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Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of the leisure subculture of rock climbing in the UK. Indoor climbers' experiences will be used as practical examples of subcultural and post-subcultural theory in action. In trying to define sport subcultures Donnelly (1981: 565) poses important sociological questions: "How is society possible? How and why do people develop the sets of norms, values and sanctions that are manifested as socially acceptable behaviour and, for the most part, conform to them?" He goes on to suggest two reasons for wanting to study smaller units or subcultures of society: they are interesting cultural phenomena but they can also give us important insight into the overall society of which they are part. It is Macbeth's (2005) firm belief that the first quest for sociological knowledge should begin with subcultural understanding. It is not until tensions and relationships *within* subcultural groups have been explored that we can begin to relate subcultural experience meaningfully to the macro-cultural setting.

A study of subculture does not purport to give definitions and answers to questions that emerge. Instead, it is "a debate – the problem at the root of which is about how scholars make sense of people, not as individuals, but as members of discrete populations and social groups" (Thornton, 1997: 1). Thornton (ibid: 4) discusses this at length, suggesting subcultures are subordinate to mainstream society. Much of the problem of subcultures being considered "beneath, but within, 'society' or 'culture'" (ibid) relates to historical studies of deviance culture in opposition to ideologies of society as a whole (see Hebdige 1979 and Willis 1979). It has to be recognised that wider society shapes subcultures; it must be understood that their functioning is within the parameters of society in which they

are found. However, the line of inquiry followed in this chapter will also be informed through contemporary writers (see Jarvie 2006; Jenks 2005; Macbeth 2005, 2006; Marchart 2004; Muggleton 2000) who's line of subcultural inquiry differs to early writers because of the impact of post-modern lifestyles. The following subcultural definition will be used in the context of this paper.

Subcultures are parts, fragments or derivations of common or more recognisable cultures adopted by particular sections of society. They are ultimately related in some way to aspects of the greater, more dominant culture, but often they can be set up as some sort of response or opposition, certainly at variance, to the principal or prevailing culture (Maguire, Jarvie, Mansfield and Bradley, 2002: 166).

Rock climbing has been one of the fastest growing outdoor pursuits in the UK over the last two decades (BMC 2003). Climbing has now many different facets generally coexisting happily enough despite obvious differences. This is partly possible because while climbing types appear to differ in their approach to rock climbing they still share a generic aim of ascending climbs using equipment as a safeguard only to a fall.

Historic Legacy

Rock climbing roots in Britain are heavily differentiated by class and gender. It was the preserve of middle/upper class echelons of male society beginning around middle to late nineteenth century (see Hankinson 1988). Birkett sums up participation in British climbing at the turn of the twentieth century:

Climbing was still very much a gentleman's sport. It was reserved for people who could afford long holidays and for those who had the necessary social education to seek a demanding and difficult leisure pursuit (Birkett, 1983: 115).

Its appeal to a wider range of people began in the 1930s with changes in employment patterns and improved conditions for working class people (Allin, West and Ibbetson, 2003, Gray 1983, Wilson 1995). A further boost came in the 1950s as two working class activists dominated the scene in rock climbing and mountaineering in Britain; Brown and Whillans (Gray, 1993, Perrin 2004). Though domination by professional classes has continued through to the twenty-first century (see Morgan 1994; Allin et al 2003), women are better represented and its appeal now spans socio economic groups (BMC 2003). But the structure of climbing still broadly reflects that of society; it is male dominated and firmly implanted in the professional classes (ibid, see also Allin et al 2003).

Climbing has been viewed as being a recognisable subculture within society (see Donnelly and Young, 1988). The values of climbing and their manifestations are significantly different from wider societal culture (See Simmel, 1991, 1997; Varley 2006). The very focus of climbing as an activity contrasts with feelings of security and safety fostered within society. Varley (2006) discusses climbing as an excellent example of bohemia: the tension between the mainstream and being different. Simmel (1991: 222) describes adventure as being “dreamlike” and “bound to the unified, consistent life-process by fewer threads than are ordinary experiences”. In climbing there are other values at play that only loosely attach themselves to those of society. The bohemian concept discussed in Varley’s work could even extend to the inception of climbing where privileged activists expressed subversion of their expected life course. According to Beck (1992, 2002) contemporary society or ‘reflexive modernity’ is itself alienating its members underpinning Varley’s work more generally (see also Krippendorf, 1984).

