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Qualitative study for qualitative methods module at Oxford Brookes University

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## **Fulfilling Life's Purpose: Persistence in Diverse Athletic Activities**

### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study explored the drive behind persistence in Aerial Circus Performance, Mixed Martial Arts and Dance using semi-structured interviews with three adult participants. Thematic analysis identified two over-arching themes: In the Moment (during the activity) and Journey (activity as life's journey). Participants were born with a core talent, having strong identity and passion for their activity, which created meaning and value through peak experience and peak performance and increased flow experience. These experiences, along with satisfaction of competence, autonomy and relatedness served the ultimate reason to persist: to fulfil life's purpose. A new model along with future directions are proposed.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Flow is a subjective state experienced during an enjoyable activity that is intrinsically rewarding: characterized by intense focus, awareness of action in the moment combined with a sense of control, loss of reflexive self-consciousness, complete absorption and time flying (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This desirable state occurs when one subjectively achieves clearly set goals within a balance of perceived challenge and skill (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2014). Privette (1983) distinguished between microflow (simple enjoyment such as chewing gum) and macroflow (deep enjoyment accompanied with realizing potential) and provided a model revealing overlaps between flow, peak performance and peak experience. Peak experiences are moments of intense ecstasy felt not only during sex, but also moments of insight, discovery and inspiration (Maslow, 1962). Peak performance occurs when one uses the maximum of their power to function at the highest level (Privette, 1983) and denotes performance outcomes and achievement (Harmison, 2006; Jackson, 1996). These concepts are advantageous to coaches seeking to motivate their athletes to achieve consistent optimal levels (Harmison, 2006).

Csikszentmihalyi et al., (2014) argue that the phenomenological experience of flow alone gives the athlete a strong motivation to continue whilst other motivation theories focus on precursors and outcomes. For example, Hebb (1955) stated exploratory and learning

behaviour is a drive that aids optimal levels of arousal, promoting a healthy nervous system, whilst White (1959) discussed how competent interaction with the environment causes a feeling of efficacy that motivates beyond behaviour propelled by drives (effectance motivation). In support of White (1959), Deci and Ryan (2000) distinguish between drives and innate psychological needs: According to self-determination theory (SDT), motivation to pursue goals is associated with satisfaction of these three basic needs (competence, relatedness and autonomy); whilst both drives and innate needs are important energizers for intrinsic motivation; primary drives operate in a circular manner (receding once satisfied) but innate needs operate in an upward spiral of seeking and conquering challenges for healthy psychological growth (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

These theories don't fully explain why an athlete chooses and dedicates their life to their activity. Passion is investment (time and energy) in an activity that is liked (or loved) and valued; a characteristic of which is internalizing the activity into one's identity and Vallerand, Houlfort and Fores, 2003 proposed two types of passion resulting upon internalization: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion describes one willingly pursuing their activity autonomously, obsessive passion describes one feeling compelled to engage in the activity due to inter/intrapersonal pressures. They found that harmonious and obsessive passion create strong motivation to persist when benefits are positive, but obsessive passion leads to a higher and rigid persistence in the face of negative outcomes such as injury and stress.

This qualitative study aims to explore persistence in diverse athletic settings through semi-structured interviews with people whose activity is their career. The role of the flow experience vs other aspects that maintain the passion and motivation to continue is explored. What fuels the inner drive to continue?

## **METHOD**

### **Rationale for the Research Approach**

A quantitative approach is useful when a specific research question is clearly defined (Howitt & Cramer, 2008) however, the research question emerged during the analytic process in this study. A criticism of quantitative research is that it focuses on one aspect of human functioning whilst the human experience is multi-faceted in any given moment (Giorgi, 2012). Qualitative methods were used to gain rich and meaningful knowledge of participants subjective phenomenological experience (cf. Kopala & Suzuki, 1999).

## **Participants and Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews give a holistic account of participants reality and direct an enriched, integrated discourse (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009) and in narrative interviewing, biographical experiences are accessed and explored allowing investigation of broader topics (Flick, 2002).

Using Wengraf's (2001) semi-structured, narrative interviewing method, a pilot interview was conducted to practice the interview format revealing less note-taking was necessary. Following ethics approval, the final interview with Violet (aerial circus performer; 40) took place face-to-face and consisted of three subsections (see appendix 1). Subsection one contained a major narrative question allowing Violet to describe (uninterrupted) the journey and meaning of her activity experience from her own perspective. Subsection two contained narrative-pointed questions requesting expansion of topics raised in subsection one in strict sequential order (Wengraf & Chamberlayne, 2006). Subsection three contained theory-based questions devised to cover eight aspects of flow. The reasoning behind the triple subsection format was to ensure the major narrative question was uninfluenced by subsequent questioning, and to collect as much narrative in subsections one and two before the influence of theory-based questioning (Wengraf & Chamberlayne, 2006). In both subsection two and three, areas of interest were followed up in the moment, allowing the participant to say whatever came up, and questions asked that might otherwise not have arisen (Carver & Scheier, 2000).

As advised by Giorgi (2012), an attitude of 'phenomenological reduction' was adopted; keeping the narrative in consciousness with a psychological attitude sensitive to the topic under investigation, whilst refraining from drawing on prior knowledge or assumptions – also known as bracketing.

The interview was recorded unobtrusively and transcribed verbatim (see appendix 2). A further two interview transcripts were chosen from those of university undergraduate peers: Ben (martial artist; 23) and Miranda (dancer; 44) were chosen for their homogeneity in relation to the research question because akin to Violet, their athletic activity was their career. Recruited via purposive sampling, all participants signed a consent form and were assured of anonymity. The final three transcripts averaged 65 minutes recording time.

## **Analytical Framework**

Philosophically, psychological analysis sets out to express the participants experience so that it becomes fulfilled in the ‘desired expression’ by exploring various expressions until the precise fit is reached (Giorgi, 2012). Braun and Clark’s (2006) widely used reflexive thematic analysis was used as a framework to reach the desired expression; the six steps are simple to follow and result in thorough analysis.

Transcripts were read thrice to get a sense of each participant and initial ideas were noted. Data was predominantly coded in a semantic and inductive manner, aiming to capture the experience from interviewees words. Individual codes were copied onto colour coded post-it notes. A thorough, active and predominantly data-driven process ensued to identify pattern and meaning consistent across the data set during which codes were worked into subthemes and themes (see appendix 3) and thematic maps constructed at stages to aid analysis (see appendix 4). During this process, subthemes applying to two participants were either placed in an alternative subtheme or discarded due to lack of commonality. Subthemes were re-worked as fresh light fell on their meaning, aiming to capture their essence, make them concise and reduce their overlap. Transcripts were re-read to check the raw data fitted with themes and a final reworking of themes and subthemes took place.

## ANALYSIS / FINDINGS

Two over-arching themes were identified: In the Moment and Journey. A final thematic map was completed (see figure 1) and descriptions of subtheme content placed in table 1.

