Articles

Control Over Self and Space in Rockclimbing

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The leisure experience has been defined with reference to the quality of self-determination. A qualitative study of a community of rockclimbers indicated that self-determination, or a person's control over the structure of the activity, was an important element that determined satisfaction within the rockclimbing experience, particularly (though not exclusively) for women climbers. This attribute appears to be a precondition for the experience of a second type of control, which was identified as control over self, or competence, leading to a flow experience. Perceptions of control were developed through narratives that interpreted past actions, but also contributed to a desired identity that formed a motive for future behavior.

KEYWORDS: *Rockclimbing, self-determination, control, identity, flow, women*

Introduction: Leisure As an Expression of Self or Narrative of Coherence?

Recent leisure theorists (eg, Henderson, 1990; Kelly, 1996; Samdahl, 1988; Wearing, 1996) have defined leisure as experience of a particular kind, rather than through more objective measures of time or activity. It is now commonly accepted that leisure defined as time apart from paid work has no meaning for a large portion of the population who do not engage in such activity (a portion that includes women who are occupied with home and child-rearing duties on a full time basis; unemployed people; and retirees). It is also generally acknowledged that the practice of defining leisure as specific activities is also fraught with difficulty, given the ambiguity and complexity of meaning which can attach to any given activity (Kelly, 1996; 1983).

To define leisure as experience, however, begs the question for more detail. A number of theorists have developed a series of two-dimensional constructs of the leisure experience, each of which focuses on two varying but "essential" qualities. Neulinger (1981: 18), for example, defined leisure through the qualities of perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation. Gunter and Gunter (1980) used the axes of freedom of choice (embedded within sociological institutions such as work and family) and psychological involvement. Kelly (1983; 1978) also used an axis of relative freedom, whilst moti-

vation (ranging from social to intrinsic) formed his second axis. These three models are in broad agreement with respect to the qualities which define a "pure" leisure experience: generally it is marked by a perceived freedom of choice and a high degree of personal investment which stems from intrinsic motivation.

Perceived freedom of choice has been identified with the concept of self-determination (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Self-determination is commonly understood to be a positive attribute, leading to increased levels of life satisfaction (Guinn, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and buffering against the effects of stress (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Park, 1996). In a world that increasingly assumes control over the most intimate of our domestic affairs (Heywood, 1994; Ritzer, 1993), leisure, in affording opportunities for experiencing this sense of self-determination, assumes a high degree of importance in our lives.

Research in the area of self-determination has focussed mainly on groups that are perceived to be disempowered in this respect, namely, adolescents (eg, Pawelko & Magafas, 1997; Shaw, Caldwell & Kleiber, 1996), people with disabilities (eg, Patterson & Pegg, 1995; Rogers, Hawkins & Eklund, 1998), the elderly (eg, Guinn, 1999; Hall & Bocksnick, 1995) and women (eg, Brand, 1998; Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw & Freysinger, 1996). These studies show considerable consistency in their results. Self-determination is a quality often denied to individual members of the above-mentioned groups, and its loss leads to boredom, apathy and disengagement. Although so called "leisure" time is frequently subject to control by others[1], the facilitation of personal control leads to increased levels of participant motivation, engagement and enjoyment.

Using self-determinism as a central defining property of leisure is also associated with an understanding of leisure as an expression, or an enhancement, of the self. This notion has been contested by Kuentzel (2000) who observed that any "idea of a 'core' self that directs life decisions and develops and matures through life's experiences carries little currency in postmodern theory" (p. 88). Kuentzel suggested instead that the constitution of self is a reflexive process, something that occurs after the event. Given the complexities and ambiguities of postmodern society, the central task facing any individual is to create a self narrative that provides coherence and order. Through reflection on past actions, the individual constructs a narrative that will "anchor the self across the contingencies of time and space" (p. 90). Kuentzel's argument is based on Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984, 1991), which maintains that individual action and social structure are mutually constitutive of each other. Whereas proponents of self-determinism in leisure might argue for a pre-existing self that seeks expression through freely chosen leisure activities, Kuentzel argues that the narrative of self is constructed *after* the event, using coherence and order as the criteria for this construction. From this perspective, the importance of leisure derives from

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[1] If self-determination is intrinsic to the leisure experience, this statement becomes contradictory.

its ability to provide a coherent sense of self, rather than from its ability to provide opportunities for the expression of self.

Kuentzel's analytical framework raises some general research questions. Within the leisure context, a comparison of the structuration framework with the self-development framework would examine whether behavior predicts identity, or whether identity predicts behavior, or whether behavior and identity are mutually constitutive. A related research question might investigate the particular role of leisure in either enabling people to work out new identities, or to anchor themselves in preestablished self-narratives.

These general questions formed one basis for an exploration of the meaning of personal control within the leisure activity of rockclimbing. Whilst the twin concepts of "self-determination" and "control" are occasionally taken as synonymous (eg, Mannell & Kleiber, 1997), the use of the word "control" rather than "self-determination" immediately introduces an ambiguity of meaning. "Self-determination" is usually understood to be quite specific in its meaning, referring to the perceived sense that the individual has freely determined to engage in a particular activity. "Control", on the other hand, which refers to a sense of "power-over," might refer to a number of factors including choice of activity, the environment, or one's feelings. The use of this broader term is justified on the assumption that a final narrative of self as a self-determining individual is based on a sense that one has remained "in control" throughout an activity. This study explores the nature of "control" in the climbing context in an attempt to understand the factors that contribute to this final narrative.

