour workday was not unusual for the informants in this study. Many of the informants described having little time to follow any other passions or interests. Partington et al. (2009) also observed this trend in surfers, who sacrificed relationships and other social norms in a search for bigger waves.

Informant C:

Í rauninni finnst mér ég ekki vera að fórna neinu þannig af því að ég hef svo gríðarlegan áhuga á því sem ég er að gera. Hef eiginlega engin önnur áhugamál sem ég myndi vilja vera að gera á einhverjum tíma. En ég finn það alveg að ég þarf að fórna rosalega mörgu sem jafnaldrar mínir eru að gera.

In fact, I don't really feel that I'm sacrificing anything because I have such a tremendous passion for what I'm doing. I really don't have any other hobbies that I'd prefer to be doing. But I have noticed that I don't have time for many of the things my peers do.

All of the informants seemed unconcerned by the fact that horsemanship consumed such a large part of their day. Many explained that horsemanship was what they enjoyed and therefore spending extensive time riding was not a bad thing. In contrast Partington et al. (2009) reported that some of the surfers in their study were concerned by how much surfing dominated their lives.

All of the riders agreed that days off and vacations unassociated with horsemanship were healthy. Informants A and B said that they planned a vacation once a year to take a break from horsemanship. On the other hand all the informants said that after several days to a week of vacation they began to really miss riding.

Informant G:

Já og ég finn það líka að þegar maður er að fara í frí þar sem eru ekki hestar. Að þá liður ekki langur tími áður en maður fer svona að skipuleggja hvernig maður á að gera þegar maður kemur heim og hvernig maður á að þjálfna þennan hest. En þá líka hleður maður bara aðeins. En ég myndi halda að það gæti bara verið rétt orðað að maður væri háður.

Yes I get that feeling when I take a vacation not associated with horses. Then it doesn't take long for me to begin to plan what I'll do when I get home and how I'll train this or that horse. I think it helps me recharge in a sense. But I think it would be correct to say that I was dependent on horses.

When asked whether they would ride even if they were hurt most of the informants replied that they would definitely continue training unless it was impossible or would negatively affect the horse. Informant E said that as long as he could stand up and dress himself, he would show up in the barn and ride even if he was injured. Continuing in an activity despite injuries and risking harming oneself further has been found to be one of the negative effects of flow (Partington et al., 2009). None of the injuries described by the informants in this study were severe and it is unclear whether the informants in this study were truly risking harming themselves by continuing riding.

All of these representative statements and the enormous time the informants spent in horsemanship related activities indicate a certain level of addiction to flow in horsemanship. When asked directly whether they were addicted or depended on horsemanship all of the informants responded yes. Similar language and phrases were found in responses of flow addicted the surfers in the Partington et al. (2009) study.

Informant C:

En ég finn það alveg rosalega vel þegar maður er veikur í 4 eða 5 daga eða ferð til útlanda í viku að það er ekkert skemmtilegra en að fara á hestbak eftir það. Þá finnurðu hvað þú ert orðinn háður þessu í rauninni.

When I'm sick for 4-5 days or take a trip overseas for a week I find that there is nothing more enjoyable than going on a ride afterwards. Then you discover how you are in fact addicted to this.

It is obvious that all of the informants in this study could not imagine life without horsemanship. Does that mean that they are addicted to the flow that they experience when riding? Their excitement in taking on new challenges and the extensive time they spend training is part of what

causes them to experience flow and obtain expertise or peak performance. Is it negative that they are successful in and get to spend extensive time doing something they love?

Informant B:

Ég þekki ekki lífið án hestamennsku og langar ekki að kynnast því án hestamennsku, hestamennska hefur alltaf verið partur af mínu lífi misstór en yfirleitt mjög stór og meira og minna allir mínir vinir tengjast hestamennsku á einn eða annan hátt hestamennskan er líka hobbyið mitt maður lifir og hrærist í hestamennsku alla dag og allann daginn og þetta er líka áhugamál þannig að ég get varla hugsað mér lífið án hestamennsku.

I don't know a life without horsemanship and I don't want to know how it is to live without horses. Horsemanship has always been a part of my life to a varying extent and nearly all of my friends are somehow related to horsemanship. Horsemanship is my hobby and life every day all day and it's what I'm passionate about so I can't imagine my life without horses.

