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SPORT AND SOCIETY

3rd Edition

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LIFESTYLE SPORT

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OVERVIEW

- What is 'lifestyle sport'?
- Trends in lifestyle sports: From counter-culture to co-option
- Lifestyle sport and social identities
- Future directions

Introduction

Sport sociologists have tended to focus on the histories, cultures and industries of traditional competition-focused institutionalised sports. However, more informal sporting activities have long been at the heart of our sporting culture and experience. In the 21st-century many informal and non-competitive sports, ranging from alternative body forms like yoga and Pilates, to lifestyle sports like skateboarding and mountain biking are growing in popularity. In the USA, sports like skateboarding are growing more quickly and becoming as popular as traditional team sports (Beal and Wilson, 2004; Howell, 2008).

In this chapter I consider the growing popularity, significance and meaning of lifestyle sports. First I explore what lifestyle sport is, and what makes lifestyle sport distinctive. I then examine some of the key themes in understanding their sociological significance, including: the impact of commercialisation processes on their cultures; the importance of risk; their increased regulation; and the urban politics associated with street sports like skateboarding and parkour/free-running. Then I consider who does lifestyle sports, and whether, like many traditional sports, they

are bastions of masculinity, where sporting identities are tied to the reproduction of white male power. Do sporting identities in lifestyle sports challenge dominant sporting discourses about gender, class, race, sexuality and (able) body dominance in sport? Can lifestyle sports present an alternative to the dominance of Western achievement sport, challenging what sport is or could be?

What is 'Lifestyle Sport'?

Lifestyle sports refers to a range of mostly individualised activities, from established sports like climbing and surfing to newer activities like kite-surfing and parkour. While each lifestyle sport has its own history and development pattern, there are commonalities in their ethos, ideologies and increasingly the transnational consumer industries that produce the commodities that underpin their cultures. For example, snowboarding, skateboarding, windsurfing and kite-surfing are all influenced by surfing. Many of these sports originated in North America and were then imported to Europe and beyond. With their roots in the counter-cultural social movement of the 1960s and 1970s, many have characteristics that are *different* to the rule-bound, competitive and masculine cultures of dominant sports. They often take place in spaces lacking regulation and control, and have forms that diverge from traditional rule-bound, competitive and institutionalised sport and consequently have been characterised by their challenge to Western 'achievement sport' (Eichberg, 1998).

   Lifestyle sports have evolved in a unique historical conjuncture of global communication, corporate sponsorship, entertainment industries, and a growing global young, affluent demographic (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011a; 2011b), which has propelled them around the world far faster than most established sports. The outdoor, non-association-based and nomadic nature of these activities makes it hard to accurately measure participation levels. For example, few activities have formal clubs, and participants move between different sites. However, from the available sources such as sales of equipment, market research surveys and wide-ranging media commentaries, it is evident that participation in many types of lifestyle sports continues to grow rapidly, out-pacing the expansion of most traditional sports in many Western nations (Tomlinson et al., 2005; Jarvie, 2006; Booth and Thorpe, 2007; Comer, 2010). L'Aoustet and Griffet (2001) claim that in France any observable increase in sport participation can be attributed to non-institutionalised informal sport activities, with surveys showing that 45–60% of the French population now practise informal sports. Sport England's *Active People Survey*s also points to the increasing popularity of more informal and individualistic sports, and lifestyle sports specifically (see Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011). Their ever-increasing body of participants and consumers range from the occasional participants who experience a range of different alternative and traditional sports, to the 'hard core', committed practitioners who are fully familiarised with the lifestyle, argot, fashion and technical skill of their activity.

The ways in which consumers can experience lifestyle sports is also ever-expanding and diversifying. This rapid expansion has led to fragmentation, with enthusiasts engaging in a wide variety of participation styles, supporting new and profitable niche markets (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011a). In surfing for example, a range of participation styles co-exist including short boards, long boards, paddle-boards and body-boards. Mediated sources have also proliferated, from internet-based social media to more traditional forms like DVDs, films and television shows. The self-defined 'worldwide leader' in action sports, ESPN's X Games (Rinehart, 2008) continues to build its audience globally. There are also those who play video games, buy clothing and accessories, devour the vast array of media products, and experience activities through adventure tourism. In a seemingly bizarre twist to the 'authentic' adventure experience, luxury cruise ships now offer a surfing wave pool and climbing wall as 'on-board' entertainment. As van Bottenburg and Salome (2010) suggest, activities that have been characterised as self-directed, conducted outdoors and in 'nature', are increasingly being repackaged as more directed, indoor leisure experiences, a process they describe as 'indoorisation'.

Different Labels: What's in a Name?

Academics have used a range of labels to characterise these sports including extreme, alternative, lifestyle, whiz, action sports, panic sport, postmodern, post-industrial and new sports. So first I will examine these different labels, and how they have been used. Then I'll look at the various characteristics that help define what lifestyle sports are.

Some commentators have used these terms synonymously but there are differences which signal distinct emphases or expressions of the activities. For example, Rinehart (2000: 506) suggested that *alternative* sports are activities that 'either ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and to mainstream sport values'. In their early phases of development, activities like skateboarding were certainly seen as having alternative values. However, forms of alternative sport can be very diverse, including anything that doesn't fit under the Western 'achievement sport' rubric. Rinehart (2000) cites indigenous folk games, SCUBA diving and ultra-marathon as examples.