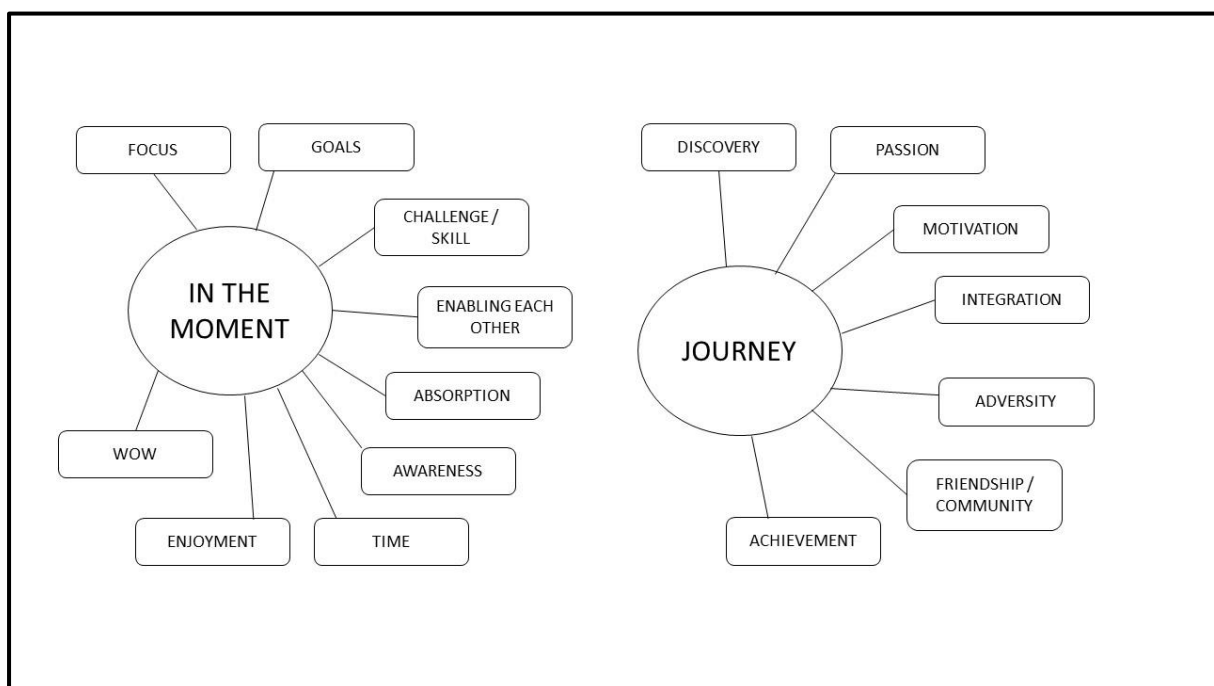


Figure 1. Final thematic map

Table 1. Final themes, subthemes and description of their content

THEME	SUBTHEMES	CONTENT
IN THE MOMENT	Goals	Goal setting Step by step goals within training (mini goals) Overall goal for training (maxi goals) Achievement goals
	Enabling Each Other	Training together Spurring each other on Inspiring each other Honouring each other Watching each other
	Focus	Locked in focus Focus for safety Focus with goals Barriers to focus Focus on the details Long term focus
	Time	Time flies Time to standstill Observations of time
	Challenge / Skill	Seeking challenge Increasing challenge as skill improves Skill ability Integration of multi-faceted activity Skill improvement Boredom in achieved skills
	Absorption	Meditative Automatic Losing self External out

	Awareness	Awareness of surroundings Skill awareness Awareness of others Action awareness Awareness of desire
	Enjoyment	Positive impact on mental health Get out of head Happy place Having fun
	Wow	Nailing it Gratitude Thrill Nerves Meaning Realization Extreme happiness
JOURNEY	Discovery	Role models Seeking new experiences Changeover moment Unique activity Inspiration
	Passion	Experience feeding passion Need to perform Positive addiction Inner fulfilment All-encompassing Obsessive Passion Purpose Authentic drive
	Motivation	Determination Building resilience Daily and long-term persistence Discipline

		Competence Hard work
	Integration	Teaching skills Teaching life lessons to others Inspiring others Learning from more advanced others Seeking inspiration Intensive training course Seeking new experiences Personality and identity Positive impact on self and others Adapting to age and environment
	Adversity	Rejection Injury Health barriers
	Friendship / Community	Involving and attracting public Family environment Deep friendship through training Bonding through activity experience Team and crew
	Achievement	Achieving goals Meaningful achievement Meaningful moments Peak performance Pride in self and students Creating novel work Working with top companies Reward

The subthemes chosen for deeper analysis due to their salience in contributing to persistence were: Integration, Passion, Achievement and Absorption.

## **JOURNEY**

## INTEGRATION

All participants had grown up through childhood identifying with a version of their chosen activity: *“From the age of 6 I was always involved in martial arts in some aspect”* (Ben); *“I did dance from the age of three”* (Miranda); *“My love for circus is actually my secondary copy love for what I used to do when I was growing up which is equestrian vaulting”* (Violet).

Participants showed awareness of how the activity had integrated into their adult life. Ben discussed that as people heard about the fighting relationship he had with a friend, it *“opened up avenues for more”*; Miranda described how she *“took solace”* in the company of like-minded dancers and that *“dance in general has been a massive part of [her] existence”* and Violet acknowledged her whole life had become embedded into it:

*all my friends and my whole life is somehow connected to circus, so it would be really hard for me to even give it up ...while circus got me there in the first place, now that place keeps giving me circus...It's like a snake that bites it's own tail, a positive vicious circle if that makes sense.*

All participants felt privileged to involve others in their “unique” and “novel” career choice with Violet expressing; *“giving people something they usually don't experience – it's beautiful”*. Miranda wanted to share her *“passion and knowledge”* and Ben's determination to continue increased upon *“seeing so many people interested in such a rare kind of sport”*. Participants were driven to share the positive impact of their own life-lessons. Violet discussed how, like herself, *“everyone can get something out of it”*; Miranda taught students her own motto; *“Hard work beats talent, talent doesn't work hard”* and Ben earnestly explained:

*One student in particular was very very quiet when he started, and now he's grown into a such a confident person, wants to fight, and looking towards the future has asked about me being in his corner. And kind of having the idea of being able to coach someone through that kind of life experience, and seeing them achieve something, such as winning a fight*

## PASSION

All participants had a passion for their activity that persisted over time; Violet acknowledged *“if I didn't love it I probably wouldn't still be doing it”* and Ben stated *“when you find*



*something that you love so much, you want to dedicate your time to it*". Miranda's passion for dance and desire to perform persisted after rejection:

*When I went and did the first load of auditions that I didn't get, don't get me wrong, emotionally that was very demoralizing, and I did go under the duvet for a week. I then had to school myself and say; "No, hang on a second, you still have this passion, you still want to be out there and perform, you need to find ways to make this work for you."*

The challenges of training fed into participants passion to continue. Violet remembered; *"I just kinda fell in love with it, in love with the training aspect and the challenges of it"* and Miranda was *"bitten by the bug"* after an intensive pre-professional training course.

Embracing the challenge fed Ben's passion and gave him *"purpose and a drive to conquer"*:

*Coming across MMA, it was a whole new thing to learn, new skills to pick up. Things I had never considered. Strikes that I'd never used before ... It grew the passion for me and made me enjoy it more every time I knew I was going to do an MMA session.*

All participants were passionate about performing on stage with *"the ultimate goal to win"* (Ben). This goal gave their activity a direction and a sense of purpose – they were *"training towards something"* (Violet). Miranda describes the intensity of the need to perform and fulfil that purpose:

*It was just that passion, it was the passion and determination that I desperately wanted to, I wanted to achieve this, I wanted to be on that stage, I wanted to be Sylvie Guillem, that was my goal.*

The drive to perform was intensified by a "lacking" or "itching" when not performing. Ben describes the moment the inner lacking drove him to aim for a competition on stage:

*internally I wanted to be a bit more fulfilled with it, and started looking at ways that I could now compete and fight... I needed to test my own abilities and understand my own skills and my own strengths, and that was the only way of going about it.*

Violet described how performing *"fills a void"* inside her and Miranda felt the drive to perform so strongly that it was *"all-encompassing"* and she was *"driven to do it"*.

This feeling of being *compelled* to perform also points towards an obsessive passion.