The following specific questions were addressed through this investigation:

1. As a leisure pursuit, does climbing provide opportunities for experiencing a sense of control? What factors contribute to this sense of control?
2. What contribution does this sense of control make to participants' satisfaction with the activity?
3. What contribution does this sense of control make to participants' narrative of self?
4. Is this narrative of self (or identity) formed after the event as a result of reflection, or is it a pre-existing construct that determines future behaviour within the leisure context?

The first two questions derive from previous research into the importance of self-determination in leisure (Ryan and Deci, 2000), whilst the final two questions derive from the questions raised by Kuentzel (2000) with respect to the reflexive nature of the self-narrative.

The Significance of Control in Climbing: Previous Literature

A desire for control emerged strongly as a motive for climbing in research that has investigated psychological determinants of behavior. Slanger (1997) found that qualitative data collected during his study of climbers

exhibited a primary "mastery" theme, in that climbers strongly desired to meet and master challenges. The mastery theme is related to a number of the six factors found by Ewert (1985) in a study of climbers' self reported reasons for participation. These factors included: challenge and risk (with an emphasis on personal competence), catharsis and escape, recognition, physical setting, creativity (including problem solving and decision-making), and locus of control (with an emphasis on gaining personal control in a risky environment). In Slanger's terms, a sense of mastery, or personal control, results from the ability (or competence) to successfully meet the challenge set by the physical surroundings through informed decision-making.

McIntyre (1991) extended Ewert's work in his study of rockclimbers in Australia, and was able to add the further factors of problem solving and leadership (ie, a desire to help others and develop personal control) to the list. A later study of female climbers (as well as kayakers and SCUBA divers) in Australia (McIntyre, Kiewa and Burden, 1994) found that the recognition factor recorded by Ewert (1985) played an important part in the motivation of these women. However, the constituent items of this factor also included a dimension of personal control, which resulted in the renaming of the factor as "identity." This study used a Likert style questionnaire to gather its data, and the inclusion of personal control as a constituent of the identity factor was based on participants' assessment of the importance of the item "To be in control of things that happen" as a motive for climbing. The interpretation of this item by participants, however, remains unclear. It appears that control forms an important part of the final narrative of rock-climbing, yet the nature of this control was not specified through this study.

More clarity has been achieved through the work of Lyng (1990) in his social-psychological study of what he called "edgework"[2] activities. Lyng elevated the dimension of personal control to become the most desired result of participation. In a strong rebuttal of research that focuses on individual attributes in isolation, he insisted that engagement in edgework activity must be viewed within the social context. This social context, according to Lyng, is one of increasing surveillance and external control, to the extent that every action might appear to be pre-determined. In the face of such overwhelming constraints, with a resultant loss of any sense of personal control over one's life, edgework activities provide an opportunity for a reversal of these conditions. Typically, edgework requires the participant to make life-or-death decisions whilst in circumstances of extreme stress. A successful resolution of such conditions creates a sense that the participant *is* in control of his or her life, to such an extent that death may be approached with impunity. Lyng believed that true edgework requires that the resolution of these conditions be largely a matter of chance, so that any sense of control is purely

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[2]Lyng derived the term "edgework" from the work of H.S. Thompson, and uses it to describe activities that expose their participants to the risk of death. Amongst edgework activities he lists skydiving, climbing, and experimenting with drugs.

an illusion. Illusion or not, the opportunity to "maintain control of a situation that verges on total chaos" is the desired goal of participants in edgework (Lyng, 1990, p. 871).

A number of texts within the mountaineering literature supports Lyng's thesis. Reid (1991) believed that

> The climber who hopes to survive to old age must be prepared to overcome scores of potentially fatal hazards on every climb, and thousands in a typical career. That may sound daunting, but it is one of the sport's principal attractions. Mountain climbers positively relish the almost perfect rigor of their discipline's cardinal directive: Go to the edge and perform flawlessly, and you will survive (probably) to go to the edge again. (p. 8)

The flawless performance is supposed to guarantee a measure of control over death, but, as mentioned previously, Lyng believed this perception to be illusory. Simpson (1994) agreed with him, suggesting that control lies "only in the choice to go". Despite this initial self-determinism, Simpson's final narrative was of powerlessness: "I never really knew what would happen, and could therefore never be in control" (p. 216). The lack of control of which Simpson spoke is over the environment, or of the events that happened to him. Later, Simpson spoke with more optimism of another type of control, which arises through confronting and thereby controlling fear: "Embracing the near future and all that it will throw at you with open arms and a clear mind, confident that you will succeed, you will control it" (p. 276).

Three types of control have been identified: control over choice of activity, control over the environment, and control over one's response to danger. As stated previously, whilst the concept of self-determinism is commonly equated with a perceived freedom of choice with respect to activity, it is argued that a *final* narrative of self-determined activity is dependant upon a sense that one remains "in control" throughout the duration of the activity. Control should therefore be extended to include aspects beyond choice of activity, such as control of the external environment, or self-control with respect to fear. The distinction between control of the environment and control of one's fears can be used to distinguish between different modes of climbing.