Extreme has been seen as a media-driven, all-embracing label that quickly became prevalent in media and consumer discourse fuelled by the emergence of ESPN's eXtreme Games (later renamed the X Games). The extreme label was quickly adopted to signify these exciting, adrenaline-fueled and youthful activities (Rinehart, 2000). But as Kusz outlines, extreme sport was initially denounced by sports fans seeing them as 'made-for-TV pseudo-sports created solely to market products to the much coveted teen male demographic' (2004: 198). It is a term that many participants continue to reject, seeing it as an unashamed attempt to capitalise on and appropriate what were previously seen as alternative and oppositional sport forms (Rinehart, 2000). Extreme is also a label that suggests high risk. However, while some 'extreme'

sport activities such as BASE-jumping and tomb-stoning (diving off cliffs or rocks into water) do involve great physical risk (and in some contexts are illegal), the majority of lifestyle sports activities are practised in relatively safe and controlled ways. Indeed, many activities labelled 'extreme' are actually relatively safe (Booth and Thorpe, 2007) and according to statistical evidence cause fewer injuries and deaths than traditional sports like rugby and boxing (Clemmitt, 2009).

The label of extreme sport however retains significance, particularly as a media and economic phenomena. As detailed in Booth and Thorpe's (2007) comprehensive *Encyclopaedia of Extreme Sport*, the long list of activities and sports characterised as extreme is ever growing, as is interest by spectators, media and corporations. Other categorisations that have at times been used synonymously with extreme sport include *adventure sport* (e.g. McNamee, 2006; Ormrod, 2009), *hazardous sport* (Laviolette, 2007) and *edgework* (Lyng, 2008). Edgework embraces a diverse range of high-risk activities, not exclusively sports, and has been appropriated to understand high-risk sports such as sky-diving (e.g. Laurendeau, 2008).

Action sport is the term increasingly used by the sports industry, particularly in North America, to describe, initially, board sports such as skateboarding, snowboarding and surfing. However, it is now widely used by corporations and media to describe adventure-based and lifestyle activities.

─BOX 5.1─

ARE 'LIFESTYLE SPORTS' SPORTS?

Some commentators have questioned whether these activities are more appropriately (or usefully) conceptualised as forms of play rather than sports (Stranger, 1999; Howe, 2003). Rinehart (1998) has coined the term '*expressive sport*' (in contrast to the reward driven 'spectacle' sports) as they are rarely conducted solely for spectators or exclusively for competitive practice.

My preference for the term *lifestyle sport* was informed by these debates and concerns about the labels of 'alternative' and 'extreme' initially in the context of understanding windsurfing. As I outlined in the introduction to *Understanding Lifestyle Sports* (Wheaton, 2004), I devised and adopted the term 'lifestyle sports', first, as it was the descriptor that emerged in my own research on the windsurfing culture. Many of the participants described their activity as a *lifestyle* rather than as *sport*. Second, the term was also used widely across other board sports. In a radio interview, Jake Burton, the founder of Burton snowboards, claimed that:

> It doesn't have to be an extreme sport at all. There's a lot of people that, you know, snowboard in a fairly conservative manner. But I think what's a better

moniker is maybe that it's a *lifestyle sport*, and a lot of the kids and people that are doing it are just completely living it all the time, and that's what distinguishes snowboarding from a lot of other sports. (cited in Wheaton, 2004: 4)

Lifestyle helped capture the ways in which participants, and increasingly consumers of the activities, sought out a particular *style of life*, that was central to the meaning and experience of participation in the sport, and that gave them a particular and exclusive social identity (Wheaton, 2004).

While this is particularly evident and well-documented in academic and popular literature on board sports, lifestyle sport has since been adopted by practitioners, media commentators, academics and policy-makers. Researchers have charted the importance of lifestyle across a range of activities including climbing (e.g. Robinson, 2008), adventure racing (Kay and Laberge, 2002), skateboarding (e.g. Beal and Weidman, 2003) snowboarding (e.g. Thorpe, 2011), surfing (Ford and Brown, 2005), Ultimate Frisbee (Thornton, 2004) and parkour (e.g. Atkinson, 2009). Furthermore, there are similarities with other 'alternative lifestyle' groupings that have emerged from the counter-culture, which also involve locally situated identity politics rooted in lifestyle practices (Hetherington, 1998).

Nonetheless, many activities I have labelled as lifestyle sports are also alternative sports, and aspects of them are clearly extreme (Dant and Wheaton, 2007). Rather than over-stating the differences in terminologies, these differences in nomenclature can obscure that it is the *meaning* of the terms, rather than the terms themselves, that matter. To understand the *meaning* of these activities we need to move beyond dichotomies such as *traditional* versus *new*, *mainstream* versus *emergent*, or other related binaries such as sport versus art. Lifestyle sport, and 'mainstream' sport, can have elements of the residual, emergent and 'dominant' sport culture (Rinehart, 2000: 506). As Rinehart (2000) suggests, the differences between, and within, these sport forms is best highlighted by a range of debates concerning their meanings, values, statuses, identities and forms.

Furthermore, it is questionable if the opposition between extreme and traditional sport is as 'rigid' as some theorists have claimed (Booth and Thorpe, 2007; Robinson, 2008). In focusing on differences and the alternative nature of lifestyle sport, we have obscured many of the similarities. Michael Atkinson's (2010) exploration of the increasingly fluid nature of contemporary sporting cultures suggests that the boundaries between traditional and lifestyle sports are radically opened up. Adopting Pronger's (1998) notion of 'post-sport' he considers how both fell-running and yoga might be considered as spaces where participants move towards what he terms *post-sport lifestyles*:

Fell running and yoga are forms of self and social boundary crossing, wherein modernity and techno-capitalist ways of forging athleticism as sport are placed *sous nature*. Here, the cultural associations between sport and dominant late modernist logics and identities (and all of their related trappings) are dislodged from the primary idea of athleticism. (Atkinson, 2010: 1265)

Although these are not activities one might expect to be labelled as alternative/ lifestyle sports, Atkinson demonstrates that while appearing to take the guise of mainstream sports forms, their 'individual and collective engagement' and experiences exhibit few similarities with their 'mainstream forms'. He suggested therefore that it is not the 'form and context' of sport practices but 'the orientation to and use of athletic movement in these post-sport spaces that creates fundamental differences' (Atkinson, 2010: 1265). These practices help to clarify and extend our understanding of the boundaries of contemporary lifestyle sports, reminding us that our understanding of what lifestyle sports are (and might become), their boundaries and characterisations, needs to be continually reviewed in the light of emerging research. Research on parkour in particular, which is variously described as a sport, art and discipline, has led me to a re-evaluation of these characteristics.