Objective evidence found in Miranda who *"lost the ability to walk and move"* following

sickness exacerbated by overtraining and despite this, pushed herself to dance again. Whilst Ben stated he is “*obsessed by*” MMA, Violet described a similar experience to Miranda:

*I ended up with adrenal fatigue from overdoing it and overtraining which now puts me in a position where I can't always do the things I love ... because my body is like, no.*

## **ACHIEVEMENT**

All participants identified specific and meaningful moments of goal achievement through peak performance that increased their dedication and overlapped with peak experience. Whilst Violet acknowledged “*tons and tons of meaningful moments which all add up*” she recognized a “*changeover moment*” where she reached a high level and realized; “*ah – this could also be my job,*” accompanied by a feeling of extreme happiness; Ben described how the “*key moment*” of winning his meaningful first fight sparked a feeling of “*wow*” and impacted his dedication:

*it's kind of given me the drive to want to do more, make me want to stay in the sport more, make me want to achieve more. I've since continued teaching, having students that want to fight themselves*

Miranda tells of her journey following the “*pivotal moment*” she succeeded in passing a meaningful audition:

*He chose me for that reason; as well as my creativity he chose me because I could teach. And I remember coming out of that thinking wow this is absolutely amazing... would it look weird if I fist-pumped into the air?!...It is probably one of the other reasons why I am an educator now.*

## **IN THE MOMENT**

### **ABSORPTION**

Participants were aware of how absorption had a positive impact on their mental state. Miranda described how “*whatever day to day things are happening, you can leave them at the door of the studio or the hall that you're dancing in, and you can get lost in the music*”. Violet sought opportunities to train so she could “*get out of [her] head*” and said, “*the happiness I feel when I am in a space training, it's almost like meditation, you know a lot of*

*the time you just get very absorbed in it.*” Ben looked forward to every training session and describes the “rewarding” feeling he gets whilst spending hours in flow:

*Another level where anything I’m thinking of, any stresses, it’s completely gone from my head. My mind becomes completely clear. All I’m thinking about is what I’m doing in that moment, nothing else matters. Just what I’m doing and what my goals are, the techniques I’ll use at that time. In my head, emotionally, it’s non-existent. Another state of mind really.*

All participants recognize how being in flow can change negative emotions into positive:

*“You can put any emotional issues that you have into the movement that you’re doing”*

(Miranda): *“Things that bothered us, we’ve been able to let it go and channel into a better way”* (Ben). Violet explains what happens when she’s having a bad day but gets absorbed in

flow;

*after two hours I’m buzzing, and I’m like, ‘this is great’ you know and I kinda remember that I didn’t feel great to begin with.*

## **DISCUSSION**

All participants strongly identified with their activity; like the jazz musicians in Walker and Burgess’s (2011) study, they persisted in their activity because it gave them meaning, enabling creation of their self. Waterman (1990) forwards that personal identity is commitment to values that give meaning and purpose to life and is a way of being – not an activity to simply do. All participants experienced key moments involving peak performance and peak experience which reinforced their dedication. During peak performance, the self is strong and during both phenomenon the meaning and power of the experience integrates into the identity (Privette, 1983). Peak experiences can cause a dramatic, memorable shift, and this combined with self-actualization brought profound meaning and purpose to participants’ activities (cf. Maslow, 1962). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states that finding purpose is not enough if one does not meet the challenge by bringing elements together into flow, which is arguably where the purpose is actualized. Indeed, upon meeting the challenges of training, participants fell in love with their activity even more and their commitment increased which does support the notion that the phenomenological experience of flow alone is a powerful motivating force.

Participants experienced a lacking when not performing and a lacking creates motivation to fulfil the desire (cf. Colman, 2015). Waterman (1990) furthers that a person's sense of identity drives the motivation when they realize they are not acting consistently with integrated values or progressing toward actualizing their goals. Participants' highest goal was to perform (or fight) on stage (or have students perform on stage) and aiming for this gave them a focus and purpose for training (or teaching). This is supported by Mallett and Hanrahan (2004), who found elite athletes focused primarily on accomplishment, and upon achieving their goals their perceived competence increased and thus their intrinsic motivation; however, this SDT explanation omits the profoundness of goal achievement in a meaningful activity. Intrinsic motivation theory does not adequately capture the value assigned to, and identification with the activity whereas passion includes all these concepts making it a stronger motivating force than intrinsic motivation alone (Mageau et al., 2009). All participants were clearly passionate about their activity; although evidence of obsessive passion was found in all participants, they experienced feelings of well-being during and after their activity and readily experienced flow which contrasts with Carpentier, Mageau and Vallerand (2011) who found the opposite was true in those obsessively passionate. Two thirds of participants persisted in their discipline despite health barriers which supports the addictive aspect of flow (Cziksentmihalyi, 1990) but psychodynamic Life Mission Theory states everyone has a core talent; their purpose is to express it (Ventogodt, Anderson and Merrick, 2003) and activities are personally expressive when they further our innate potential (Waterman, 1990), therefore persisting through barriers is remaining true to one's innate talent and remaining true to the love for the activity. Love is a basic value, inherent to human nature and on a psychological level; irreducible to another form (cf. Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008), so could persistence not simply be a case of: 'I love it - It's who I am'?

All participants practiced a version of their activity throughout childhood, elaborating upon an already complex structure throughout adult life, increasing feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness; unifying the self (cf. Deci & Ryan, 1985) but also creating a strong sense of identity with all aspects of the activity which is an aspect of passion (Vallerand et al, 2003) and remaining true with their core talent (Ventogodt et al., 2003). All participants embraced relatedness with activity-peers and through teaching others, deriving a deep satisfaction from these interactions and a healthy self-perception (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000). Participants valued the activity's uniqueness, seeking to share the joy of the activity

and life lessons from the journey that mirrored their own; sharing this gift with others is a highest act of power (cf. Ventegodt et al., 2003).

## REFLEXIVITY

As the researcher, my own experiences as an activity practitioner has influenced and guided this study, so I cannot discount biases formed during interpretation. Interviews were conducted with unconnected researchers, so some specific lines of thinking remain unexplored.

## CONCLUSION

Based on this research, fulfilling life's purpose is the ultimate reason why people persist in an activity that is true to their self. A new model; the Life Purpose Model, is proposed (see figure 2).

