Achieving ‘partnership’: The relationship between horse and rider in the competition arena

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the horse-rider relationship in elite-level eventing. Current literature suggests that the concept, 'partnership', is routinely used to describe a fundamental aspect of rider-horse compatibility, and that this concept is argued to need time to develop. Highly skilled riders who use multiple horses in competition may not have time to develop such 'partnerships', however, such combinations are often found to achieve significant competitive success. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how elite-level eventing riders account for equestrian performance and how 'partnership' between horse and rider is routinely described in discussing achievement at this level. Discursive analysis was used to identify broad patterns in the data, as well as identifying routine linguistic practices and rhetorical organisation that recur in elite riders' constructions of event horses. Event horses were routinely described in two ways: as autonomous, decision-making agent, and as social being, that displays specific dispositional attributes that contribute toward performance success. These constructions were applied to an 'equine habitus' framework (Gilbert & Gillett, 2011), to develop the notion of an 'eventing habitus'. The study's findings have practical application for riders and trainers in competitive environments as well as for other equestrian professionals (e.g. jockeys and stockmen) who are routinely required to ride unfamiliar horses in high-risk contexts.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no materials previously published except where due reference is made. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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