The Defining Characteristics of Lifestyle Sport

To help delineate lifestyle sports and how they differ from other (traditional and extreme or alternative) sporting activities, I have suggested that the defining characteristics of lifestyle sport could be summarised in a list of nine 'typical' features (Wheaton, 2004). Subsequently (Wheaton, 2013), I updated this list to incorporate more recent research. I did not intend this list to form the basis of an ideal-type, which might suggest that these activities are homogenous, fixed and unchanging. Rather my intention was to illustrate that while each lifestyle sport has its own specificity, history, (politics of) identities and development patterns, there were also commonalities in their ethos, ideologies, forms of motion, cultural spaces and the (trans)national consumer industries that underpin their cultures. The nine features are outlined in Box 5.2.

─BOX 5.2─

KEY FEATURES OF LIFESTYLE SPORTS

1. A historically recent phenomenon; involving activities that have emerged since the early 1960s, and either the creation of new activities (such as kite-surfing, Ultimate Frisbee and snowboarding) or the adaptation of older 'residual' cultural forms (such as the (re)emergence of paddle-surfing, or sport-climbing in rock climbing). Many of these sports originated in North America in the late 1960s, and were then imported to Europe by American entrepreneurs (Bourdieu, 1984). With their roots in the counter-cultural social movements of the 1960s and 1970s many retain characteristics that are different to the traditional rule-bound, competitive institutionalised, Western 'achievement' sport cultures.

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2. The sports are based around the consumption of new objects (boards, bikes, etc.), often involving new technologies, yet embracing change and innovation. Improvements to technologies have resulted in rapid advances in many lifestyle sports, often resulting in the fragmentation and diversification of the culture, and its forms of identity.

3. Commitment in resources such as time, and/or money, and a style of life and forms of collective expression, styles, bodily dispositions, and attitudes which they design into a distinctive lifestyle, and a particular social *identity*.

4. Although participants invest heavily in their lifestyles and identities, this commitment is to the feeling of 'being stoked', variously characterised as the 'buzz', being 'at one' with the environment, the standing still of time, and the 'intense awareness of the moment' (Stranger, 1999). Participants embrace risk and danger, but in most cases as a means to provide the thrill or 'stoke' that characterises the experience.

5. Lifestyle sports participants emphasise the creative, aesthetic and performative expressions of their activities. Some practitioners refer to their activities as art. Nevertheless, practitioners are self-consciously aware of 'being seen', and presentation of self to others – whether in lived settings or mediated forms – seems to be a part of the experience (Rinehart, 2000).

6. In most lifestyle sports, commercialisation and popularity have led to the erosion of their oppositional character. However, some participants still denounce regulation and institutionalisation, and have an ambiguous relationship with forms of traditional competition. ESPN and other media transnationals have attempted to promote competitive forms of alternative sport, and some have subsequently been accepted as Olympic sports (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011a; 2011b).

7. A predominantly middle-class, heterosexual white, Western participant composition. Despite being associated with 'youth', many activities have wider-based age ranges, and in some spaces are less gender-differentiated than institutionalised sports. Unlike more traditional sports, subcultural affiliation tends not to be based around 'national' attachments, but operates more transnationally (Wheaton, 2005), often connecting with other 'alternative lifestyle' groupings such as those found in art, fashion and music.

8. Predominantly, but not exclusively, individualistic in form and/or attitude. Ultimate Frisbee and Adventure Racing are two interesting exceptions. The body is used in non-aggressive ways, mostly without bodily contact, focusing predominantly on personal challenges and goals.

9. The locations in which these sports are practised are often new or re-appropriated (urban and/or rural) spaces, without fixed or delineated boundaries. Many occur in non-urban environments, and are 'cultural spaces in which one "blends with" or "becomes one with" the sea/mountain' (Midol and Broyer, 1995). Participants have a sense of nature as something spiritual, to be revered, protected and nurtured. However, paradoxically, some of the industries underpinning lifestyle

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> sports (e.g. mountain resort tourism, surf board manufacturing) contribute to rural degradation, and operate in ways distant from the eco-friendly credentials espoused by environmental activist groups like Surfers Against Sewage (Wheaton, 2007; Laviolette, 2010). Urban-based activities like skateboarding, parkour and BASE-jumping, adapt and redefine urban city spaces.

While most of these characteristics continue to exemplify lifestyle sport activities, they are not fixed temporally or spatially, and will need continued revision. Despite some shared characteristics, lifestyle sports take multiple and increasingly fragmented forms. They are saturated with ambiguities and contradictions, reflecting the multiple configurations of identity characteristic of cultural processes in late modernity, such as the expression of self-identity as increasingly fragmented, 'mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive, and subject to exchange and innovation' (Kellner, 1992: 141).