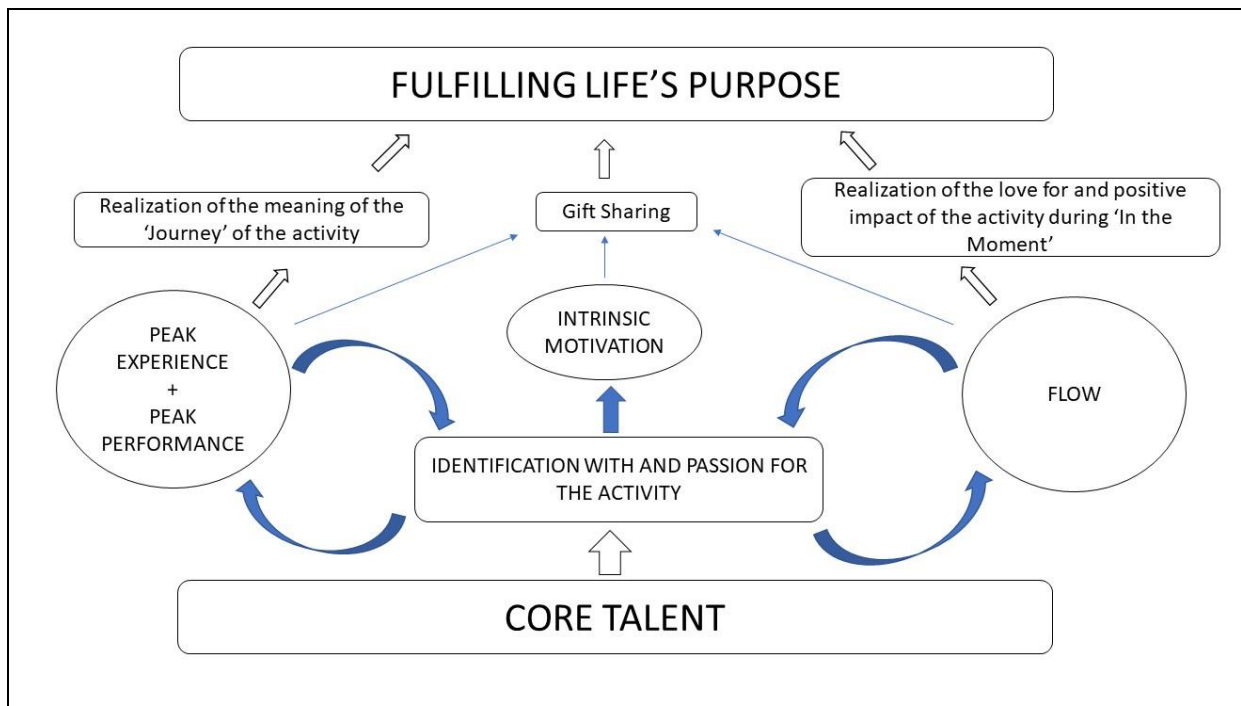


Figure 2. The Life Purpose Model

People are born with a core talent that creates identification with, and passion for an activity allowing expression and fulfilment of that talent. Two cycles feed back into passion and identity, reinforcing their strength: peak experience + peak performance events and the flow experience. Realization of the meaning and value of the former, and realization of the positive impact and love for the latter causes partial fulfilment of life's true purpose. Intrinsic motivation is a constant intermediary that pushes energy forward by satisfying the three basic

needs. This satisfaction enables the person to share their talent – their gift – with others by way of teaching or performing. Flow and peak experience + peak performance play their role by giving the person insight for more personally expressive gift-sharing, which causes partial fulfilment of life's purpose. Life purpose can be topped up for life. To further this research, the model's fit needs to be checked with a large sample of participants who are aware of their core talent and use it. The concept of passion is important but under-researched and requires more exploration.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. *Violet's interview questions*.

<b>Sub Section 1</b> <b>Major Narrative Question</b>
As you know I'm interested in researching people's experiences of activities that they find most meaningful and absorbing. Can you tell me the story of your journey with aerial circus skills and the events and experiences that are most meaningful to you personally? Feel free to elaborate and talk away while I make some notes.
<b>Sub Section 2</b> <b>Narrative Pointed Questions</b>
1. You said being able to perform fills the void in you. Can you tell me about a specific occasion when you felt that happen?
2. So you said your personality lends itself to overtraining or overdoing it, can you elaborate more on that?
3. You said when you go to the Brazilian Festival, both the training aspect and being part of a circus family makes you feel lucky and special. Can you describe any specific moments that you remember feeling that way?



4. You said you built a huge structure in a town center to do shows and workshops for people that wouldn't normally see that kind of thing. Can you describe another event where that happened?	
5. So if we look at maybe not the massive arc structure but one of your street shows where you've just got your pole up for example, so can you describe a moment where, with that – I know you've described the young girl who came up and spoke to you – but another situation like that where it meant a lot to people watching, it wasn't someone that normally would have seen you and then there you are, in that moment and that kind of interaction and what happened there.	
6. I suppose it's just one of those moments where you feel like, 'wow that meant something to them, this is how that was for me and this was that moment.' Do you remember them I guess, whether you remember all the specifics doesn't matter.	
7. So you said circus is a great hook for kids to get involved in because it's cool, but for you it's much more than that, even if at first you just thought, 'hey this is cool'. Can you remember any specific times ... again this is a hard question, you know ... Don't worry too much about that if you can't, just think, 'OK, I can go a bit deeper' ... when you realized that circus was much more than that for you. If you can't remember specific times don't worry but maybe just go a bit deeper into that.	
8. You said that training sometimes sets you right. Could you elaborate on that?	
9. So you said that sometimes during training you experience real happiness. Can you remember a specific moment, or moments, when that happened, and can you describe that real happy feeling?	
10. You said that you like the drops and slides – the thrill – the most on the aerial equipment. Can you describe moments like these that you've experienced?	
<b>Sub Section 3</b>	
<b>Theory-based, structured questions</b>	
<b>FLOW ASPECT</b>	<b>QUESTION ASKED</b>
1. Perceived challenges, or opportunities for action, that stretch existing skills (i.e. neither overmatching nor underutilizing); a	Can you describe how you do or don't meet the challenge of getting more advanced in your activity?

<p>sense one is engaging challenges at a level appropriate to one's capacities.</p>	
<p>2. Clear proximal goals and immediate feedback about progress being made.</p>	<p>So when you begin your activity, when you begin training, yeah, when you're training, do you always have a goal you want to accomplish by the time you are done or do you just start and see how it goes?</p>
<p>(Clear proximal goals and immediate feedback about progress being made)</p>	<p>What's the difference when you're training with a specific goal or something in mind, as to when you are training without a goal?</p>
<p>3. Intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment.</p>	<p>This question kind of leads on a bit from that actually. So how would you describe your state of focus and concentration when you're doing your training and/or your performing.</p>
<p>4. Merging of action and awareness.</p>	<p>Can you describe a time when you felt as though the training or performing you were doing was automatic or spontaneous?</p>
<p>(Merging of action and awareness)</p>	<p>Do you still feel like you're getting something out of it even though in a sense you're in autopilot. Are you still advancing in that moment or are you at the same sort of skill level?</p>
<p>5. Loss of reflective self-consciousness (lose awareness of oneself as a social actor).</p>	<p>Can you tell me about your awareness of how others perceive you when you are doing aerial circus training and in performance too – they might be different. I guess, you know, are you feeling self-conscious or not as opposed to ... as in contrast to everyday life.</p>

(Loss of reflective self-consciousness (lose awareness of oneself as a social actor))	What about when you're training on your own? I guess then it's a question of not how others perceive you but how you yourself perceives you, or what happens to that.
6. Sense that one can control one's actions.	How does your sense of control when doing aerial circus stuff compare to everyday life?
7. Experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding (end goal just an excuse for the process).	Considering that you change, people change and you are a different person now than you were two years ago, a decade ago, all this time you've still done circus so what is it that continuously motivates you to take part in it?
(Experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding (end goal just an excuse for the process)).	you're right, but you do still go out as you have described, going to Brazil, and you seek out the same activity in another part of the world.
(Experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding (end goal just an excuse for the process)).	You did a PHD, you could have embarked on an entirely different career, but you know, this grabbed you, it took you on a totally different journey and you're still doing it and considering you spent years doing your PHD in computer science, about a similar length of time, and you met people, but you're not back there doing that, so there's got to be something about.
8. Distortion of temporal experience.	How does time pass for you when you are doing your activity?

Appendix 2. *Violet's interview transcript.*



**More than just cool**

**happy place**

**meaningful**

**connection with people**

**meditation**

250. think about but not in the moment  
 251. think about it, you know, they might not have the same journey as me but there's another that  
 252. happy that I'm in the moment  
 253. something that I've come across just recently  
 254. throughout my journey and there's been times and  
 255. lots of meaningful moments which all sit up. But a  
 256. lot of the time it's just having a small cup of tea  
 257. and after a show and seeing that I've inspired them  
 258. or making that day, that's been a low moment  
 259. where it's been the opposite  
 260. it's about smiling, really amazing  
 261. I think that's where working on the streets is  
 262. because you have that connection with  
 263. people, you're in the moment, I think it's well with  
 264. I think about because it's different and a lot of  
 265. people haven't seen it again that's what  
 266. that stands out in people's minds, the way to think  
 267. about meaningful events  
 268. I think about it  
 269. it's not necessarily high points, but the  
 270. things that when you're in the moment, it's  
 271. about the meditation you know for the time  
 272. you're not very interested in it, even though I  
 273. know it's important. You know it's of the time  
 274. for me that's - family, enough, just set me right  
 275. sometimes, to have a bad day or whatever  
 276. and to be able to come back to a nice, calm day  
 277. where you're not meditating, or whatever it  
 278. is, you're in a funny way of meditating, it can really  
 279. have quite a powerful effect on a - something it  
 280. has a positive effect.