In a sense the informants in this study were limited by their passion for horses. Should we say that the informants were committed or addicted? Symptoms of addiction involve compulsively or repeatedly engaging in an action until that action has negative consequences. In this case committed seems more appropriate. All of the informants believed that they were lucky to be doing something that they enjoyed. They did not express regrets about their choice of horsemanship as a career. On the other hand, if a person is willing to ride when injured, and perhaps risk further injury, questions should be raised. The same is true for people who cannot enjoy vacations away from riding. Further research should continue to explore this thin line between commitment and addiction.

The Vocabulary of Flow

In the English-speaking world Csikszentmihalyi's work on flow has helped focus discussion and research on how it is that people find enjoyment. The word flow provides a focus for these endeavors. We need to find a word or words in Icelandic to orient our discussions of enjoyment in Icelandic. The informants in this study used a variety of Icelandic synonyms for the word flow.

Skemmtilegt	Fun/enjoyable
Kikk	Kick (got a kick out of it)
Fílingur	A feeling
Gaman	Fun/enjoyable
Allt í einu leikur allt við mann	Everything's coming together
Æðislegt	Delightful
Gekk allt vel	Everything went well
Rush	Rush
Adrenalín kikk	Adrenaline kick
Alsæla	Ecstasy
Gengur allt upp	Everything works/goes well
Gleymir sér	Forget yourself
Allt bara virkar	Everything works
Að komast í gírinn	Get in gear
Leyfa augnublikinu að taka völdin	Let the moment take over
Ofsaeinbeitingu	Extreme concentration
Komast í ham	Get in the mode

Future researchers need to determine which Icelandic words or expressions will be most helpful in stimulating conversations about flow or enjoyment. One advantage of the word flow is that it is a simple one-syllable word. None of the single words used in Icelandic seemed to fully describe the experience of flow. For example “skemmtilegt” and “æðislegt” are more equivalent to the word “enjoyable” rather than flow. Several of the words used were simply modified English words. For example, “adrenalín kikk” is basically an English phrase. Perhaps the most interesting Icelandic phrases used were “alsæla” and “að komast í ham.” Future studies on flow should investigate the usage of these two words to determine whether they satisfy the flow criterion. The word “flow” could be introduced to the Icelandic vocabulary. Before Csikszentmihalyi defined the concept of flow in 1975 the word flow was not extensively used in the context of describing this experience. Today American athletes are familiar with the term and often use it to describe their experiences. If these concepts are further introduced to athletes in Iceland they may begin to adopt the use of the term flow or a similar Icelandic word.

Conclusions

Across a variety of activities professional equestrians may commonly experience flow. Informants often describe horseback riding as an enjoyable activity. However, the extent to which riders find flow is impressive. The day-to-day work of training, which starts early and ends late, does not appear to become an impediment to flow. The pressures of competition do not diminish flow; they may even enhance it. Flow also appears in teaching, despite the complexities of the teacher-student-horse relationship. While these interesting conclusions are suggested by the preliminary interviews, it is inappropriate to draw definitive conclusions from this research. Although similar flow themes seemed apparent across the interviews, the sample was not large enough to provide true data saturation.

This study provided preliminary descriptions of the contextual factors that seem to encourage flow in horsemanship. A family background in horsemanship, or close relationships with other equestrians seemed to encourage horsemanship as an enjoyable and possible flow activity. When addressing when and how the equestrians in this study experienced flow as amateur riders the importance of social context and enjoyment orientation memories was clear. Positive early experiences, such as with a challenging enjoyment orienting horse, seemed to facilitate flow experiences later on in a riders career. Future research needs to further investigate the concept of enjoyment orientation memories and the importance of the social context in facilitating flow. Studies that compare amateur riders with more advanced riders could further enhance understanding of these ideas.