Trends in Lifestyle Sports: From Counter-Culture to Co-option

The landscape of lifestyle sport is increasingly characterised by the presence of a range of global commercial interests. Lifestyle sport has been appropriated to sell a vast array of products, services and experiences, and the star performers like Tony Hawk (skater), Kelly Slater and Bethany Hamilton (surfers) have become celebrities who, like other global sport celebrities, transcend their subcultures. Commentators have therefore described lifestyle sport as a 'co-opted' sporting movement increasingly associated with the global expansion and reproduction of consumer capitalism, and controlled by multi- and transnational corporations and media organisations:

> In the world of extreme sport sponsorship, pierced and tattooed skaters and skysurfers mix quite amicably with buttoned-down corporations such as ATandT and Toyota … For all of the counter-culture cachet associated with ESPN's X Games and NBC's Gravity Games, the truth is that the events were co-opted from the start. (Ostrowski, 2000, cited in Wheaton, 2005: 142)

Nonetheless, despite the 'resilient belief' that 'grassroots' or 'authentic' culture resists and struggles with a 'colonizing mass-mediated corporate world' (Thornton, 1995: 116), research across different sports and contexts has illuminated how consumer capitalism penetrates lifestyle sports cultures in complex and contradictory ways. The media and consumer industries' roles are often more complex, contradictory and fluid than incorporation and co-option (c.f. Wheaton, 2005). These lifestyle sport consumers and participants are not simply 'victims' of commercialism, but

shape and 're-shape' the images and meanings circulated in and by global consumer culture (Wheaton, 2005: 156). The increasing institutionalisation, regulation and professionalisation of lifestyle sports, especially as expressed through attitudes to competition and regulation, provide important insights into understanding how co-option has been contested, and is discussed below.

Regulation and Sportisation

One of the defining features of lifestyle sports is their spontaneous nature, with participation predominantly taking place in informal settings, often without governing bodies or clubs or other forms of external regulation. However, there is increasing pressure from both commercial operators and state-funded or sanctioned leisure – and education providers – to professionalise, institutionalise and regulate. These processes are occurring at both the elite/professional level, for example to enable the activities to be incorporated in traditional forms of competition such as the Olympic Games, and at the grass-roots level where conflicts around the use of space, or concerns about safety, are played-out. The fear that lifestyle sports are dangerous and cause injury has also led to increased regulation of activities and participants. In skateboarding, for example, these concerns have led to: containing skaters in skate-parks; enforcing rules about appropriate behaviour and protective clothing; and limiting street-skating through legislation and modifications to the urban furniture (Borden, 2001). I will examine some examples of these intertwined processes of professionalisation, sportisation, institutionalisation and regulation below.

Lifestyle sports are increasingly global in influence; international sporting rules and organisations have been established, and – in some cases – competition between national teams has evolved. In some ways then, the historical development patterns of lifestyle sports, particularly at the elite level, mirrors the 'sportisation phases' suggested by Maguire (1999) in his discussion of the globalisation of more traditional 'achievement sports'. Elias described 'sportisation' as the process by which play-like activities become more regulated and organised (Elias and Dunning, 1986). Yet in many lifestyle sports, clubs and organisations tend to be formed only where required, for example to assist in access to facilities or spaces. In windsurfing and kayaking for example, clubs have been formed as a way to secure access to a particular beach or waterway. Participants remain hostile to rules and regulations, especially those that are externally-driven.

The Olympic Paradox: Incorporation and Contestation[1]

The Olympics is the pinnacle in the careers of many athletes from traditional sports. However, as Thorpe and Wheaton (2011a; 2011b) explore, amongst many lifestyle sports athletes, events such as the X Games, or athlete-organised competitions, continue to hold more 'cultural authenticity' and thus tend to be valued more highly within the lifestyle sports culture and industry. Practitioners have been wary of their

incorporation in these traditional forms of competition, seeing it as a form of 'selling out' their 'alternative' values and ideologies. This was graphically illustrated by the skateboarding communities' largely negative response to reports that 'Skateboarding could make its Olympic debut at the 2012 London Games' (Peck and agencies, 2008).

─BOX 5.3─

SKATEBOARDING AND THE OLYMPICS

In 2010 thousands of skateboarders from across the world signed an online petition titled *No skateboarding in the Olympics*. The petition was addressed to the IOC president and contained the following introductory statement:
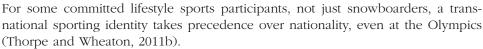
> With due respect for Olympic Athletes, we the undersigned skateboarders and advocates strongly request that the IOC NOT RECOGNIZE SKATEBOARDING AS AN OLYMPIC SPORT, or use skateboarding to market the Olympics. Further, we ask that the IOC NOT recognize any individuals or groups claiming to be the IOC recognized governing body of skateboarding or provide funding to them. Skateboarding is not a 'sport' and we do not want skateboarding exploited and transformed to fit into the Olympic program. We feel that Olympic involvement will change the face of skateboarding and its individuality and freedoms forever. We feel it would not in any way support skateboarders or skate-parks. We do not wish to be part of it and will not support the Olympics if skateboarding is added as an Olympic sport. (The Petition, 2010, para. 1)

In contrast to the ideology of achievement sport, attitudes to participating in organised competitions tend to stress more 'intrinsic' factors such as challenging the self, or the environment, even amongst elite and professional participants. When the first Olympic snowboard champion (1998), Ross Rebagliati was stripped of his medal for allegedly smoking marijuana, he was celebrated by sections of the snowboarding subculture and media for having publicly re-established snowboarding's 'alternative' image (although his medal was later re-instated) (Thorpe, 2011). World Champion Terje Haakonsen, who refused to participate in the 1998 Olympics, claimed to be protesting against snowboarders being turned into 'uniform-wearing, flag-bearing, walking logo[s]' (Mellgren, 1998). Haakonsen preferred to identify with the global snowboarding culture, and a transnational snowboarding company, rather than his nation (cited in Reed, 2005):

> How can you have a sponsor for ten years and then you go to the Olympics and you can't even pack your own bags because the nation has sold you as a package? Norway is a great country to live, but it's never supported me like my sponsors. My flag should be Burton not Norway.