Difference in Communities of Climbers

The fact that distinctions exist between different climbing communities has not been widely recognised in academic research.[3] A study of climbers by Feher, Meyers & Skelly (1998), for example, simply referred to the climbers who participated in their research as "competitors," despite the fact that formal competition is an anathema to many climbers. The climbing fraternity, however, makes a clear distinction between "traditional" climbers and

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[3]Exceptions include Heywood (1994) and Morgan (1998), who both discuss conflict between different groups of climbers.

"sports" climbers. The conflict that exists between the two groups is evidenced by an entry in the introduction to the guidebook to Mt Arapiles (Mentz & Tempest, 1999), which states that any climber found guilty of violating the traditional climbing ethic "will be weighed down with heavy stones and thrown into the nearest swimming hole" (p. 13). Violation is defined through such practices as placing bolts in the cliff for protection and chipping hand- and foot-holds in the rock. Both these practices represent an attempt to render the climbing activity more controlled through modification of the physical environment.

By controlling the physical environment, climbers reduce the likelihood that they might approach the borders of chaos, which, according to Lyng (1990), is the goal of edgework activity. Williams & Donnelly (1985) described the question of environmental control as that of defining the appropriate "degree of jeopardy." Their argument is supported by Tejada-Flores (1978) who explained that different modes of climbing require different rules, so that techniques used to meet the risks involved in mountaineering are not permissible whilst engaged in the lesser challenge of single-pitch rockclimbing. Traditional climbers, therefore, set themselves strict rules, which, although they appear arbitrary, afford them the opportunity to engage with an environment over which they have deliberately exerted little control. They are thus enabled to struggle with the second type of control in their ability to perform within stressful circumstances.

This ability to perform within the "appropriate degree of jeopardy" is analogous to the "flow" performance described by rockclimbers in Csikszentmihalyi's original study (1975). The sense of control integral to this theory is based on competence, or the ability to successfully meet a challenge. Csikszentmihaliyi's original study indicated that the flow experience provided the major source of reward for climbers, and its anticipation provided motivation for ongoing engagement. A number of writers have observed that the flow experience, based on a balance of challenge and skill, is a source of intrinsic motivation (Guastello, Johnson & Rieke, 1999) or of enjoyment and deep involvement (Bialeschki & Henderson, 1992; Stebbins, 2000). The importance of control over choice of activity in the flow experience, however, has not been well documented. Indeed, studies of the experience of flow within highly structured situations such as might occur during an organised camp (Bialeschki & Henderson, 1992) or at work (Goodman, 1996) indicate that control over choice of activity is not a major determinant of the flow experience.

This review of the climbing literature has provided further clarification of the research questions that informed this paper. First, the relationship between control over the structure of the activity and control over one's actions through competence and self-control is explored in this study, which investigates the relative contributions of these factors to a final narrative of self-determinism. Second, this paper examines whether this narrative is constructed after the event, or whether the desire to exercise an identity of control forms an initial motivating force for participation in climbing.

Research Methodology

The climbers who contributed to this research formed part of a tradi-
tional rockclimbing community in Australia, and comprised a total of sev-
enteen men and fourteen women. A traditional rockclimbing community was
chosen to stay within the limits described by Heywood (1994). The members
of this community generally abided by strict rules that ensured they could
exercise little control over the natural environment. The focus thus shifted
to other forms of control, such as over self and performance. The climbing
area that formed a focus for this research is a medium-sized crag, featuring
mainly single-pitch climbs, the majority of which follow natural crack lines
and thus afford multiple opportunities for the placing of protection. Other,
more challenging crags also exist in the area, featuring multi-pitch routes,
fewer crack lines, and loose rock.

Two criteria were followed in selecting participants. Participants needed
to be (a) active lead climbers and (b) following a traditional (not sport)
climbing ethic. Data gathering began with a convenience sample of climbers
known to the researcher, but continued through a snowballing technique as
word spread about the research. One limiting effect on the study was the
researcher's desire to attain a balance of male and female participants. Be-
cause of the small number of eligible female climbers (fourteen seemed to
represent the total number of female lead climbers adhering to a traditional
climbing ethic), the number of male climbers was correspondingly restricted.
Despite this restriction, thirty-one climbers represented a large proportion
of this particular climbing community.

These climbers represented a range of ability and experience. Years of
involvement in climbing ranged from three to twenty-eight, and competence
(measured through preferred grade of climb) varied from grade 10 to grade
24[4]. Despite this variance, every climber involved in this research shared a
high degree of commitment. All had climbed at many sites throughout Aus-
tralia; twenty-seven participants had travelled overseas to climb; and all had
experienced extended climbing trips (ranging from two weeks to one year)
devoted entirely to climbing.

