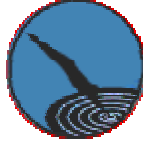




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World of Personal Spirit

LOVING FUN: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ART, PSYCHOLOGY, AND PHILOSOPHY  
OF THE OAQUI GAMES(TM) AS REVEALED BY E-MAIL TO [DR. FUN](#)

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*Loving  
Fun*

### **The Oaqui**

The Oaqui are (or is) the e-mail identity of some individual or group claiming to be the originator/s of the only true games. Though I can in no way validate the truthfulness of this claim, I have in fact found genuinely deep fun merely by playing what the Oaqui call the Oaqui Games. The following is my attempt to explain why.

### **Flow**

According to the Oaqui, fun is what Oaqui games are all about. I therefore begin with a review of the literature.



Fun, it seems, is as function of the relationship of challenge and ability. When the challenge is just right, and when we are engaging just the right combination of abilities, well, this is really what it's all about. This is why rock climbers climb and rock dancers dance. This is what makes it worth risking both limb and life.

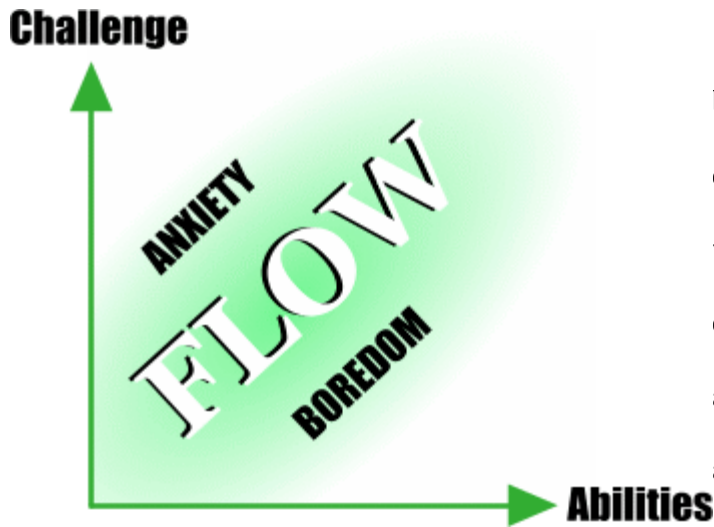
Fun.

There are many characteristic experiences that are associated with fun: the sense of timelessness, of being at one (with mind and mountain), of exhilaration, focus, immediacy. And all of these are characteristic of what we, regardless of activity, call "fun."

According to Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's well-documented observations and research, and his wide-scale gathering of personal observations, there is pretty much universal agreement that when there *isn't* a high correlation between the challenge (the height of the mountain, depth of the dive) and the ability to meet that challenge, fun is something we're definitely not having.

For a chess player, for example, a single pawn can become an Everest of fear and wonder. For a mountain climber, the streets of San Francisco are a waste of pitons.

The main dialog (dynamic), according to Mihaly "just call me Mike" Csikszentmihalyi, is between Challenge and Ability. When the challenge is greater than our abilities, we become anxious and potentially dead. When the challenge is significantly less than that of which we are worthy, we become bored, and potentially dead.



Maintaining the dynamic balance between abilities and challenge is key to making the world more fun. That is, keeping it dynamic. Making it possible for anyone to find exactly the right amount of challenge needed to engage exactly those abilities

needed to access flow. If the only swimming pool in town is an abandoned water tower, some people might never learn to swim.

Which means that to make the world more fun, we have to create complex, but negotiable challenges, challenges that allow the individual to engage or disengage, to play harder or play safer.

So, there we have it: Fun defined as Flow, which is defined as a function of the relationship between Challenge and Ability.

### **Complexity**

In my interpretation of Mike's Flow model, every line is a vector (an arrow). This is my way of symbolizing what Mike calls the tendency towards "Complexity" - to increase the challenge, increase the range of abilities, risk even deeper heights of anxiety, broader depths of boredom, to access an ever more profound state of Flow.

The first time you jump into a swimming pool, for example, you're probably already too anxious to experience anything flowlike. Especially when you don't know how deep or how cold the water will be. And even more especially when you don't know how to swim.



You go to the shallowest end. Gently, you let yourself in (at the lower end of your abilities). Next thing you know, you're merrily splishing and splashing, trying to impossibly run from one side to the other, and flow is definitely what you are in.