For some committed lifestyle sports participants, not just snowboarders, a transnational sporting identity takes precedence over nationality, even at the Olympics (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011b).

Reassessing snowboarders' attitudes to Olympic incorporation a decade or more later, it is apparent that contemporary snowboarding culture embraces a range of sub-groups, each embodying different values, styles of participation, and contrasting viewpoints. In a context where Olympic and professional competitions have thrived, reflected in increasing professionalism at the elite level, many participants do not see the inclusion of their sports in the Olympic Games as a form of 'selling-out' but, reflecting trends observed in other contemporary 'post subcultural' youth and sport cultures, as offering further opportunities for participation and consumption within an already highly-fragmented culture and industry. The inclusion, and popularity of slope style at the Sochi Games is further evidence of the snowboard culture embracing and having a growing cultural power in the Winter Olympic Games. Nonetheless, committed participants are aware that the Olympic Games are not the arena where the most progressive manoeuvres, innovative technologies, and latest styles develop, and thus prefer alternative forums (like the X Games) for performing, producing and consuming their sport. The marriage between the Olympic Movement and snowboarding still remains tenuous and based on compromise by both parties. Residual traces of snowboarding's counter-cultural past remain, which leads to 'cultural clashes' with the disciplinary, nationalistic, Olympic regime (see examples in Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011a).

While snowboarding's inclusion in the Games (1998) has caused most debate, as Thorpe and Wheaton (2011a) outline, contestation about the incorporation of other alternative sporting lifestyles has occurred; namely windsurfing (in Los Angeles 1984) and BMX (in Beijing 2008), which was introduced under the 'cycling' discipline. However despite the similarities in subcultural philosophies and ethos, the *particularities* of each activity need exploration. The cultural politics *between* and *within* groups are unique, based on the distinctive history, ideologies, identities and development patterns of each lifestyle sport culture and the specific historical juncture within which the incorporation processes occurred. In each case, the market-driven process of incorporation has led to complex, but contextually-specific power struggles between the IOC and governing bodies, media conglomerates, and lifestyle sports cultures and their industries (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011a).

In increasingly austere economic conditions (around 2011–13), some lifestyle sports industries have been actively lobbying for the mainstreaming of their sports. The International Surfing Association (ISA), with support from some of surfing's biggest stars like Kelly Slater, has presented proposals to the IOC outlining the benefits of surfing's inclusion in the summer programme, even if it takes place in artificial wave pools (Aguerre, 2009). In 2013, kite-surfing successfully petitioned to be included in the 2016 Rio Olympic sailing regatta (Sail-World, 2010). However, a few months later this decision was reversed, following a successful protest by the windsurfing community to the ISAF (International Sailing Federation), the body who had decided to drop windsurfing from the Olympic yachting regatta to allow kite-surfing space.

Discourses of Risk and Irresponsibility

For many commentators on extreme/lifestyle sports, it is the element of risk inherent in these sports that provokes fascination. An increasing number of philosophical, sociological and socio-psychological theories have been proposed to examine the meaning and differing cultural constructions of voluntary risk-taking in these activities (see Thorpe, 2009). Sociological theories have often understood risk-taking in sport as either cathartic or symptomatic of, and rooted in, the uncertainty inherent in a period of rapid social transformation (Giulianotti, 2009). Risk-taking in lifestyle sport is therefore seen as an escape from the increasingly over-rationalised and sanitised leisure experiences characteristic of late modernity, providing 'an antidote to our safety-first shrink-wrapped world' (Appleton 2005 cited in Booth and Thorpe, 2007: 192). Therefore Le Breton proposes that dangerous sports are most prevalent in those societies that can provide their members with social and economic stability (2000), and Fletcher (2008) argues that risk-taking appeals more to a professional middle-class habitus. Stranger (1999), however, argues that the *embodied experiences* of high-risk sports practitioners require analysis. Risk-taking in surfing, he argues, is inherent in the search for an experience of 'self-transcendence' within the surfing aesthetic (Stranger, 1999). Laurendeau (2008) highlights that the gendered dimensions of voluntary risk need to be explored.

Yet as West and Allin discuss (2010), in contrast to risk-taking, lifestyle sport participants often seek ways to *manage* and *control* risk. Theorists such as Giddens and Beck outline that an increased awareness of risk is a 'product of human action rather than fate' (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002: 318) and the need to manage it are important features of late modern societies. Risk is 'closely linked to reflexivity, accountability and responsibility' (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002: 318). Indeed, as West and Allin outline, risk management is bolstered by neo-liberal discourses which discourage state support and encourage individuals to take personal responsibility.

As noted above, the actual risks in many lifestyle sports do not exceed, or are less than those in traditional sports activities like football and swimming. However, media accounts often over-emphasise the risky and dangerous aspects of lifestyle sport, framing events in ways that focus on the relatively rare incident, accentuating negative events, so 'amplifying' risk (Davidson, 2008). As Dumas and Laforest (2009) argue, perceptions of skateboarding often remain tempered by the view of them having a high risk of injuries. Media reports about street-based activities like parkour and skateboarding often characterise young people as deviant and out of place; 'hoodies hanging-out on street-corners'. Yet media reports are often contradictory, for they emphasise risk, and see participants as irresponsible, while simultaneously promoting and admiring the 'heroic adventurer' (Davidson, 2008).