Training and competing seemed to both be flow experiences for all the informants in this study at various levels. The flow characteristics that emerged from the data included all of the characteristics that Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson (1999) used to define flow. In general the informants seemed to use competitive situations constructively. The equestrians in this study were talented in discovering and evaluating challenges in training and competition in a thoughtful and flexible manner. The importance of the perceived challenge-skills balance characteristic of flow was evident in all the interviews. All six informants seemed to recognize the intricacies of training and competing. They seemed to be skilled at making complex but exciting long and short-term goals while training and competing. Future research should delve more deeply into the thought processes of these riders in order to learn how they make decisions.

The tentative discovery of contagion between riding teachers and their students suggests another area of inquiry. Increasing the frequency and intensity of flow experiences among riding instructors could increase flow experiences among their students. More research needs to be done to better determine what factors may increase flow in riding lessons. Videotaping and interviewing the most successful teachers could help us further explore such techniques.

Teachers seemed to experience more flow when teaching advanced students as opposed to beginners. If the theory of contagion is true, this means that beginning students may be denied opportunities for flow. Future researchers should inquire more into the kinds of skills and challenges that can be developed in teaching novice riders. Csikszentmihalyi and Jackson (1999) emphasize that skills and challenges are subjectively perceived. What we view as a challenge depends on our interest, point of view, and past experience. Even if the challenges presented by beginning riders are more difficult to find than those presented by those who are more skilled, we need to do a better job of articulating those challenges. One way to do this would be to conduct a study that just focused on the teaching of novice riders. If we examined a group of teachers dealing with beginners, we could identify those who enjoyed their work the most, and attempt to note if they defined the skills and challenges differently from those who enjoyed their work less.

The picture of flow offered by this research was primarily positive. However, in the study of the dark the “dark side of flow” Partington et al. (2009) raised questions about problems related to flow. They argue that some people become so addicted to finding flow that they become oblivious to other important areas of their lives. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) also raises questions about whether the consequences of flow are good or bad. He says that by all accounts, “Adolph Eichmann enjoyed working on the logistic problems involved in transporting Jews to extermination camps” (1997, p. 139-140). In addition to looking at the experience of flow, we also need to examine its consequences.

Partington et al. (2009) examined big wave surfers who seemed to be on an endless search for bigger waves, surfing when injured, and paying inadequate attention to the areas of their lives beyond surfing. In several ways the riders in this study also fit this profile. Some were willing to ride when injured, began to get irritable if they were away from riding on vacations, and frequently associated more or less exclusively with other riders. However, there may also be fundamental differences between the informants in my study and the big wave

surfers. Partington et al. (2009) do not provide many details about their sample, but the information they give depicts the surfers as loners that single-mindedly focused on finding the “biggest” waves. Hefferon and Ollis (2006) have pointed to the importance of the relationships a dancer has with her peers and choreographer for the creation of flow, and this finding may be widely applicable. The equestrians in this study tended to belong to closely-knit communities, and they engaged in a variety of activities with multiple goals. It is perhaps for this reason that this study did not find the signs of alienation and dysfunction that were suggested by Partington et al. (2009).

Future research should examine the extent to which being engaged in a community and engaging in a variety of activities does in fact influence flow. Even though the riders examined in this research appeared content in their careers, there is a need to further evaluate how a propensity to supplement interests in riding with non-riding activities affects riders. Future studies should also examine how riding fits in with the rest of life. For example, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) suggests the possibility that when people experience flow in recreational activities that may make them more capable of taking on the challenges of day-to-day life. Is this true of riding?

Flow in horsemanship should also be investigated with quantitative methods. Survey or questionnaire research has been used in studies of flow (Jackson & Eklund, 2002). Tests and special scales have been developed to measure aspects of flow. Susan Jackson has developed several scales for assessing flow in physical activities (Jackson & Eklund, 2002).

Csikszentmihalyi has described the basic characteristics of flow. A variety of researchers have extended his thinking in many different contexts. Examples mentioned in this paper include dancers (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006), big wave surfers (Partington et al., 2009), musicians (Bakker, 2005; Kirchner et al, 2008), collegiate rowers (Bramsen, 2007), and middle school teachers and their students (Gunderson, 2009). The results of this paper have shown that flow occurs throughout horsemanship activities. In addition, these findings have offered suggestions on how to enhance flow and enjoyment in Icelandic equestrians. Hopefully this research has set the stage for future inquiries into flow in horsemanship.

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