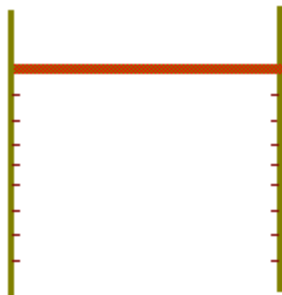
Until you just get tired of it all. There's still both splish and splash, but you're bored. And it's not so fun. The very same water. And yet, no flow.

Until some chemically-encoded perversity takes hold, and you decide to get your head wet. Instant anxiety, and yet, a whole new world of challenge.

And so on, and so on, challenge by challenge, stroke by stroke, between boredom and anxiety, you wiggle your way into the deeper and colder and more swiftly flowing waters, where the challenges become profound and the demand absolute. And so you grow, from wader to diver, from mystery to mastery, learning, extending your abilities. As you challenge yourself more, you grow more, evolving ever more complex sets of skills and sensitivities, becoming an ever more complete human being.

And some of us can even find flow and challenge in the daily realities of work and family. Some of us, in our gardens and offices, manage to enjoy ourselves and become ourselves more fully, more wholeheartedly, day by day. Some of us have even learned how to create more fun for everyone.

### **The Oaqui Bar<sup>tm</sup>**



A cursory examination of the one of the simplest of Oaqui innovations, the Oaqui Bar, reveals a great deal about the nature and philosophy of the Oaqui.

In "Adaptive Phys Ed, " teachers are given an elegant model, called the "Slanted High Bar" principle, that puts the concept of individually negotiable challenge very clearly into practice.

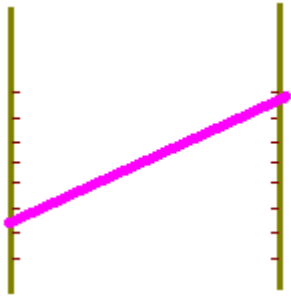
If you're a Phys Ed teacher, one of the things you do with kids is help them develop their high jumping skills. In "non-adaptive" Phys Ed, the way you did this was to hold jumping contests. You'd hang a high bar horizontal to a certain height and everybody would have to take a turn jumping over the high bar. If they succeeded, they'd get to the next round, and the high bar would be raised. The contest would continue until only one person was left, and that person would be lavishly praised as the one who established the high jump record for the class.

The problem with this kind of competitive incentive structure is that the kids who need the most practice are the kids who get to jump the least often. The worse they are at jumping, the sooner they're out of the game.

So, along comes the Oaqui Bar. Make the high bar diagonal instead of parallel to the ground. And let everybody jump over any part of the high bar, and take as many turns as they want. And what do you get?

Instead of the teacher, each kid sets his/her own challenge. The jumpers who are not so good at jumping can still jump across the high bar as many times as anyone else they just cross at a lower point. And, when they feel the need to increase the challenge, they can just station themselves at a higher part of the high bar.

No one is eliminated. No one is given prizes. Everyone wins. Repeatedly.



Slant the high bar and the authority rolls right out of the hands of

the teacher, out of, actually, any one body's hands, into everybody's. Perhaps that's why it works so well! The Oaqui Bar invites a new level of complexity. The challenge (jump as high as you can, and then jump higher) remains the same, but the challenger has changed. It's not the Phys Ed instructor who increases the challenge, it's the kids, themselves: the kids as a group, and the kids, individually.

A challenge that is determined by the individual player is more complex, because it requires "reflective action." The player must evaluate not only his or her own success, but also the success of the challenge. And even though they can get very competitive, the challenge is ultimately self-selected, ultimately guided by sheer fun.

Without an external evaluator, each kid can devise and revise the challenge. Of course, evaluation is going on, and whether the competition is inner-directed or outer-directed, the fact is that the teacher, your fellow jumpers (both higher and lower), your inner referee; somebody is evaluating your performance, challenging you to challenge yourself.

Ideally, each kid should be seeking out his/her personal level of flow, driven by the natural desire for complexity into a deeper and healthier engagement with the relationships between the human body and gravity. But, in fact, there's still something about the way the task is framed that draws the kids apart. Oaqui though the high bar may be, the game is still not truly Oaqui.

Even though nobody's eliminated, even though everyone's free to increase or decrease the challenge, even though you don't even have to take turns, the fact is that the challenge is directed towards the *individual*. With the focus on individual performance, on how high who jumps; the relationship is fundamentally the same.