In turn such a predominance of male professional classes has produced the value structures, rules and conventions of climbing (Donnelly 2003: 294). These are “socially constructed, formed through consensus among climbers and enforced through self discipline and social pressure” (ibid). The work I have

undertaken since 1993 explores value structures of climbing and questions whether fragmentation in post modern society (Jenks 2005, Muggleton 2000) is reproduced in the lifestyle sport (Wheaton 2004) of rock climbing in the UK. But not having the scope to develop this in a single chapter my intention here is to reflect upon only one climbing type in relation to the academic underpinning offered and through this develop the notion of differentiation in UK rock climbing. I have categorised four climbing types into two broader headings. These need unpacking before moving forward.

Traditional climbing

Traditional climbing is a recognised form of climbing where removable equipment is placed in natural fissures in the rock in order to protect the climber from a ground fall. The lead climber ascends relying on climbing skill but also the ability to place into rock weaknesses various removable protection devices. Because, ideally, no equipment is left on the climb further skill is required in reading the rock and interpreting guidebook information. Longer climbs are often found in mountain areas thus drawing further on general outdoor skills (for a more full explanation see Lewis 2004; Donnelly 2003: 291-304 and Hardwell 2007: 12-14). Traditional climbers often compensate for the many unknowns encountered by ascending at a comfortable standard within their capabilities, the outcome being a safe ascent.

Contemporary climbing

I have used the term contemporary climbing to encompass three distinctly different climbing types: sport climbing, bouldering and indoor climbing. Sport climbing occurs outdoors and utilises fixed protection by way of expansion bolts or stainless steel staples drilled into the rock (See Donnelly 2003: 291-303 and Hardwell 2007: 14-16). The protection is visible and so, to an extent, marks out the route on the rock; there is less need for the interpretive skills of traditional climbing. Bolts are generally reliable and easy to utilise and therefore it is

possible to more safely push climbing limits. This is underpinned by the outcrop nature of many sport crags and their close proximity to civilisation.

Including bouldering under the contemporary umbrella is contentious because, arguably, it is the oldest form of climbing with documentary evidence of its existence dating back to the late nineteenth Century (see Gray 1993). But because of the way it is practiced in the twenty first Century it is very distinctive and has become a contemporary rock climbing phenomenon capturing the imagination of rock climbers globally. Bouldering dispenses with ropes and other equipment as the climbs rarely exceed five metres in height. Because of this a fall is not life threatening and most moves occur only a few metres off the ground. This has paved the way for the most difficult and technical moves ever performed on rock.

Indoor climbing occurs on fabricated climbs utilising different sized holds screwed on to resin coated boards and erected to a height of up to 20 metres. Climbs are protected using bolts; essentially then, it represents an indoor sport climbing arena. Indoor climbing forms the basis of the subcultural exploration in this chapter.

In order to fully appreciate possible outcomes within indoor climbing it is necessary to explore how each climbing type fits with the other. I propose to do this theoretically by drawing on debates on detraditionalization from 1996. This is particularly pertinent for work on climbing because of the possible dual interpretation detraditionalization may have in this context. This will be closely aligned with the concept of differentiation and developed further through discussion on subcultural work from Donnelly (1981). After developing this firm theoretical base reflection on indoor only climbers will occur to show how the subculture for indoor only climbers may be very different from other climbing types.

Detraditionalization

Detraditionalization is “the decline of the belief in pre-given or natural order of things” (Heelas, 1996: 2). Heelas (ibid) also suggests it involves “a shift of authority from ‘without’ to ‘within’”. In other words, individuals are increasingly called upon to make choices in life decisions that would ordinarily be pre-given (Beck, 1992, makes this issue a central focus). Postmodern societies foist upon us an array of choices in all areas of living, including leisure lifestyles. Fifty years ago rock climbers in the UK were presented with one approach: traditional climbing. Participants would involve themselves in exploring rock with poor equipment and little knowledge of climbs attempted. Great trust was put in the lead climber with any mistake possibly proving fatal. However, climbing in the twenty first Century is about choice (see Heywood, 1994). Where previously the adoption of traditional climbing was the only possibility, now choices have to be made between indoors or outdoors, with fixed or removable protection, bouldering or long routes in the mountains. In short, the onus is on individuals to make a choice about their rock climbing preference. Modern living has developed rock climbing in the UK into a multi-faceted activity and through the use of technology has reduced danger to a level acceptable enough to interest a growing number of participants (BMC, 2003). Of course, many other reasons may also account for increasing participation though it is not the remit of this chapter to go into these in any detail.