Another lifestyle sport that has fuelled debate about risk and responsibility is kite-surfing. In the UK, local bylaws have been used (or adapted) to ban kite-surfing in venues where there were seen to be potential conflicts with other beach and water-users such as pleasure-boats or swimmers. Experienced kiters often blamed beginners or the inexperienced for causing kiting incidents. A narrative of blame in

which accidents only happen to the foolhardy and inexperienced appears to be prevalent across lifestyle sport cultures. Developing 'safe' and certified teaching establishments has therefore been seen as an important way of giving the sport credibility, and the British Kite Suring Association (BKS) has seen this as one of its central roles. In some locales, clubs were formed as a consequence of threats to ban the activity, and have gone some way to appease the concerned authorities. Clubs serve to control the activity, requiring safety equipment and evidence of third party insurance. They provide rules and regulations such as who can kite at that locale, when they can kite, etc. Often it is the members themselves who police and enforce these rules, but they see it as an unwanted restriction to their freedom. Some kite-surfers I observed continued to contravene imposed rules, flaunting regulations, and ignoring bans, especially in venues where it was hard for authorities to police or enforce them.

Such defiance is certainly not unique to kite-surfing, but characterises attitudes across lifestyle sports. Perhaps the most provocative examples of transgression come in sports such as BASE-jumping, where the activity is often illegal, and part of the challenge is to evade police or security guards to gain access to the building and to escape after the ascent. As Tomlinson et al. (2005) have suggested, whilst many so-called extreme sports transgress social norms and rules, they also establish sport rules and subcultural codes to ensure the safety of participants. This is particularly evident in mountaineering where the discourse of safe practice is linked to experience, skills, knowledge and information, such as measurements, grading systems, guide books, etc., representative of the 'cultural capital' of mountaineering (Beedie, 2007: 40).

Street Sports and Urban Politics

Another theme that has been prevalent in the lifestyle sport literature, but which initially emerged from scholars in urban planning, architecture and cultural geography, is the ways in which street sports like skateboarding and parkour connect to the politics of public urban space. That is, they are concerned with how space is used, given meaning, contested and policed/governed. Ian Borden's study of skateboarding was one of the first to examine these issues. Borden (2001) drew on the French theorist Lefebvre's theories about space, to conceptualise urban (street) skateboarding in the 1990s as a critique of capitalist space. Street skaters, he argued, actively re-appropriate and redefine government, business and commercial space in the city; they critique ownership, refusing to consume architecture as pure image, using it as 'a material ground for action' (Borden, 2001: 239). Therefore street skating could be seen as a critical practice that challenged the form and mechanics of urban life, confronting the social, spatial and temporal logic of capitalist space.

Over the past half-decade a spate of articles on skateboarding and urban politics have emerged (e.g. Stratford, 2002; Howell, 2005; 2008; Chiu, 2009). They have highlighted the lack of provision for skateboarders, their exclusion from public spaces, and their marginalisation in decision-making processes (Howell, 2008).

Howell (2005), however, points to a shift in this relationship between skateboarding and the city 'managers' that has occurred since the 1990s. He argues that, situated in the broader context of neoliberal governance reforms, skateboarding in the gentrifying city is no longer seen as a 'problem' but is being used as an instrument of development, the participants being embraced rather than derided and excluded. The negative public perceptions of lifestyle sports participants – such as involving high-risk, and deviant behaviour – are being challenged, instead highlighting their social benefits.

The increasing visibility of parkour via commercial media and films has also provoked research (e.g. Geyh, 2006; Atkinson, 2009; Kidder, 2013). Parkour, which emerged from the suburbs of Paris in the 1980s is defined by its founders as the art of moving fluidly from one part of the environment to another. In contrast to the spectacular stunts depicted in the mainstream media, traceurs (those who practice parkour) describe it as inspired by 'efficient motion' over, under, around or through obstacles by jumping, vaulting and climbing. Researchers have examined how this 'new form of movement' provides a different way of interacting with the (urban) environment (Geyh, 2006: 1); and, following Borden, how parkour transgresses capitalist space, disrupting and destabilising capitalist meanings of the city's physical and social landscape (Daskalaki et al., 2008). Daskalaki et al.'s examination of the activities and the philosophy that underpins their practice, leads them to propose that parkour is a form of 'urban activism' that poses a challenge to the 'fixed, sterile organisational behaviour, fixed models and ready-made answers' of contemporary social formations (2008: 61). They describe parkour as a practice that opposes the commodification and commercialisation of the body, and of the institutional controls of city spaces. Similarly, Michael Atkinson's ethnographic research with traceurs in Toronto (Atkinson, 2009) illustrates that they challenge dominant social constructions of urban environment as sanitised corporate spaces. He analyses traceurs as an 'innovative anarcho-environmental movement' who critique the political and economic ethos underwriting the design of, and physical cultural movement within, urban cities … and who bring forth an aesthetic-spiritual reality of the self' (Atkinson, 2009: 170).

Lifestyle Sport and Social Identities

Early research on lifestyle sport, such as Pearson's (1979) seminal study of surfing subcultures in the 1970s, failed to acknowledge or explore girls' and women's involvement. This reflected the 'male stream' scholarship dominant at the time. As feminist critiques of youth subcultures more widely illustrated, male 'opposition' to the dominant hegemonic culture tended to be celebrated, even when it was sexist or racist (e.g. McRobbie, 1991). However, over the past three decades, the construction and representation of gender identity in lifestyle sport has attracted a wealth of studies across different activities and geographical contexts. Scholars have examined the gendered cultures of various lifestyle sports across a range of activities and geographical contexts including windsurfing, BMX, climbing, roller derby,

skateboarding, snowboarding and surfing. This research has demonstrated the complex and shifting ways in which different structural, material and ideological factors operate to exclude different groups of women and girls in these activities. Nevertheless, there are clear differences *between* activities as well as spatial, temporal, and cultural variations. As social constructionist and post-structuralist approaches to understanding gender remind us, we need to explore the multiple ways in which different women experience social oppression; and the significance of shared experiences and difference in understanding women's leisure worlds (Scraton, 1994). The focus on detailed qualitative research adopted by many researchers, has revealed the complex ways in which these various influences work to exclude women in different sporting spaces.