The study was based on a constructivist (Schwandt, 1994) and symbolic
interactionist (Blumer, 1969) approach to epistemology. Knowledge is con-
sidered to be "constructed" through interaction with others, rather than
existing as objective truth that can be "discovered" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994,
p. 111). This approach meant that participants became "co-researchers," who
together with the researcher developed an enhanced understanding of their
experiences. Interaction between each participant and the researcher oc-
curred at a number of points. It began with a day spent in a climbing context
when the researcher "went climbing" with each of twenty-nine participants

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[4]The Australian grading system is an open ended one, beginning with grade 1. Grade 10 is
relatively easy, corresponding to American Grade 5.5. Grade 24 is difficult, corresponding to
American Grade 5.11c.

(fifteen men and fourteen women). This day encouraged the development
of a close rapport, as well as providing opportunity for a detailed explanation
of the research procedure and purpose. The purpose of the research was
described as an exploration of how climbers developed a sense of identity
(which included their beliefs, values and ideas) through interactions within
a climbing context. Reflections on this day were written up immediately af-
terwards in the researcher's Reflective Journal. During the climbing day, par-
ticipants were given a diary that they kept for six months, noting in it any
significant interactions that occurred in a climbing context as well as reflec-
tions on such interactions.

At the end of six months, the diaries were collected from nineteen of
the original twenty-nine participants. Those participants who had not com-
pleted their diaries apologised for this and expressed an interest in contin-
uing their involvement in the study through interviews. The contents of the
diaries were transcribed and analysed using a NUD*IST programme for
the computerised analysis of qualitative data. This analysis contributed to the
development of questions that provided a semi-structure for in-depth, taped
interviews of fourteen of the original twenty-nine participants (seven women
and seven men). These participants were selected mainly on the basis of
availability.

As a result of the analysis of these interviews, a number of proposals
were formulated. Feedback was sought on these proposals from the fourteen
participants by mail, as well as from an additional eleven participants (five
women and six men) through further in-depth interviews. These eleven par-
ticipants were drawn from the fifteen climbers who were part of the original
group and had not yet been interviewed. The remaining four climbers were
no longer available for interview, due to moves interstate and overseas. Two
additional (male) participants, who had so far remained external to this
process, provided comment on the final analysis.

All data were transcribed and analysed using a NUD*IST programme to
aid in organisation and the coding procedure. Analysis of data followed a
grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), utilising open, axial
and selective coding. Data were grouped into categories (open coding) that
were then organised according to the relationships that existed between
them (axial coding). One central category was then selected as the core, and
all other categories were rearranged to illustrate their relationship to this
core (selective coding). Two academic advisers as well as the two climbing
colleagues mentioned above provided feedback on the validity of interpre-
tation. In this way, patterns were revealed, a story was told, and theory was
built.

This process was followed for each of the major stages of the research
(diaries, early interviews and later interviews). Each successive stage was built
on the results of the previous, and this procedure, together with the practice
of recycling results to participants for comment, meant that there developed
a refinement of understanding, with corresponding attention to detail and
variant cases. Throughout the process, a Researcher Diary was kept which

recorded reflections on the climbing days, as well as notes and reflections on emerging results. This Researcher Diary became an articulation of an enhanced understanding of the meaning of climbing for the researcher.

Results and Discussion

The theme of personal control emerged at a number of points within this research. Two types of control were distinguished, which aligned closely with the types of control identified in the literature. With reference to the first two research questions that seek to identify factors contributing to a sense of control in climbing, and determine the importance of this sense of control to an overall feeling of satisfaction, two frames of reference are employed. First, the need for (and enjoyment of) controlled and competent reactions (self-control) in stressful situations is described and discussed, before turning to the second frame of reference, the desire to retain the activity of climbing as a space of personal control.

The Need for Self-Control within Stressful Situations

Climbers frequently described their activity as stressful, but were able to describe a process whereby they transformed this stress into exhilaration. This process involved an understanding of the nature of fear in climbing and the usual avoidance of challenges that evoke such fear. At the same time, climbers accepted a loss of control over environment, evoking the ever-present possibility that a difficult challenge might arise. Knowledge of this possibility, and its occasional realisation, meant that climbers must possess the ability to perform whilst fearful through self-control, based on a number of learned strategies. The sense of competence that arises through successful performance leads to feelings of exhilaration and control. A final factor is considered in whether this sense of control is an illusion. This process will now be described in more detail, with illustrative quotations.

Climbers went to some length to differentiate between the stress of climbing and the stress that they experienced in other parts of their lives. Elizabeth, for example, explained that "in everyday life it's all so regimented—everything is run by bells and all these constraints on different things—whereas with climbing, it's simply, will I be able to do it? Or the danger, because climbing is inherently a dangerous thing. So the stress is that you're trying to keep yourself out of danger."

The stress of climbing is easy to understand, because it involves not falling off the cliff. Ease of understanding, however, does not imply that this stress, closely allied with the risk and fear of physical harm, is easy to deal with. In a diary entry, Joanne expressed her feelings eloquently: "With tears rolling down my face I struggled to keep a grip on rocks that felt like they would give way any second. I REALLY wanted to stop and bawl my eyes out and scream out to the world "I'M SCARED", but getting hysterical would only blur my vision even more and increase the chances of a fatal accident."

All participants were intimately acquainted with this kind of gut-wrenching fear. To continue with their activity they must avoid, or move beyond such unpleasant feelings, or translate these feelings into a more positive affect. A number of climbers observed that, in general, they tried to avoid such desperate situations. Nicola observed, "If I find myself in a situation where it's too terrifying, then I generally don't do it. I back off. I climb within my capabilities and I'm pretty well aware of what they are. So I don't find it that risky."