Heelas (1992: 2) sees this opening up of opportunity and choice as part of the way in which “capitalistic producers seek to increase sales” resulting in commodification and commercialisation of anything that can be sold. Adam’s (1996: 137) observation that “what is contemporary today may become tradition tomorrow” is a crucial line of inquiry. Climbing participation is rapidly increasing (BMC 2003) and within this different ways of climbing are being chosen and practiced. There is no longer one way of rock climbing in the UK. But, in her critique of detraditionalization, Adam (1996: 137) makes a further point for consideration. “Traditions seem not to require conscious thought. They are

almost taken for granted actions reproducing and maintaining the past in the present". Despite the contemporary rock climbing choices available the unwritten rules and canons of traditional climbing apply. The aim of contemporary climbing types is a distillation of the 'end game' of traditional climbing with its strong underpinning ethic of ascent from the ground up using equipment only as a safeguard to a fall. However, the journey's offered by the two broad climbing categories are different. While it is quite acceptable for contemporary climbers to practise and rehearse moves before completing a climb in one go this has not been the way of traditional climbing in the past.

Considering traditional climbing has remained the bastion of rock climbing choice in the UK, despite the variety of climbing types available over the last 30 years, development of this issue is required. This further underpins Adam's (1996: 137) observations that "it is almost pre-ordained that some things are more likely to become tradition because of respect or duty". Traditional climbing remains the most highly respected approach to rock climbing in the UK and may be one of a number of reasons why people choose this type of climbing.

So far I have only used detraditionalization conceptually, but in the context of climbing a literal interpretation of detraditionalization could occur. The canons of contemporary climbing types are different to traditional climbing though the end game remains the same. The choice available for rock climbers is itself detraditionalizing the traditional.

Differentiation

Differentiation is a key focus of this chapter because it is based on being able to identify specific types of UK rock climbing. In Geology helps greatly within this task. Steep featureless limestone is often developed with fixed protection. Rock climbers actively discourage fixed protection on gritstone and mountain crags and this is strongly supported by the British Mountaineering Council (BMC). This causes recognisable differentiation. What is perhaps of more interest to the

leisure sociologist is the deeper subcultural meanings and outcomes associated with this differentiation.

Luhmann (1996: 60) conceptualises differentiation in a way that is important to understand in this chapter. He suggests “a pre-formed” system can be delimited from the environment to form its own environment for new subsystems. Traditional climbing is taken to be the ‘pre-formed’ ‘delimited’ subsystem for contemporary climbing types and I have therefore sought to investigate the extent to which this delimited environment exists in contemporary climbing types. My interest is in the autonomy of these ‘new ways’ of contemporary climbing.

Luhmann (1996: 65) also makes strong links with value identification and is interested in the way in which “an explicit semantics of values supports itself on this operative level of the communication of preferences, elevating its preferences in order to inflate them into norms”. Here Luhmann (ibid) questions when choices and preferences become the norm and challenge the ‘pre-formed’ system. Traditional rock climbing ascents in the higher echelons are succumbing to pre-practice and inspection because of the risks involved in adopting traditional ethics; top roping is becoming more acceptable in the outdoors (Last 1997) and many traditional climbers also enjoy other types of climbing. Therefore, detraditionalization and differentiation are closely linked in the sense that contemporary climbing practices are becoming more acceptable within traditional climbing and a shift in the value system towards contemporary forms of climbing may be identified.

Luhmann (ibid) goes on to suggest that eventually a subsystem is able to “observe its own operations” and “monitor its own cohesion” as opposed to being reliant on the “pre-formed system”. In effect, Luhmann suggests that newly created values and norms, occur that are autonomous to the ‘pre-formed system’. Of issue here is the importance of value in the autonomy of sub systems.

In all of this my interest is the robustness of traditional climbing as a preformed system for UK rock climbing as a whole. The popularity of indoor climbing has increased significantly in the last decade (BMC 2003), so much so that some people only climb indoors. Through using examples from indoor climbers studied and using the framework of Donnelly's subcultural membership levels as well as Marchart's (2003) subcultural appropriation model conclusions will be offered regarding the place of traditional climbing within UK rock climbing more generally.

Climbing values

Set in the context of values, resistance to change would point to a value system robust or resilient enough to sustain itself over time. The values of climbing have been sufficiently different from wider society and leisure culture to resist incorporation (see Donnelly 1993). It may be suggested that wider society tends towards utilitarianism as a value base whereas the values of climbing may be far more normativist. Donnelly's (1993) suggests that climbing as a resilient subculture is near its end. This may partly be driven by the accessibility indoor climbing and bouldering affords and its subsequent widening participation base (see BMC, 2003). A dilution of climbing values upheld over decades may be seen through a growing number of people with an interest in lifestyle sports and the outdoors per se as opposed to climbing specifically (see Jarvie 2006; Beal and Wilson 2004; Wheaton 2004; Buckley 2003; and Wilson 1998).