And what's worse (or more complex), someone might be *attaching meaning* to your performance, as if how high you can jump says something about your character!

So, what if we completely redirected the challenge, away from the individual and towards the group? What if the entire class tried to jump holding hands? Or with their arms around each other's shoulders? Or each other's waist?

Suddenly, the game becomes truly Oaqui.

Shifting the focus of the game away what they can do individually (ME), we focus, also, on what the kids can do together (WE) - on collective as well as individual performance.

To jump the Oaqui Bar together, we need to make sure that each individual kid is going to make it. Even though the challenge is to the group, there are still plenty of challenges to the individual player. Each has to be stationed at the right part of the high bar: too high and you might not get over, too low, you might make it harder for someone else. Each has to be able to ask for help, and provide help. Preparing for the big jump, synchronizing the preparatory, simultaneous squat, each individual is doubly challenged. And yet, not competing. Same slant, same task, but fundamentally shifted experience. Truly Oaqui.

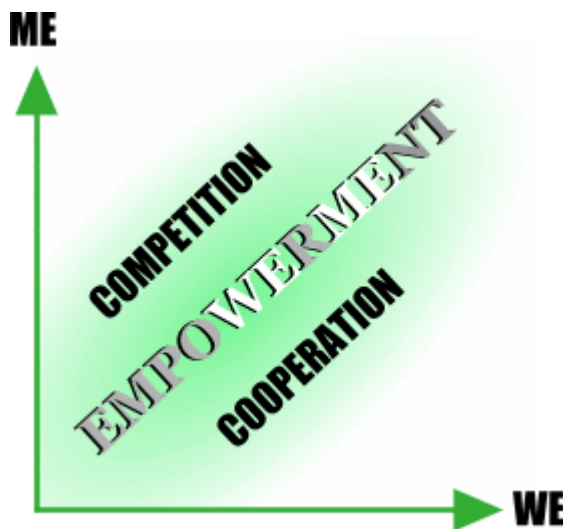
Raising the high bar, you intensify the competitive relationship between the diminishing few. The game, internally and externally, becomes one of increasingly isolated MEs (the "winners") against an increasingly disempowered WE. Create a Oaqui Bar, and the relationship relaxes, becomes supportive, empowering, healthy, ME/WE.



Now, merely by taking a few radical liberties with Csikszentmihalyi's Flow model, we cunningly arrive at a model for depicting the true nature of the Oaqui game.

Instead of Challenge and Abilities, we draw the relationship between ME and WE. The MEwards pointing arrow points towards an increasing emphasis on the individual. The WEwards pointing arrow, the increasing emphasis on the relationship.

As we learned from Mike's concept of complexity, when we are having fun (in flow) we invest more and more of ourselves (abilities). The Oaqui games demonstrate that when we're enjoying each other, we invest more and more of ourselves in each other.



Playing Oaqui Games produces a co-liberating state of ME/WENess, neither self-, nor other-directed, But both.

When there is a dynamic balance between ME (each individual) and WE (the relationship), each serving and supporting the other, there is no need to make any distinction between ME and WE. The more fun for all,

the more fun for each, the more truly Oaqui.

This experience of ME/WENess is bordered on one side by the act of separating ourselves from the relationship (competition), and on the other, by the act of identifying ourselves with the relationship (cooperation).

Collectively, WE can redefine the relationship, rototill the groundrules, do whatever is necessary to make the game more fun. This is the essence of what makes a game truly O-aq-ui.

This constantly changing set of rules. We can make it harder or easier to win. We can play against a different team. We can play a different game.

Individually, we can change the way we are playing, increase or decrease the challenge to ourselves and each other.

The ME/WE balance is a function of a dynamic tension between competition and cooperation.

Competition, in our modern world, is, well, excessive, at least. Unhealthy, generally. The tension between competition and cooperation has become so great that we often must risk life or sanity just to have fun.