Sometimes, however, climbers find themselves in situations where they can't "back off." Charles described the mixed feelings evoked by this phenomena: "Occasionally you get on a climb and you've just got to go and do it—when that happens—they're very exhilarating moments. . . They're the sort of experiences you don't want . . . You know how it's sort of a love-hate thing . . . They occur in climbing and hopefully you're up to them."

Charles described the fearful moments as "sort of a love-hate thing." He was able to translate these times of stress into positive, even "exhilarating" moments, through understanding them as providing opportunity to demonstrate being "up to them." Being "up to," or able to deal with situations which have moved beyond one's control was what many climbers believed to be the essence of climbing. The first step involved a willingness to relinquish control of the environment, as Sally observed: "You don't know if you've got the right gear, you don't know how hard the moves are going to be, you don't even know if the gear that you've got is going to go in the climb anywhere. So you have to go up to it and say, well, I'm going to do the best that I can, but there's a fair chance that I could be stepping over the line here, and getting into a situation that—well—I guess you have to be prepared to fail."

Having accepted a loss of control of the environment, a climber must then demonstrate an ability to cope with the fear that arises through this uncertainty. Gerard expressed his admiration of this ability in a climbing partner: "And when he got to his limit, and he pushed through that last little bit of what he had, I thought 'Wow, that was awesome' . . . And his or her or their limit is what it's all about. Digging deep."

"Digging deep", "pushing through" were metaphors that described the processes in which all climbers engaged. The epitome of such processes was a sense of personal control. This is achieved through strong mental focus, as described by Nigel: "You stand at the bottom of a climb—I'm always a bit nervous, a bit scared, and I've just learnt to put those negative thoughts out of the way, and just say, ok, forget about the top—just concentrate on climbing well. Just concentrate on using your feet, getting into those rest positions." Angie engaged in a similar process: "Stay calm. Relax. Breathe. Tell myself I'm light as a feather. And sometimes I speak sternly to myself. Okay, you can't panic. You can't lose it here."

The exhilaration that followed the successful application of such self-control was familiar to all climbers, and contrasted strongly with the resolution of work-based situations. Sean stated, "I don't think there's anything

that matches when I've extended myself a little bit and pulled something off—I'm stoked for days and days and days—I've never experienced that at work," and Judy made a similar observation: "And when you get through it—that feeling—that rush—of relaxation. When you get to the top. And I'll bet you any money when you get to the end of a long day at work, you don't get that rush. You never get that rush. You just sit on the couch and go, 'Uuuugghhh.' It's a totally different feeling."

These results supported Slanger's (1997) contention that climbers are not sensation-seekers. They may actively seek out risky situations, but this is not because they enjoy the resultant feelings of fear. Rather, they work very hard to control this fear. What they do enjoy is the sense of exhilaration that follows the application of personal control within an out-of-control situation. Retaining personal control means that climbers can use their skills to good effect, so that the climb is completed successfully. The notion of sensation-seeking implies the passive acceptance of sensations (eg, a roller-coaster ride), whilst relinquishing control to others. Climbers actively work to bring the chaotic situation back under control.

The description of how climbers retain personal control (eg, breathing, self-talk, and concentration) extends Slanger's suggestion that climbers are good "repressers" (Slanger, 1997, p. 368). Slanger used this notion to describe climbers' inclination to remember successes rather than failures. This study indicated that climbers are also good at repressing negative emotions, having developed a number of successful strategies that enable them to do so. Apart from the common elation experienced at the end of a climb, when danger has receded, climbers also experienced immense personal satisfaction from the knowledge that they are good at performing under stress. Tony, for example differentiated between work and climbing as follows: "I don't feel the pressures to deal with the stresses in a work environment as quickly as in a climbing environment. So I think I deal with it better in a climbing environment because you've got to make the decision really quickly." For Tony, work could not provide the challenge of quick thinking and acting under pressure that he enjoyed. Such challenges were provided by the difficult and potentially dangerous situations that he deliberately embraced in climbing, and he derived considerable satisfaction from his competent handling of these challenges.

Such satisfaction supported the "mastery through competence" theme which is common to the findings of Ewert (1985), MacIntyre (1991) and Slanger (1997). It also supported the notion that climbers deliberately choose to engage in climbing because they desire to experience this mastery (Lyng, 1990).

A final point to consider within this frame of reference is Lyng's contention that any sense of control is an illusion (Lyng, 1990). In general, climbers believed that they usually retained a reasonable margin of safety in their climbing by using skills such as the careful inspection of climbs from the ground and the placement of protective devices to ensure their safety. For this reason, they believed that the sense of fear that must always be kept

in check is often groundless, and that control over the climbing activity is quite realistic. Catherine, for example, observed that her fear in climbing is largely unfounded, since she was able to reduce the risk through her competence: "I guess climbing is risky, but, then again—you're in control—theoretically you're in control and you're trying to eliminate those risky factors by doing everything right and placing your gear well. So that's just another mental thing I've got to get over."