Understanding how climbing has resisted change for a hundred years may also involve work from Donnelly (1981) building on earlier work from Clarke (1974). Clarke (1974: 433) uses the term inclusiveness to explore "the extent to which membership includes all aspects of a person's life or only a part of it". He closely associates this with identity and how inclusiveness shapes individual identity. On a similar theme, but in more detail, Donnelly (1981: 572) identifies five levels of membership depicted in the form of concentric circles. The core represents primary level membership where members "show a major commitment to the activity in time, energy, money, friendship, information and other resources".

Importantly, Donnelly explains that these members are responsible for creating and modifying the characteristics of subculture.

Primary members operating at the subcultural core are those most likely to be closest to core value identification. Subcultural resilience relies on diffuseness of boundaries between members and the ability of those at other membership levels to permeate the core. To an extent this would require acceptance of values already in place and controlled by core members. Poor permeability would ensure resilience. A value structure significantly at odds with other sport forms or indeed society more generally (see Donnelly, 1981) would call for total immersion into the culture for primary level penetration. Figure 1 schematically represents Donnelly's (1981) membership levels and draws links with subcultural value systems. Donnelly (1981) suggests primary (core) members are the decision makers of the subculture, affecting direction and structure. Those involved as occasional members of the subculture will have less influence in its direction and value orientation and be more oriented towards the wider values of society. This is significant in climbing due to interest in indoor climbing occurring over the last two decades (see BMC 2003).

Subculture Core Value System	Donnelly's Membership Levels
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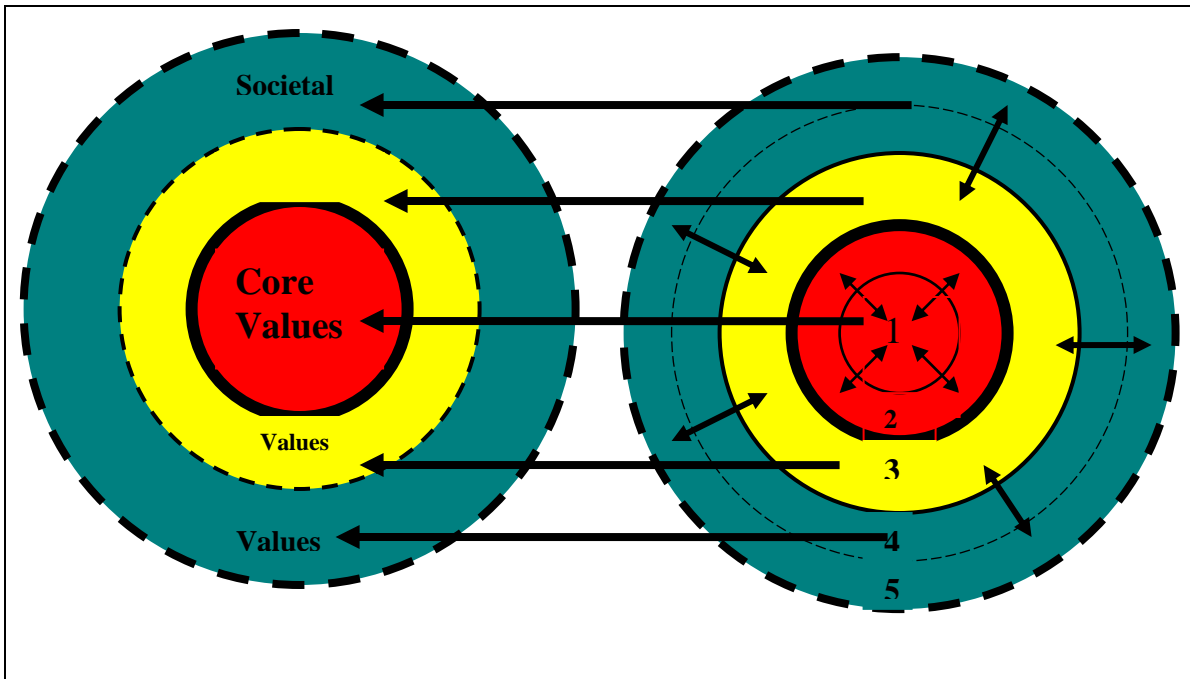


Figure 1: Core values alignment with membership levels.

Core value systems aligned with Donnelly's membership levels. Donnelly (1981) suggests a concentric circles model of different levels of membership. These could easily be linked with core values. The boundary lines are significant. Dotted lines denote permeability whereas thick solid lines denote closure. The numbers on Donnelly's model are: 1 = Principal members – primary level membership. 2 = Secondary level membership. 3 = Associate membership. 4 = Marginal members. 5 = Occasional participants. The smaller arrows inside Donnelly's model depict movement of members.