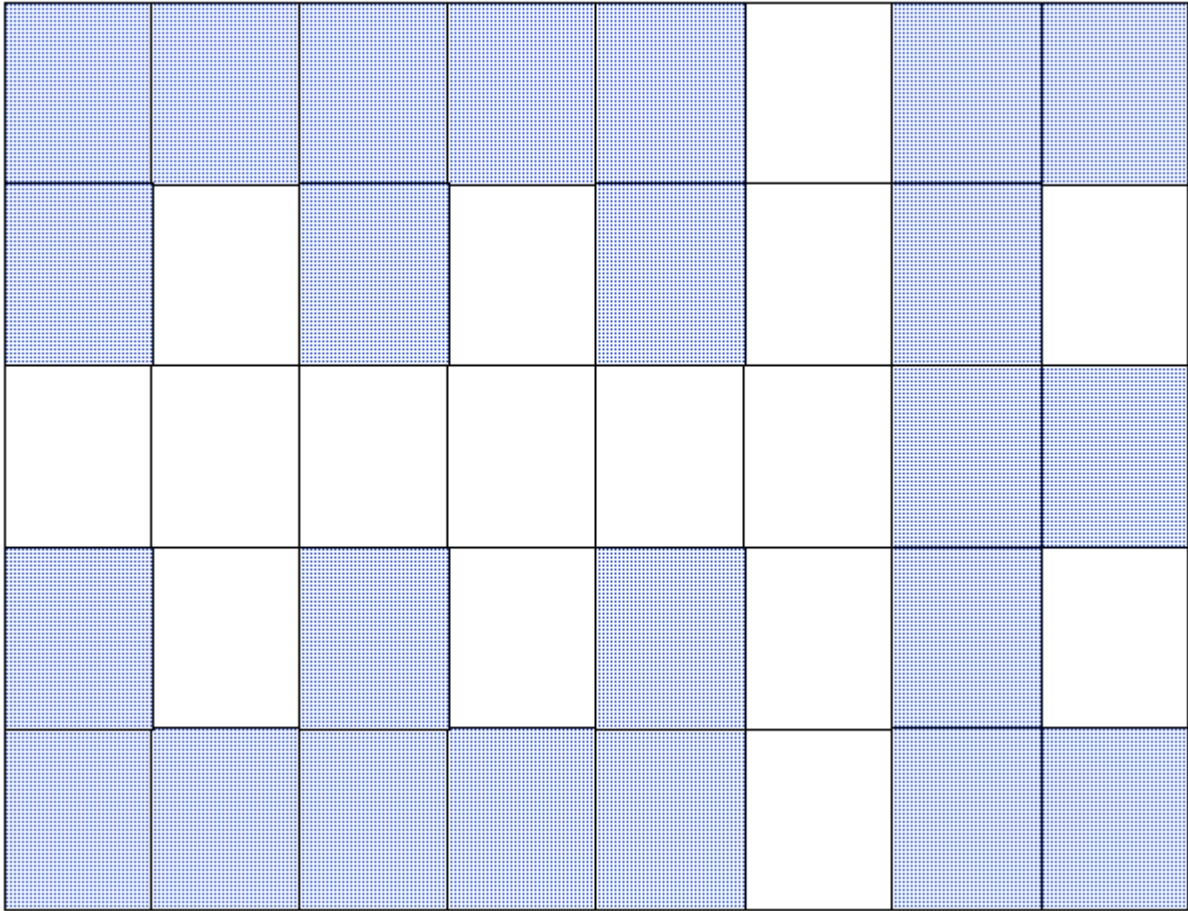
COOPERATION  
M RA

When competition is healthy, the relationship between ME and WE constantly shifts between competitive and cooperative, like foreground and background, the rules becoming steadily more empowering, the players increasingly more competent. It is fun that is gained at no one's cost, achieved to everyone's benefit: the one and only secret of the success of the Oaqui Games. Fun that is more fun, for everyone.

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### Oaqui Tac Toe(tm)




#### Take turns deciding the rules:

- Select (a different, the same) (symbol, letter, color, M&M).
- (Alternate turns, Go simultaneously) (placing M&Ms and/or writing) (your, any) (symbol, letter, color)(s)
- in an (empty, shaded) (rectangle, or at the intersection of any (2, 3, 4) lines),
- making (1,2,3) move(s) (per, every other) turn.
- You can (not) place (an M&M and/or personal mark) on a (shaded, empty) (rectangle, intersection).
- You can (not) (change, move) a (mark, M&M).

- The (first, last) player to claim (3, 4, 5) (rectangles, intersections) in a (line, row and/or column and/or diagonal) (or pattern, or creates a sequence with the other symbols or completes a word or shape)
- (wins, loses, changes the rules).

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[Bernie DeKoven](#) is the author of a [Connected Executives](#) a book that helped to revolutionize how people work together, and [The Well-Played Game](#). a book that helped to revolutionize how people play together.

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