As a number of climbers observed, however, traditional climbing involves rules that ensure limited control over the cliff environment, so that at any moment climbers might find themselves on the borders of chaos. The question then arises as to whether climbers have any control over their successful resolution of this situation. Lyng (1990) argued that, in true edgework, success or failure is purely a matter of chance. Some participants, such as Nicola, acknowledged that, in certain situations, such would certainly be the case: "I think that if I got more into mountaineering it would be more out of control, because it's objective dangers, out of your control—someone else might trigger an avalanche above you, which you have no control over. The Warrumbungles is a place that I find scary because there's a lot of loose rock . . . you can come across four or five big loose refrigerator boulders in a row—certainly that's on the edge, that's scary."

Similarly, Tim suggested that particular styles of climbing create situations that can be governed more by chance than others. Observing that "I used to really push my boundaries in terms of my climbing," he went on to explain that he has become "far more careful in terms of what I climb . . . I've seen what can happen. And I certainly don't want that to happen to me. It's just not worth it to me any more. If it ever was."

As Tim has recognised, pushing the boundaries too far is likely to create the situation where skill plays less part than chance. No climber in this study was prepared to admit that they pushed the boundaries so far. All insisted that they retained a margin of safety that ensured that their own skill might determine the outcome. Such insistence seems to effectively remove these particular climbers from the domain of edgeworkers.

The Desire to Retain the Activity of Climbing as a Space over which One has Control

Control in the climbing context has been considered within the framework of personal control within a risky environment. A second framework that emerged from the data is related to control over choice of the activity. This aspect was mentioned most often by women, who described their control of the activity as a source of pleasure. Loss of this control was also a source of frustration, although one example is described where a woman seems to be content in the project of her other-directedness. These observations will now be described more fully through the use of illustrative quotations.

Female participants in particular expressed concern over their control of the climbing activity, treasuring the event as something of their own.

Amanda observed, "I guess one way I could describe climbing is that it's something of my own. It's something that I can achieve, and it's my own . . . I guess I hold it very precious." Judy also described the way that climbing helped her retain a sense of control in a complex life: "So maybe when my private life is out of control—really out of control—then climbing can be one way I can have control. It's a climb I've chosen, and I've chosen to lead."

However, these same participants described many circumstances when they felt that they had lost control of their climbing. These circumstances arose through a perception of pressure from male climbers. For example, Amanda portrayed her relationship with her climbing partner as one of domination: "James is a very dominant person. He knows exactly what he wants to do and does it—he doesn't let much stop him. He also likes things done his way—and also makes that known. All these things frustrate me when we're climbing. I feel he has very little respect for me as a climber." In a later diary entry, Amanda described how the dominance of her male climbing partner led to feelings of frustration and anger: "He rarely consults me genuinely—I mean he usually says 'Is that cool with you' or 'What do you think' but really he has totally made up his mind—I usually add my comments but he just confirms his ideas with his reasons. These are just some things which explain his dominance—but so far all I've managed to say is that I'm the victim—I hate being the victim. Being dominated. I have a very strong sense of self worth and doing what I want and I'm not happy when I'm not achieving things."

As a direct response to this sense of pressure from male climbers, a number of female participants in this study had chosen to climb only with other women, as articulated by Elizabeth: "I think that's what started us climbing together—the thing we really loved was being independent and being able to do it all ourselves, because we used to find that—well Tom would get impatient when I was doing something—I'd be able to do it, but I'd be much slower than he would—and they'd come along, and they're only trying to be helpful, but they'd take over and I'd get left standing there, watching them. And that doesn't happen with the girls. They're quite happy for you to take your time and work it out."

At least one female participant, Judy, continued to try to "educate" her climbing partner (Andrew, who was also her romantic partner) about her needs. The conflict that ensued achieved a measure of understanding on Andrew's part. However, as Judy noted, Andrew's "enthusiasm" continued to mitigate against her achieving full control: "It caused many arguments between me and Andrew, and he goes to great lengths now to make sure that I've done what I want to do. He wants me to be in charge. But then he gets so enthusiastic, and he doesn't realise how it affects me. He needs to leave things just a little bit longer, so I've had a chance to do things."

In her diary, Amy also indicated how completely a woman's climbing activity can be taken over and structured by her male climbing partner, as well as her complicity in this project. She described a situation where a male climber spoke for his female partner, stating which climbs she was able to do, how she should do them, and refusing to follow her up a climb that he

disliked. Amy concluded, "I felt quite annoyed at this guy. Who was he to speak for this woman—and why was she letting him? And how selfish to say he wouldn't follow her up a climb just because he didn't like it . . . I was just so glad that we three women were climbing together—lots of support, no putting down. What a wonderful difference! I hope this woman will one day discover this for herself."

This emphasis on control over one's activity echoes the work of Freysinger and Flannery (1992), who found that women put a high value on "self-determined" leisure, which "was seen as a source of identity and self-esteem and a means of maintaining mental health" (Freysinger and Flannery, 1992, p. 314). Although freedom of choice has been identified as a crucial element of leisure, it appears that much of what passes for leisure for women lacks this quality. Self-determined leisure is further identified as a major source of enjoyment for women by Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw and Freysinger (1996), and forms a central theme in the work of Wearing (1998).