Class and Privilege

While social class has not been the focus of detailed research in this field, as Bourdieu (1984) has illustrated it remains of central importance in acquiring the 'taste' for lifestyle sporting practices, and as the basis of their lifestyles. While research has illustrated some of the complex ways in which economic, cultural and physical capital operate in lifestyle sports cultures, and the differences between these and more institutionalised sports activities (e.g. Kay and Laberge, 2002), in many – but not all – lifestyle sports, participants come from higher socio-economic groups (Tomlinson et al., 2005; Fletcher, 2008).

In my ethnographic research on windsurfing, almost all of the women who windsurfed were 'privileged women': predominantly well-educated women between 20 and 40 years in age, able-bodied, white and middle-class, many with their own income. Although some of these women found expenditure on equipment a financial drain, it was a lack of time that most restricted their participation, particularly for those who had children or lived a considerable distance from the water. Committed windsurfers needed flexibility in their lifestyles. The institutionalised power held by men in many traditional sports, such as in the ways in which men have historically controlled sports organisations, was less evident in the more informal windsurfing communities. Yet the sport's informal nature also created *barriers* for some women. For example, the lack of clubs often meant there were no facilities such as changing rooms, showers, child-care facilities or safety services. For those women who did have the economic resources and opportunity to windsurf, factors such as the British weather, perceptions of the sport (perpetuated in subcultural and mainstream media) as being very demanding, dangerous, and requiring excessive strength, contributed to their lack of interest or enthusiasm to persevere. In many lifestyle sports, exclusion often works in more subtle ways than in institutionalised sports. Lifestyle sports that, like skateboarding, require the least specialist equipment, and are the cheapest and most geographically accessible, are often the most male dominated (Beal and Wilson, 2004), signalling that cultural and ideological factors underpin the reasons for women's lack of participation.

A Female Athletic Revolution?

> [I]t's changed a lot [surfing]. Growing up there were two other girls besides my sisters that surfed at our school, our entire high school ... And now I see packs of little girls, teen girls, pre-teens on skateboards and bikes heading to the beach with their surfboards and it's the coolest thing. (female surfer in California, 2009)

Over the past decade there has been a boom in women's and girls' interest in life-style sporting cultures, amongst both consumers and as participants. This interest has included sports like surfing and skateboarding, previously seen as bastions of masculinity. Media reports claimed that women constituted 60% of learner surfers across wide-ranging geographical locations (Jarvie, 2006; Comer, 2010). In Britain, the media in 2008 branded the popularity of surfing among women as a 'female surfing revolution', and the British Surfing Association (BSA) claimed that women showed a ten-fold increase (Barkham, 2006). Surfing has also expanded increasingly into more mainstream forms of popular culture such as the Hollywood blockbuster *Blue Crush,* and US reality TV show *Curl Girls* (see Comer, 2010).
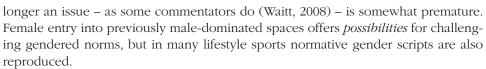
Atencio et al. (2009) claim that the economic power of the (middle-class) female lifestyle sport consumer is driving this growth; women and girls have become the new lucrative target niche market. Executives within the lifestyle sports industry identified women as being the crucial component of expanding their market (Atencio et al., 2009). The marketing manager of ski and snowboard manufacturer Salomon corroborates this view. He explains that: 'To be successful commercially you need women endorsing your brands' (Asthana, 2003). This expansion has been reflected in surf schools, surf tourism, surf shops and surf magazines, all of which now produce female specific products and services. *Roxy*, Quicksilver's clothing and lifestyle brand for women, was reported to be growing at 35% a year, when the male market had stabilised (Asthana, 2003). According to the owner of *Surf Diva*, the first company in the USA to organise women-only teaching and surf tourism, they teach 'thousands of women each year' ranging from young girls to grannies (personal interview, 2009).

Reflecting the development of sport feminism more widely, the most recent feminist research seeking to explain these global increases in participation – particularly among girls – in sports like surfing, skateboarding and snowboarding, has been inspired by Foucaudian post-structuralism (e.g. Spowart et al., 2010; Thorpe, 2011; MacKay and Dallaire, 2013) and debates in third wave feminism (e.g. Comer, 2010; Thorpe, 2011). These approaches embrace complexity, examining multiple sources of power, and emphasising both difference and diversity. Pomerantz's research, for example, suggests that female skaters have established a subculture that has the potential to challenge dominant attitudes to gender, space, risk and embodiment (Pomerantz et al., 2004).

Yet while the increasing numbers of young white middle-class women who surf, skate, climb, bike and snowboard is undeniable, to then suggest that gender is no

longer an issue – as some commentators do (Waitt, 2008) – is somewhat premature. Female entry into previously male-dominated spaces offers *possibilities* for challenging gendered norms, but in many lifestyle sports normative gender scripts are also reproduced.

The scholarship on lifestyle sport culture has, until recently, failed to express the viewpoint of the sport's Others – such as other ethnicities, sexualities, and those with dis/ability. Roy has examined surfing, gender and sexuality, revealing the experiences of lesbian women (Roy and Caudwell, 2014). Research is also beginning to explore the experiences of older participants (e.g. Wheaton, 2013). While popular representations of lifestyle sport have tended to be dominated by youth, lifestyle sports are being increasingly used to target older consumers, particularly in the context of prolonging health and well-being. Older participants are continuing to practice, and take-up lifestyle sport later in life, in so doing challenging dominant discourses about the ageing body, redefining what it means to grow older. In the last section I highlight the absence of research on race and ethnicity, identity and exclusion.