Model analysis

A body of sociological thought exists concerning the fragmented nature of postmodern society (Jenks 2005; Marchart 2004; Muggleton 2000; Maffesoli 2000). To suggest an identifiable core in UK rock climbing may be problematic. Indeed, its differentiated nature has already been discussed with four different climbing types highlighted. But also discussed is the binding unwritten rule that climbs should be ascended from the ground up using equipment only as a safeguard to a fall. This is practiced by all climbing types with the most coveted ascent being a first attempt successfully completed in one go with minimal information about the climb, known in climbing circles as 'a flash'. Due to the sustained and technically demanding nature of many contemporary climbs, and

this would include cutting edge traditional climbs, practising the route beforehand is almost a prerequisite to the accepted style of ascent. This leaves a dilemma; UK rock climbing does seem to be underpinned by an identifiable code of conduct recognised across climbing types, yet differentiation is also occurring.

Indeed, indoor climbing and its accessibility is responsible for the tremendous boost in numbers of active climbers in the past two decades (BMC 2003). Indoor climbing is also used by other climbers as an accessible and reliable way of keeping climbing fit during the winter months. Unfortunately, exact figures regarding the number of active traditional climbers compared to indoor climbers is unavailable. The model above suggests indoor climbers would have little impact on the core value of UK rock climbing despite their growing numbers due to the permeability model (Donnelly 1981).

Studies I have conducted so far also reveal considerable influence and shaping of local climbing culture through sport climbing activists and boulderers. To suggest only traditional climbers make up the core of rock climbing thought and action in the UK is untrue within my studies. Boulderers have influence locally through organising competitions. Regionality is immensely important in this debate and requires further study for greater understanding in this area.

Additional models

Marchart (2004) discusses concerns of subcultural appropriation that also may be aligned to Donnelly's (1981) subcultural membership model. Using Redhead's (1993) work he develops a criticism of Hebdige's (1987) early cyclical appropriation model which was based on "authentic self made or street-style subculture" (Marchart 2004: 88) suggesting instead a "'synthetic' appropriation by the image and fashion industry" has occurred. Hebdige viewed subculture as a counter hegemonic force that ultimately would be subsumed by the hegemony of the day and this relied on the true or authentic existence of subculture. In post-subcultural studies authenticity is questioned as subcultures are subsumed by outside influences and become fashion or trend statements. Using this line of

inquiry subcultures become representations rather than a subculture with real depth; blurring of authentic and synthetic occurs (see Marchart 2004; Ritzer 1997, 1997a). Buckley (2003) views the outdoors as a lifestyle fashion statement gripping swathes of the population in their bid to symbolise healthy living through outdoor involvement.

The use of authentic and synthetic in rock climbing study is fraught with difficulty. Authenticity has to be viewed from the perspective of participants. Background, previous experience and depth of subcultural emersion all shape authenticity. A climber only experiencing indoor climbing has little by way of comparison and for them the activity is authentic and meaningful. Despite these reservations Marchart's (2004) post-subcultural model is useful when aligned with Donnelly's membership levels and is seen in Figure 2. There are still significant issues around permeability and Marchart (2004) suggests the level of penetration or appropriation through outside influences to be considerable and affecting the very core of the activity questioning whether authenticity really exists. The schema draws together the work of Donnelly (1981) Marchart (2004) and Clarke (1974) and shows the strong links between models and the importance of Marchart's concern about depth and penetration of appropriation. Indoor only climbers acts as an example of model application and enables greater understanding of the place of indoor climbing in the lives of its participants and as part of climbing in the UK as a whole.