**happiness**

**happy place**

**meaningful**

**connection with people**

387. just get the light and sometimes just experience  
 388. when you happen and you think, "this is amazing"  
 389. anything, in such a way that it's not just about  
 390. the things that it's better and it's funny when  
 391. we do other things, but when it's all part of it  
 392. in the morning and we do without it, and we do  
 393. in the morning and we do without it, and we do  
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**happiness**

**happy place**

**meaningful**

**connection with people**

510. I think it's really good for me and well to think  
 511. about it, and generally what it is about that - that  
 512. is really interesting.  
 513. 552: 42 minutes, 44 seconds.  
 514. I think it's really good for me and well to think  
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 600. is really interesting.

**happiness**

**happy place**

**meaningful**

**connection with people**

351. kind of... it can be quite hard to focus on when  
 352. having a performance helps the training aspect  
 353. because you're creating a specific thing, training  
 354. towards something and it's a funny one. When I  
 355. was in the moment, I was in the moment, I was in  
 356. and again I come out of it and I thought I'd like to  
 357. bring my show here and again I can't quite rate  
 358. why or what but it was the same kind of thing  
 359. when I was like "I'd like to perform here, I'd like to  
 360. bring my show here and do the thing I'd like to  
 361. do".  
 362. I think your show was...  
 363. I think your show was...  
 364. perfect for the location in that, but again I'm not  
 365. quite sure what it is that I don't know why  
 366. what that need to you now, perform and you  
 367. your stuff in front of an audience that... yeah...  
 368. there - show what you're doing, it's interesting  
 369. I think it's very interesting  
 370. P: Yeah, definitely I can come up and do that  
 371. year.  
 372. I think... Oh, thank you. We can get that, but  
 373. question. So you said your personality kind, but  
 374. overthinking or overdoing it, you collaborate  
 375. more on that?  
 376. P: I think people call it workaholic, do they? I  
 377. think I just, you know, like someone for sure and  
 378. I love working and I love performing and I love  
 379. other and I like some people and these things  
 380. that interesting thing, I don't know how it works  
 381. other people - if they love it or if they are  
 382. better at hearing when your body tells you to stop  
 383. I'm not sure which one it is. I don't know if just

**happiness**

**happy place**

**meaningful**

**connection with people**

384. love it more than other people and that's why I  
 385. keep doing it or if I'm just not good at listening, but  
 386. yeah, definitely do but I'm kinda getting  
 387. better and then more but I'm kinda getting  
 388. some of, maybe and any of those things, but you  
 389. know it's probably generally that kind of personality  
 390. - wanting to do everything kind of to mix and do  
 391. best as well as slightly... how do you call it...  
 392. perfectionist as well, kind of leads into all that  
 393. yeah  
 394. P: I think it's interesting that you can be...  
 395. P: Yeah, probably in an unhealthy kind of...  
 396. not always healthy... for sure not always healthy  
 397. other people, but yeah, it's definitely the kind of...  
 398. top performer, but yeah, I do love training and I  
 399. love being busy, probably sometimes I  
 400. slightly overdo it, but I think it's...  
 401. I think it's a bit of people doing things probably  
 402. and, in terms of training that love the training aspect  
 403. and I probably people that overdo it easily  
 404. which is why I think that the love it. To a certain  
 405. extent I think you do because you have to train to  
 406. perform and you have to train to perform and you  
 407. to be able to make the point and that's what I  
 408. think of when I think of it, it's not just about  
 409. performing, you're very very kind of...  
 410. I think it's really interesting that, because  
 411. with other people that's not the case, but you  
 412. think you love it more than you should, you're  
 413. demanding a lot of it to stop.

**happiness**

**happy place**

**meaningful**

**connection with people**

414. P: I think it does quite a lot of the time attract  
 415. certain personality styles, that tend to maybe go a  
 416. little overboard.  
 417. I think it's interesting, OK, so I'll go onto the  
 418. next question. So you're when you go to the festival  
 419. festival, both the training aspect and being part of a  
 420. group, family makes you feel really special. Can  
 421. you describe any specific moments that you  
 422. remember, feeling that way?  
 423. P: There's definitely moments that's less the  
 424. training aspect and more the community and family  
 425. aspect. So generally before the festival training,  
 426. starts and after the festival has finished in kind of  
 427. group, to less people, which is essentially just  
 428. crew, and you know kind of the crew, maybe  
 429. 30 or 40 of us and, it's quite a different feel to when  
 430. the rest of the festival is on, and we essentially have  
 431. one big table where we have dinner and lunch  
 432. everybody and we talk. We call it family dinner time  
 433. call it different to... during the festival we have  
 434. smaller tables of 4 or 5 which is lovely but then  
 435. something about the family dinner, there's  
 436. been quite a few times when I've literally just sat  
 437. down at that table and knew just looked around  
 438. people I love and I just think, yeah - this is really  
 439. special. There are definitely moments that  
 440. I really remember that I'm not sure and I've kind of  
 441. and I've acknowledged it and I've felt yeah - I'm  
 442. quite happy, I feel very lucky. There are moments of  
 443. community and family time that I have experienced.  
 444. I guess in terms of the training aspect to be honest,  
 445. everywhere I manage to be there and do training.

**happiness**

**happy place**

**meaningful**

**connection with people**

446. this year I managed to do a lot of things that  
 447. training because I met another girl who was very  
 448. much into chess and we just ended up  
 449. training together - it was really fun and we  
 450. other and I like some people and these things  
 451. that interesting thing, I don't know how it works  
 452. other people - if they love it or if they are  
 453. better at hearing when your body tells you to stop  
 454. I'm not sure which one it is. I don't know if just  
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826 I: That is that's it, you know you're going to  
827 get a goal. But you would never dream of  
828 that step for the first introduction of an audience  
829 would you?  
830 P: This is it. You want to know it's not a feeling because  
831 funny one how we, maybe it's an attention-capturing  
832 phrase or looking for whatever reaction from the  
833 audience. (opens generally as a performer) creating  
834 always has to appear to be in the attention-capturing  
835 aspect, or wanting to be center of attention. I don't  
836 know, wanting people to be there. That's definitely  
837 something there. I think I can't perform here  
838 that is true. Why do we get there and perform?  
839 Because we want people to be there and perform?  
840 applied to it?  
841 I: It's a profound question - it really is. A big  
842 big question.  
843 P: because a lot of us want to achieve  
844 something with a performance, either we want to  
845 reach people or we want to get them to feel  
846 something, some sort of emotion, or we want them  
847 to do what we do, but I think few performers do  
848 other than just wanting something from the audience.  
849 We like to get out there wanting something from the  
850 audience - it might be things that we want to  
851 experience, so I think it's a certain personality that  
852 leads them to wanting to perform. And I know a lot  
853 of people that love training and love coaches but  
854 don't want to perform. That's enough to see  
855 that there's definitely something made up where  
856 we want to perform.

When of  
audience  
why -  
attention  
appears  
audience?

Something  
wants to  
perform  
personality  
love  
training  
love  
coach

857 I: It's such a good question, such a good thing  
858 to think about.  
859 P: I do think there are overlaps in certain  
860 personality traits in performers and people training  
861 and all of the sort of stuff I did over the original  
862 question.  
863 I: That's absolutely fine, and yeah you do think  
864 that we use that of performing. It's a whole  
865 creature, thing as well.  
866 P: I think it's really hard to want, you're putting  
867 yourself out there, because your performance  
868 doesn't go well it can actually be quite bad,  
869 because you get instant feedback. With other things  
870 you just out there the feedback is not quite so  
871 instant, but with performing it's quite direct. I think  
872 they're going to show you.  
873 I: I think it's very interesting and it can be  
874 a bit of a struggle, it's very intense and it can be  
875 really tough and it can be really tough, but you're  
876 putting something out there that you've made and  
877 you think it's amazing for other people to judge.  
878 You put yourself out for judgement and it can be tough.  
879 So yeah, I'm not sure why we do it because it can be  
880 really tough and it can be really tough, but you're  
881 know - yeah I'm not sure why we do it, yeah - why  
882 are we doing it?  
883 I: It can really, it can depend on your social  
884 world. It can make you feel that big and you're  
885 want to do that stuff?  
886 P: I know - I might struggle actually it's funny  
887 that's it.