The work of Wearing (1998) is based upon the notion that self-determinism is more than simply an initial exercise of choice. Rather, a final narrative of self-determinism is dependent upon a *continuing* ability on the part of the participant to structure their involvement. Elizabeth's comment, "They're only trying to be helpful, but they'd take over and I'd get left standing there, watching them" as well as Judy's observation, "He needs to leave things just a little bit longer, so I've had a chance to do things" illustrate the loss of this control. The existential[5] nature of this process was recognised by Wearing (1998) who, building on the work of Foucault, developed the notion of self-determination into a sense of "personal space" (where space might be physical or metaphorical). Personal space becomes the central defining property of leisure, which is conceptualised as a form of "resistance to domination, a space where there is room for the self to expand beyond what it is told it should be" (p. 146). This redefinition of leisure arises through an interactionist framework, and complements Samdahl's (1988) two-dimensional configuration of "pure leisure" as incorporating both "freedom from role restraint" and "high self expression".

Although Wearing developed her understanding of leisure as personal space within the context of women's leisure, she also argued that the concept is relevant to men's experience: "Men who construct their leisure as their own personal space may, as with women, be coming closer to a form of leisure which recognizes enlargement of the self as a core element of the leisure experience" (Wearing, 1998, p. 156). In this research, threats to "ownership" of the activity were mentioned far more often by women than by men, but the problem was not exclusive to female climbers. A number of male climbers commented on the intrusive nature of some climbing partners. Nigel, for example observed that "When you're leading, you don't like people saying when to do this and what to do. Unless I ask them. I don't

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[5]The term "existential" is used here to imply a process of continuous construction.

mind if someone says "Watch out, you've got your foot round the rope"—
or something like that—important safety things—but it's when people say,
'Go a bit higher and there's a place for a number one friend,' or 'There's a
hold out to the left'—I don't like that. It makes you lose control of that
adventure."

That women, too, can be guilty of taking over another's climb, is illus-
trated by this extract from the researcher's Research Journal, written after
completion of a day's climbing with a female participant:

> I then did "Odin," a climb I've been thinking about for ages. Elizabeth has
> done it before, and gave me some pretty good instructions about how to do it.
> Actually, I found myself resenting the explicitness of the instructions some-
> what—particularly where to put what protection. Elizabeth is a better climber
> than I am, but I'm not used to being told so exactly what to do. (Research
> Diary)

Through her well-intentioned direction of the climbing activity, Eliza-
beth effectively destroyed the researcher's sense of personal space, thus un-
wittingly incurring resentment for the loss of control over the leisure expe-
rience. It seems that women, as well as men, must pay attention to the fact
that climbers need to retain freedom to structure their climbing experience
in a way which renders it their own.

Two types of control have been identified as important to climbers in
this study: self-control and self-determinism. The nature of these qualities
will now be further explored through an investigation of the relationship
that exists between them.

The Relationship between Self-Control and Self-Determinism

Control over self has been linked with the concept of flow through its
basis in the climber's ability to successfully meet a challenge, or competence.
The initial description of the components of the flow experience (Csiksz-
entmihalyi, 1975) did not include the need for self-determinism. Subsequent
work in this field, which has focussed on the achievement of flow in a struc-
tured work situation (eg, Beatty, 1999, Goodman, 1996), seems to indicate
that self-determinism, extended by Wearing (1998) to include the notion of
personal space, is not an important aspect in the achievement of flow.

The following extract from Judy's diary, however, appears to indicate
that the achievement of control over her own climbing space was an impor-
tant contributing factor to her feelings of competence and self-control:

> On a couple of the longer routes we did in Yosemite I would have LOVED to
> lead a couple of the pitches—or even better, alternated leading all the way—
> but the crowds below us (lining up and climbing the same route) were just too
> stressful and I felt pressured to climb faster than I was capable of. People com-
> plained back at camp EVERY night about slow people learning to lead holding
> up everyone else behind them. Because of this, I only did three routes (leading)
> in Yosemite. What a pity! I only decided to do the last two because Andrew had
> re-injured his shoulder on "Lurking Fear" and the only way I was going to get

a climb in was if I led!! And I think that was all I needed!! For ME to be in control. And I felt bloody GREAT too!! No fear. No expectations. Not a care in the world!! For the first time on this trip, I felt totally relaxed, comfortable and CONFIDENT on lead. And I climbed for ME!! (Judy: Diary Entry)

It appears that the other-directedness of Judy's participation in climbing introduced components such as pressure to hurry, which mitigated against the achievement of the flow experience. The situations described previously by Nigel and the researcher seem to have resulted in a similar effect, though for a different reason. In these situations, the "support" offered by the climbing partners took the form of telling the climbers where holds were, or where to put pieces of protection. Such information effectively removed the ability of the climbers to exercise their own competence, resulting in a loss of the flow experience and any sense of self-control. Self-determination of the climbing activity appears to be an important component within the exercise of competence and the consequent sense of control. Since it is this experience of control that leads to exhilaration, it is not surprising that climbers should resent any interference that destroys the process.