Subculture Core Value System	Donnelly's Membership Levels
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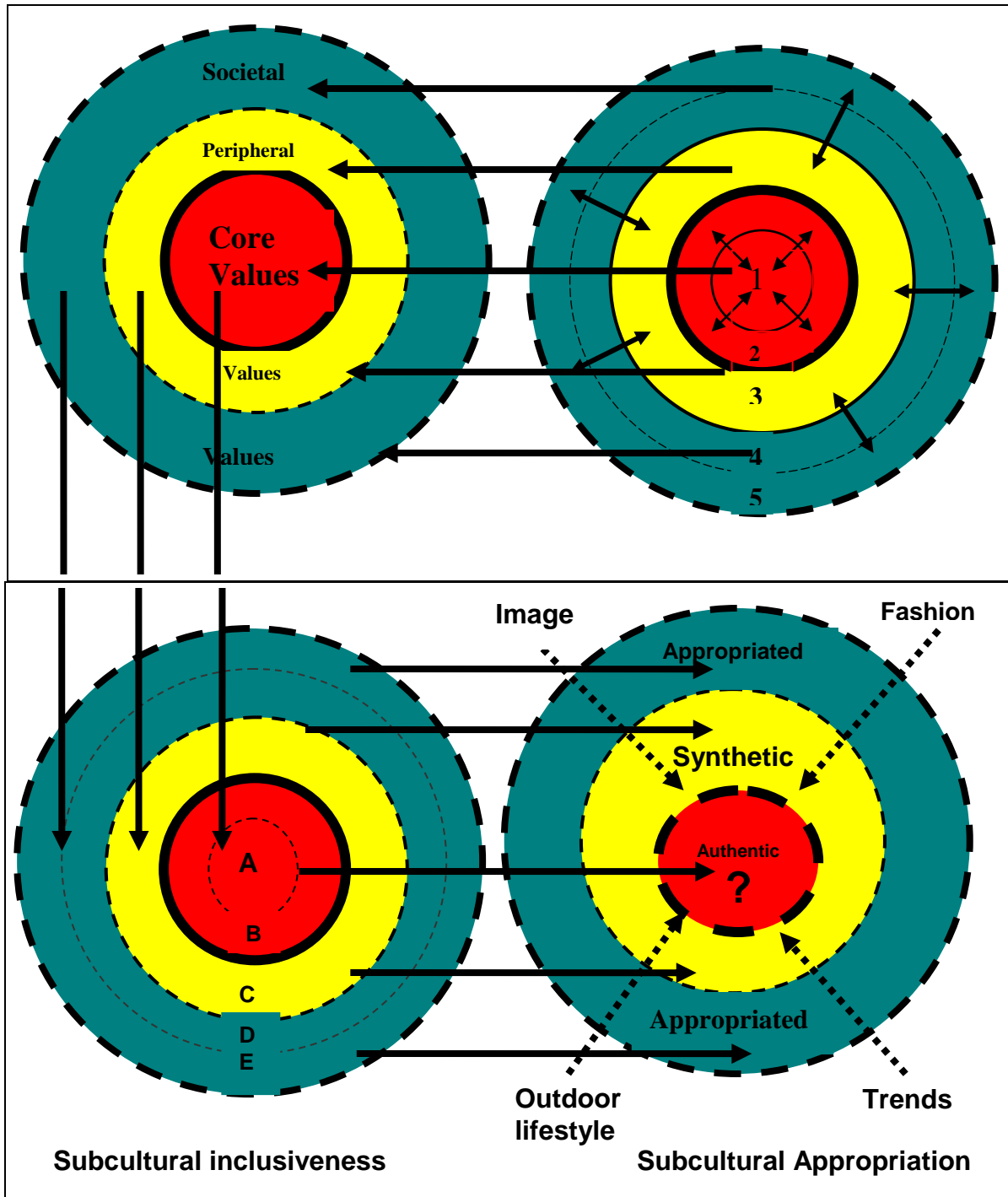


Figure 2: Subcultural membership level and appropriation. Donnelly (1981) suggests a concentric circles model of different levels of membership. These could easily be linked with Clarke's Levels of inclusiveness where core members may be seen as the most assimilated members to the subculture with significant influence on its values and actions. 'A' at the core represents total immersion into the culture and therefore high inclusiveness where as 'E' on the periphery represents low subcultural inclusiveness. Similarly, Marchart's (2004) appropriation theory is also schematically represented but the permeability model he proposes is depicted using dotted circle boundaries where these are more easily penetrated and the core less protected. The boundary lines are significant. Dotted lines denote permeability where as thick solid lines denote closure. The numbers on Donnelly's model are:

1 = Principal members – primary level membership. 2 = Secondary level membership. 3 = Associate membership. 4 = Marginal members. 5 = Occasional participants. The single headed arrows denote strong links between models. The dotted arrows denote appropriation pressures. The smaller arrows inside Donnelly's model depict movement of members.

Brief methodology

Indoor only climbers are one of five groups studied over a three year period between 2003 and 2006. The study began with a quantitative survey using value statements. Respondents were asked to categorise themselves into one of six identified climbing groups. A qualitative follow-up phase was conducted with respondents who had expressed an interest in the study and were willing to provide more information about their climbing. Following successful methods deployed by Kiewa (2002), visual diary work, participant observation through climbing days, photographs and taped discussion were all qualitative methods used for gathering information.