Personality  
traits

Instant  
feedback

Putting  
yourself  
out there

Wanting  
other  
people  
to judge

888 **55:39 minutes, 04 seconds.**  
889 I: Can you describe how you do or don't meet  
890 the challenge of getting more advanced in your  
891 activity?  
892 P: It's certainly a challenge. (I guess through)  
893 regular training and trying to do workshops and  
894 classes as much as possible, have people teaching  
895 you, yeah it's trying to find the balance between  
896 having people teach but also then training yourself.  
897 And I guess have the inspiration through other  
898 other people that's watching shows or watching  
899 other people train, yeah, looking up stuff, the  
900 looking up videos on youtube helps to inspire  
901 sometimes. It's trying to find the right balance  
902 between motivation, inspiration and you're  
903 well, I don't always meet the challenge, sometimes I  
904 don't and I don't even progress at all, sometimes I  
905 don't even train because I think what's the point.  
906 There's definitely that sometimes, getting very  
907 frustrated instead of motivated and inspired.  
908 I: So do you feel challenged, do you feel there  
909 are challenges you have to meet when you are  
910 doing your activity?  
911 P: Yeah, for sure, some of them are just  
912 challenges that come naturally with doing your job  
913 of training and success stuff, there's always  
914 challenges ahead doing something that you can't  
915 yet do and then I've got some personal challenges  
916 which is my health which is a very big challenge  
917 because I can't train as much as I'd like to or  
918 probably would need to if I wanted to progress. I've  
919 got the challenge of not necessarily having

Balance  
between  
classes +  
training

Looking  
up  
videos

Sometimes  
frustrated +  
demotivated

Challenge of  
training you  
out you do  
health  
challenge

899 I: So when you begin your activity, when you  
900 begin training, what when you're training, do you  
901 always have goals, are you always to accomplish like  
902 you know you do, or just start and you have  
903 no goal?  
904 P: It's about half really, sometimes  
905 I might be working on a piece and then I might  
906 come in saying OK I want to do a bit more so  
907 with the set, or I have the set already but I  
908 might be in a workshop or course or something and  
909 then, or sometimes I might come in with a  
910 specific goal I want to learn. Sometimes I might  
911 come in with considering and my goal might be to  
912 improve out of control, but sometimes I  
913 might go in and have no goal and then for  
914

Challenges of  
beginning  
your  
activity

Health  
challenge  
depends  
on  
day

Specific  
goal  
flow

915 I: So when you begin your activity, when you  
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929 might go in and have no goal and then for  
930

No specific  
goal  
social  
goals  
flow

Specific  
goal  
flow

More  
focused  
but more  
flexible  
with  
goal

931 I: So when you begin your activity, when you  
932 begin training, what when you're training, do you  
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944 improve out of control, but sometimes I  
945 might go in and have no goal and then for  
946

No goal -  
social  
goals  
flow

Focus +  
concentration

Health  
challenge  
depends  
on  
day

Focus on  
training  
change  
goal

947 I: So when you begin your activity, when you  
948 begin training, what when you're training, do you  
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960 improve out of control, but sometimes I  
961 might go in and have no goal and then for  
962

Focused  
on  
each  
idea

Mini goal  
next goal

Focus on  
little things  
already

Automatic  
already  
but  
not  
yet

963 I: So when you begin your activity, when you  
964 begin training, what when you're training, do you  
965 always have goals, are you always to accomplish like  
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977 might go in and have no goal and then for  
978

Warm-up  
is  
mostly  
automatic

Warm-up  
is  
mostly  
automatic

Warm-up  
is  
mostly  
automatic

Warm-up  
is  
mostly  
automatic

979 I: So when you begin your activity, when you  
980 begin training, what when you're training, do you  
981 always have goals, are you always to accomplish like  
982 you know you do, or just start and you have  
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990 specific goal I want to learn. Sometimes I might  
991 come in with considering and my goal might be to  
992 improve out of control, but sometimes I  
993 might go in and have no goal and then for  
994

Warm-up +  
because  
unintentional

Warm-up  
is  
mostly  
automatic

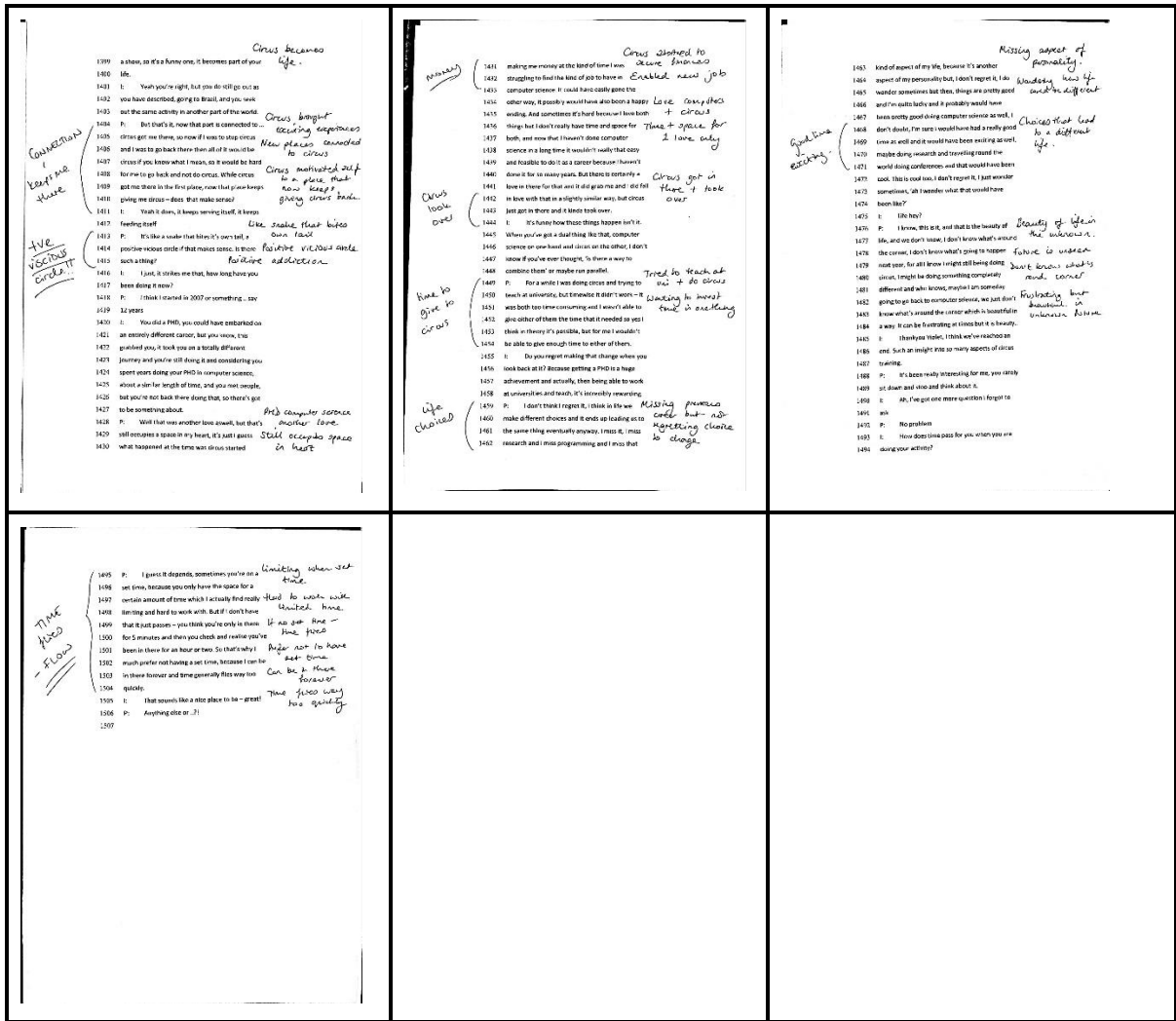
Warm-up  
is  
mostly  
automatic

Warm-up  
is  
mostly  
automatic









Appendix 3. Photographs of the step-by-step creation of themes and subthemes with individual codes on post-it notes.