The literature that has been used to interpret the results of this study (eg, Wearing, 1998) is based on a notion of "self" that was disputed by Kuentzel (2000). This dispute underlies the second pair of questions that framed this paper, which asked whether the desire for an identity of control formed a motive for climbing (cf. Haggard & Williams, 1992), or whether this narrative was developed after the event as an expression of coherence.

Climbing as an Extension of Self or a Narrative of Coherence

Kuentzel's argument is based on a refutation of the notion of a "core" self as a rational actor that can direct and determine behaviour. He argued that the credibility of a unified self is undermined by the fragmentation, complexity and ambiguity of the postmodern condition. In this situation, the "fundamental motivating task for individuals is to develop trust in the order and logic of an increasingly complex world" (p. 87), rather than to engage in a project of self-development. This is achieved through a process of reflection upon what has already happened resulting in a narrative of self that achieves a level of coherence across time and space. This reflexive procedure means that "self" becomes the dependent variable, rather than the independent variable that directs behaviour.

Participants in this study engaged in reflection and created narratives of self, or identities, that were based upon this reflection. These identities, however, were also used to guide future actions. It can therefore be stated that, within this study, identity and behavior were mutually constitutive. Three examples will be used to justify this claim.

The first example is based on the extract from the interview with Tony, quoted previously. In this extract Tony observed that he has found that he is able to act quickly in a crisis, and that he enjoys this sense of competence. In response to the question, "And that would be a reason why climbing

appeals to you?" he agreed that it provided opportunities to make decisions and act quickly, and that "I feel like I deal with it well." Tony engaged in the construction of a self-narrative of competence after the event, yet he also indicated his intended use of this narrative to direct his future decisions with respect to his continued participation in climbing.

The second example is based on the story of Amanda. In her diary entries, quoted previously, Amanda expressed frustration over her lack of control of her climbing space. Her interview took place some months later. By this time Amanda had ended her relationship with the climbing partner of her diaries, and expressed far more satisfaction with the control she was experiencing with her new climbing partner. The narrative of dominance that had emerged from her early climbing experience contradicted Amanda's desired identity ("I have a very strong sense of self worth and doing what I want") and resulted in a decision to change climbing partners.

The third example is drawn from the three female participants who took part in this study, who had chosen to climb mainly with each other. Sally, Amy and Elizabeth had created a common narrative that described the pressure of climbing with men and the mutual support and freedom that resulted from climbing only with each other. This narrative represented their interpretation of particular events, yet it also determined their future behavior, as Elizabeth noted, "I think that's what started us climbing together."

The feminist critique of the postmodern denial of self (eg, Stanley & Wise, 1993) argued that the loss of self represents a setback to the feminist project. Certainly Kuentzel's argument for the need for coherence seems to ignore the need for subjectivity. Kuentzel's argument is based on the premise that "the fundamental motivating task for individuals is to develop trust in the order and logic of an increasingly complex world." The need for coherence is becoming more urgent in "a fragmented, ambivalent world with an expanding 'plurality of choices,' and a pervasive sense of ambiguity in everyday conduct" (p. 87). Rojek (1990), however, has noted that the so-called ambiguity and hyperreality of the postmodern world runs counter to the lived reality of many people (p. 15), which is often predictable, routinized and other-determined. The women described in this study have interpreted some of their climbing experiences as contributing to a narrative of self as victim. This is a coherent narrative; yet it begs the question as to whether coherence is worth the price of freedom. A narrative of self as victim provides order and logic, but it also inspires resentment and a desire to resist. An understanding of leisure as merely providing opportunity to develop coherence provides no prospect of resistance to such domination. An understanding of leisure as personal space offers far more promise in this respect.

Conclusion

Two tasks have been addressed in this paper. The first task was to explore the nature of control in the climbing context, thereby contributing to an understanding of the importance of self-determination within a particular

form of leisure behavior. The second task was to determine the extent to which belief in a particular identity forms a motivating factor for behavior, or whether identity is constructed after the event as a way of anchoring the self across the complexity of action.

One implication of this research is that there exists an integral relationship between control over the structure of an activity and the flow experience. Control of behavior can only be achieved when an activity has been deliberately and willingly embraced. An experience that has been determined and structured by another cannot afford this opportunity. In the research reported in this paper, in particular for participants such as Judy and Amanda, such dominance led to increased levels of fear, as well as anger and frustration. For Nigel and the researcher, other-directedness led to loss of the opportunity to exercise competence, leading to similar feelings of frustration.

Self-determination, therefore, plays a crucial role in the achievement of what has been posited as a major motivating factor for participation in climbing: the ability to manage one's fear and act competently within an environment over which one deliberately exerts little control. This finding supports Wearing's (1998) suggestion that personal space plays a central defining role within the leisure experience, as well as Lyng's thesis that engagement in edgework activities offers opportunities for the participant to escape the surveillance and external controls that characterise our everyday existence.

This finding also supports the view that identity forms a major motivation for behavior. Participants in this study desired an identity imbued with qualities of decisiveness, competence and independence, leading to a sense of control over their own fate. They deliberately engaged in a leisure activity that offered opportunities to display these qualities. However, these behaviors were in term subjected to a reflexive process, whereby coherence was sought between the desired identity and the narrative of self that was constructed from behavior. Thus identity and behavior were found to be mutually constitutive.

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