The sample size used in the qualitative phase was small ($n = 3$) but consideration of the study as whole is important. The quantitative phase gained 638 responses with a high proportion of these from traditional and assortment (those practicing all types of climbing) climbers. Four other climbing groups were studied in the qualitative phase bringing to 15 the number of participants involved. Indoor only climbers were chosen as a group for this chapter because the findings revealed an underpinning of aspects of the models discussed so far as well as having wider appeal to the reader. Due to accessibility, contact for most people with any inclination towards trying different leisure activities is a distinct possibility.

Indoor only climbers

I was particularly interested in participants who had little experience of climbing outdoors. I wanted participants to have chosen climbing as an activity above other leisure choices. Exploring reasons behind their choice and their involvement in the activity would develop an understanding of the place of climbing in their lives and their place within the subculture of climbing more generally.

All participants were members of the Partners in Climb group. Through an introductory climbing scheme offered at the climbing wall participants were able to develop the necessary skills for safe indoor wall climbing. A notice board for signing up and letting others know of availability quickly cemented partnerships and the formation of an informal 'club' meet occurring on Wednesday evenings. I accessed this club through regular visits to the wall and sharing with the group my research aims. Contributions are taken from different group members using the qualitative tools already highlighted.

Findings

Participants in this research were indoor only climbers. Their reasons for choosing rock climbing rather than more 'main stream' leisure activities was that it was different. Participants saw climbing as having a danger element within it, controlled by specific skills and knowledge learned quickly through the introduction to climbing course. The climbing wall ambience, the nature of the activity, the skills needed and concentration required were all different to other activities encountered. This was a definite appeal of the activity. James discussed these issues with me during field observations:

One of the issues for me is that it's like no other activity I do. Once I am on the climb the only thing I can think about is the climb itself. It is all absorbing and my vision and thought becomes completely engrossed in the climb. This means real time away from work issues (James, indoor climber, field diary notes, 09/05).

Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1998) noticed certain sport and leisure pursuits captivated participants. He used the phrase 'flow experience' to capture the essence of what James describes as 'completely engrossing'. Such feelings were reported across all climbing types and are an important reason for involvement. Because of the different skills required it is also an activity in which

others may not readily engage. For Mel, her participation in a different activity was important suggesting that “it is wholly my own activity: nobody I knew before I started went climbing or wants to climb” (Mel, indoor climber, visual diary 09/05). It represents a complete break from everyday activities and this includes work friends and normal social circles. The expression here was one of ‘time out’ or ‘a rest from the treadmill’ which is essential to routine. Mel reiterates this by commenting “I feel more normal when I climb. Weeks when I don’t climb feel wrong (Mel, indoor climber, visual diary, 09/05). This is underpinned by James who observes the importance of a break of work routine and socialisation this inevitably involves.

I socialise with other people from work: doctors, consultants and so on. Invariably we end up talking shop rather than actually getting away from the work situation. In climbing I meet people from all walks of life: builders, teachers, chimney sweeps and this is really important (James, indoor climber, field diary notes, 09/05).

The fitness element involved in indoor climbing was also seen as important. The practice of indoor climbing affords far more opportunity to top rope climbs (a technique where pre-placed ropes run the entire length of the climb so the rope is always above negating a fall). Top roping allows the climber to function at their physical limits as safely as possible. Mel highlights the importance of safe practice in her visual diary:

I am not keen on bouldering indoors as I don’t feel that I can stretch myself fully when there is a fear of falling and hurting myself in the back of my mind – I like the security of having a rope (Mel, indoor climber, visual diary, 10/05).

Participants were grade conscious, they wanted to improve their climbing grade; they were competitive with themselves and often with each other and ‘top roping’

enables participants to do this safely. Phil sees the element of achievement and success as inescapable and makes the following comment:

I think everybody wants to achieve and be successful and so if you are doing something like climbing where you can easily judge progress it gives you a sense of achievement. So, achievement is important (Phil, indoor climber, taped discussion, 11/05).

While the opportunity to boulder was available to the group with crash mats to protect against injury there was a definite preference to climbing longer route – in some cases up to 17 metres. The thrill of being high up and defying gravity, the difficulty of sustained climbing for a prolonged period and the puzzle element of climbing, piecing together the correct sequence of moves, were all reported as important in choosing routes over bouldering.

What constitutes a legitimate ascent of a climb seems almost instinctive. While all group members were acutely aware of climbing protocol (route adherence, not resting on the rope, climbing from the ground to the top in one go) no one could actually explain from where they had gained these unwritten rules. Jackie explains how she climbs:

I never like to rest on a climb, well, not on the rope anyway. Resting for me is a failure to climb the route. A successful climb starts at the bottom and then finishes at the top. If I get tired on the climb I just keep on going until I fall off. I power down and then may be have another go later but never have a rest on the rope to finish the route (Jackie, indoor climber, 09/05, field diary notes).