Violet's codes laid out with identification of patterns in the data

Violet's codes sorted into subthemes



Miranda's codes added to subthemes, some subthemes merged together some new ones added



Ben's codes added to subthemes, some subthemes merged together, miscellaneous items discarded



Subthemes worked into themes



A potential theme named 'journey'



Potential theme named 'flow'



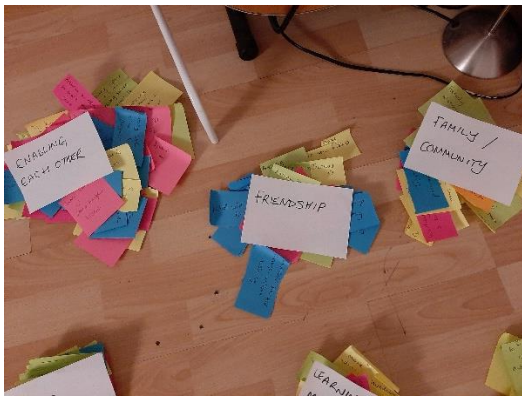
Potential theme named 'self'



Potential theme named 'the role of others'



Potential theme named 'teaching and learning'



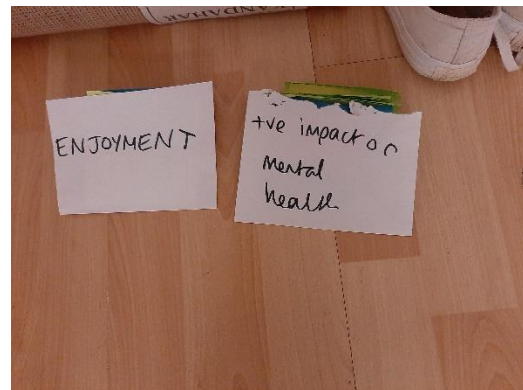
Potential theme named 'peak'



Potential theme named 'feels good'



Reworking of themes and subthemes, in both content and name

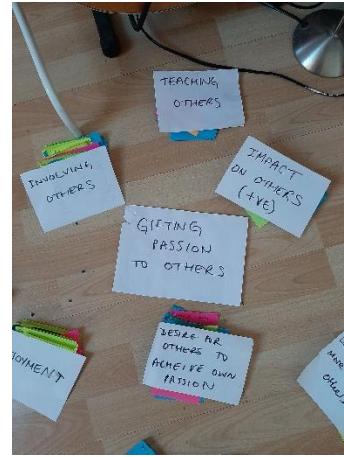


Reworking of themes and subthemes, in both content and name

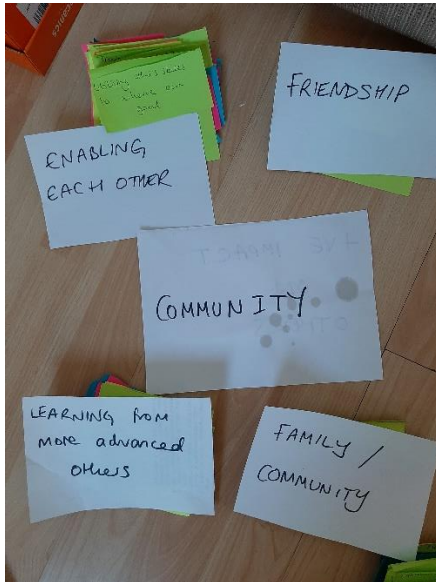




Reworking of theme



Reworking of themes and subthemes, checking codes consistent with subtheme essence



Transcripts re-read, themes, subthemes and codes checked against the raw data set



Reworking of themes and subthemes

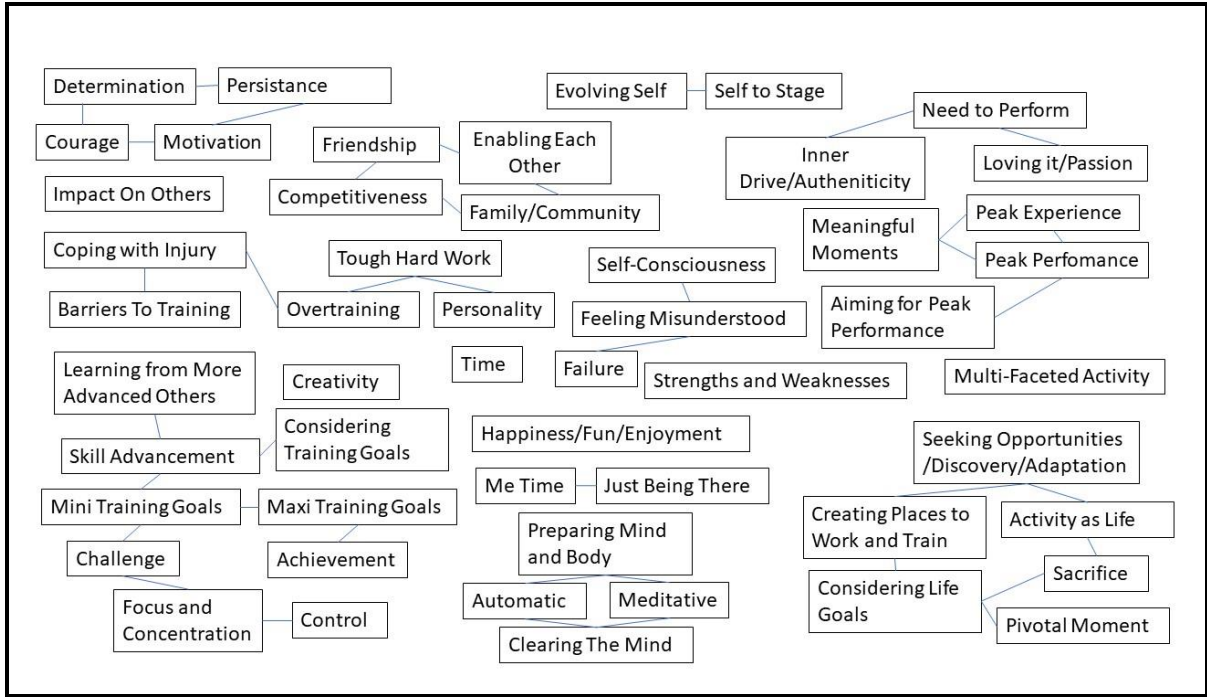


Final reworking following research on passion, flow and motivation.

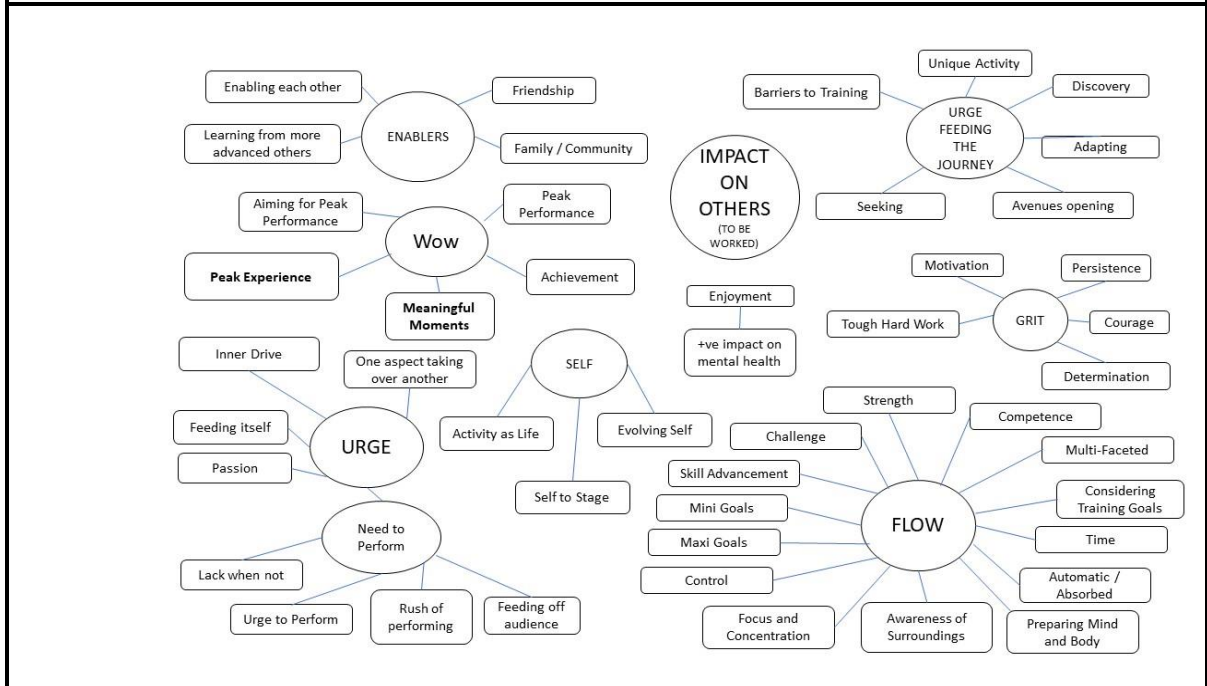


Appendix 4. *Thematic maps created step-by-step during the analytic process to aid the working of themes and subthemes.*

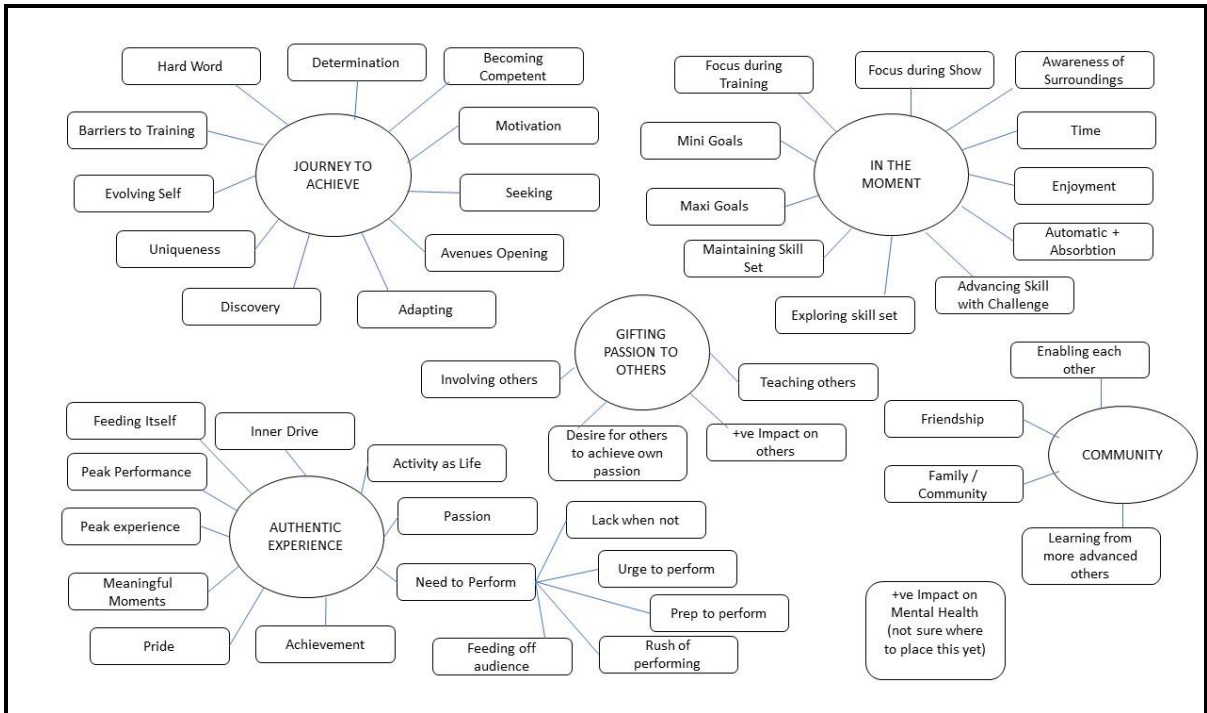
THEMATIC MAP 1



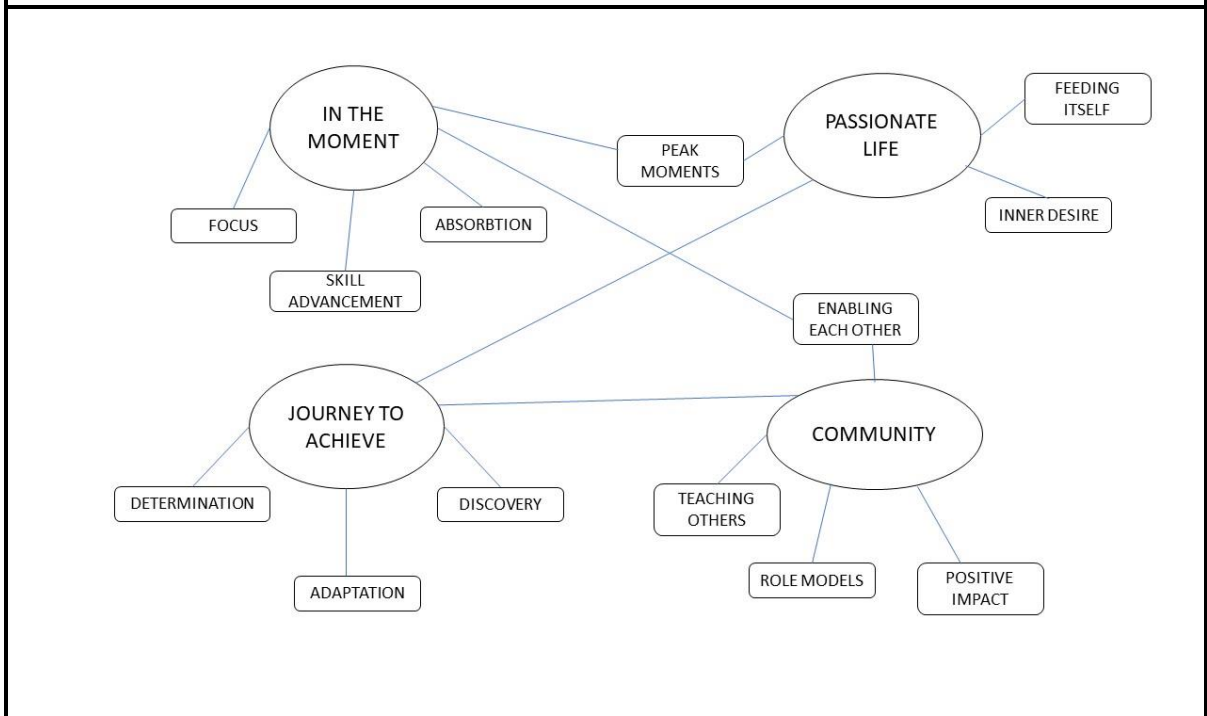
THEMATIC MAP 2



THEMATIC MAP 3



THEMATIC MAP 4



THEMATIC MAP 5