Lifestyle identity of indoor climbers is firmly established as mainstream. Climbing forms part of the buffer against this, but not a desire to transform their lifestyle around climbing. They were happy to be on the periphery of climbing subculture

and lifestyle identity. This is in marked contrast to many outdoor climbers. Indoor climbers do not see themselves as climbers. They see climbing as a recreation forming part of their patterned existence but it is not carried as a 'badge' or symbol of identity. Differences in dress code, lifestyle and identity from outdoor climbing enthusiasts are all observable.

But the activity itself does have an appeal over and above other activities. Mel describes becoming board with other activities suggesting that "climbing is a sport I can actually relate to as it involves thinking as well as exercise" (Mel, indoor climber, visual diary, 11/05). Dave also thought through what it was about the appeal of climbing that made him always return to the activity:

I think the thing about climbing is that you can come and you can treat it purely as movement. Take it on at an angle or at a grade that is so far within your capability that it is just comfort and movement (Dave, indoor climber, taped discussion 11/05).

It was reported that the act of climbing is what attracts them to the building rather than the people, the atmosphere or the scene. Yet, although climbing does have a specific appeal it is not enough for people to want to change their lifestyle and make climbing their central focus. In doing this the appeal of a break from routine would be lost and this is of absolute importance.

Conclusion and model reflection

Within the findings presented a constant theme emerges. Climbing is seen as a form of escape. Five major escape themes are worth reiterating as important aspects of indoor climbing for the participants studied.

1. It is physical escape from familiar daily environment

2. It is physical escape in terms of type of activity and skills required in its performance. Climbers regularly mentioned their lack of enthusiasm for mainstream sport. Climbing represents an activity requiring different skills and providing a different sporting outcome
3. It is mental escape, focus of attention being specifically on the climb and everything else becomes secondary to the task in hand
4. It is social escape where people encountered are not part of participants' daily lives. It represents a complete break from routine: the people, the environment and the activity are all different
5. It represents an escape from normal existence.

However, the activity remains an *escape* from routine only. Inevitably routine will be restored for the next week until it is time to climb again. Indeed, there is a willingness to return to routine and no compulsion for climbing to be anything other than an escape. This willingness is perhaps made easier by the assurance of routine being broken again the following week, the irony being that the escape also becomes part of the routine (see Ritzer 1997).

For many indoor climbers there was no desire to climb any more regularly than they do, for fear of the activity losing its central purpose: that of escape. It must be practiced irregularly enough to still be different from other areas of life. It represents the one day or evening a week when the person escapes and has time for themselves. It is possible, through accessibility and more 'mainstream' users taking up the activity, climbing will lose the chance to offer a different experience; its appeal as something different will no longer occur and people will want to experience another 'different' activity.

Indoor climbing is important in the lives of participants yet serves a different purpose when compared with other climbing types. It is grounded for many in the break of routine from everyday experiences. It allows participation in an activity solely for themselves and does not involve contact with people from regular spheres of life. This emphasis is in stark contrast to other climbing types where

like-minded family and friends often live lifestyles based upon the outdoors and rock climbing. Many of the indoor climbers in this study would be described as “marginal members” or “occasional participants” (Donnelly, 1981) in an “appropriated” climbing activity (Marchart, 2004). Their involvement does not include all aspects of their lives so their inclusiveness is weak (Clarke 1974). Yet this is a conscious choice: there is no desire for climbing to be the centrality of lifestyle or to provide a distinct climbing identity. Instead, the activity is used as respite, a mental and physical haven directly contrasting to other aspects of people’s lives.

Marchart’s (2004) appropriation model is not without its difficulties when viewed from the perspective of indoor climbers in this study. Indoor climbing is undoubtedly appropriated. The autonomy so important in climbing is controlled; routes are fabricated, safety lies in the hands of ‘professional’ climbers, much of what attracts many traditionalists to climbing is missing and all they wish to escape from is present. But the measuring stick used to view its authenticity may no longer be traditional climbing because indoor climbing is its own activity, a different experience attracting different people. And for those with indoor climbing experience only, it is their authentic climbing experience and therefore underpins conceptual issues of differentiation.

Climbing is unlikely to be as central to the lives of indoor climbers of this study compared with participants of other climbing types investigated but this does not necessarily mean it is any less important. The need for an escape, the importance of an activity wholly their own and the combination of both physical and mental absorption ensure indoor climbing makes a unique and meaningful contribution to the lives of participants.

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