Lifestyle Sport and Whiteness

Lifestyle sport, both in the increasingly ubiquitous appropriation of its imagery across media and public space, and in terms of participants (in the West) is often constituted as a white space. Drawing on the body of critical race literature focusing on whiteness, Kusz has illustrated that whiteness in lifestyle sport is often represented as a 'cultural space that is overwhelmingly white yet it is rarely ever imagined as a racially exclusive space' (Kusz, 2004: 207). It therefore acts as an invisible and unmarked 'norm' to most whites.

Kusz's research foregrounds how mass media representations of extreme sport in North America became key cultural sites in the construction of whiteness. He argues that in the late 1990s extreme sports emerged as an important and politically powerful contemporary site of whiteness, used as part of a broader conservative cultural politics that sought to re-establish and secure the dominant positioning of white masculinity. He describes how the US media celebrated extreme sports as the 'symbol of a new American zeitgeist' (Kusz, 2004: 209). They promoted and revived traditional and specifically American values including 'individualism, self-reliance, risk taking, and progress' (ibid.). This masculinised and patriotic representation of extreme sports re-articulated and naturalised the link between whiteness and America, re-establishing white masculinity as dominant in the American imagination (Kusz, 2004: 199).

Other informative studies of extreme/lifestyle sports and whiteness have followed, many focusing on representations of white identities in images, magazines and films. But detailed empirical research on the racialisation of lifestyle culture and space has received surprisingly little academic attention. Exceptions include Thompson (2011) on surfing in South Africa, Wheaton's (2013) examination of African-American surfers in California, and Chivers-Yochim (2010) on skateboarding, masculinity and whiteness.

BOX 5.4

SKATEBOARDING, IDENTITY AND RACE

It's [race] really no big deal. We just want to skate, you know? (Bradley, skater, age 15, cited in Chivers-Yochim, 2010: 104)

Skateboarding, with its home in inner-city contexts, appears to be one of the least middle-class and white-dominated lifestyle sports. This is certainly the view perpetuated by the sport subcultural media, where it is often claimed that the values of skateboarding 'transcend' barriers of race, gender, and class (Borden, 2001; Chivers-Yochim, 2010); and that the 'imagined community' of skateboarders is inclusive and racially diverse (Chivers-Yochim, 2010: 104). For example; 'There aren't the biases that exist in other areas of life. It's like we are our own race' (cited in Borden, 2001: 141). While there is some diversity in US skate parks and in skate niche media (Chivers-Yochim, 2010), as Kusz's (2007) analysis of the cult skateboarding film *Dogtown* suggests, the discourses of race, inclusion and belonging in the North American skateboarding subculture, are complex and inconsistent.

Chivers-Yochim (2010: 103) suggests that skateboarders claim their culture is 'tolerant', 'multicultural', 'open to all', working 'hard to elide race', that 'race doesn't matter – skateboarding does' (2010: 103). Yet in discussions about race, her interviewees still drew on the 'normativity of whiteness' (2010: 103). She suggests that tolerance claims and rejection by skateboarders of the notion that their community might be 'exclusionary' (2010: 105), are rooted in their beliefs that it is the practice of skateboarding itself that is crucial to the ('authentic') culture, and not the performance of different lifestyles, such as 'appearing to be cool' or 'developing an exclusionary group' (2010: 103). Skaters believed they lived and operated differently from other adolescent groups, and claimed a kind of 'outsider status' (2010: 96) (see also Atencio and Beal, 2011) which gave them a 'unique outlook on life' (2010: 96). This outsider status frequently translated into 'assertions of cultural acceptance' of diversity and multiculturalism (2010: 99). Similarly, in Beal's research (Wheaton and Beal, 2003a; 2003b) skaters were hesitant to discuss or acknowledge racial difference or exclusion. Instead they wanted to discuss the 'generic' characteristics needed of a person to be accepted. On deeper inspection, however, their narratives were contradictory, and the 'generic' characteristics invariably reflected values associated with hegemonic white masculinity (Wheaton and Beal, 2003a). Like the Ann Arbor skaters (Chivers-Yochim, 2010), skaters in Beal's research claimed that they skated with a racially-diverse group, but at the same time drew on stereotypes of race such as describing African-American skaters as being able to 'Ollie' higher, and Asian-American's excelling because they 'took it more seriously' and 'worked harder' (Wheaton and Beal, 2003a: 86). Beal concluded that the black

skaters in her research in North America did gain subcultural status, but it was harder for them to gain respect than white skaters, and they were marked as *different*. The skateboarders' 'elision of race' alongside their 'continued reliance on individualised notions of identity and community' served to maintain the power of white, middle-class skateboarders (Chivers-Yochim, 2010: 105).

Future Directions

In this chapter I have highlighted some of the contemporary sociological issues surrounding lifestyle sport. I have considered the characteristics of contemporary lifestyle sports, whether they remain as alternatives to mainstream sports, and looked at their regulation and sportisation, particularly in relation to the Olympic Games. Finally I have considered the politics of identity within the sports, looking at who is included and excluded, in their representation and in their cultures.

There are a number of other interesting research avenues and questions we could have examined. For example;

- Lifestyle sports and their relationship to new social movements, including the environmental movement.

- The globalisation of lifestyle sports: What are the global flows? What is the impact on different local cultures?

- The lifestyle sport media and industries.

- The cultures of different lifestyle sports and how identity and status are performed.

- The increasing use of lifestyle sport in various sport policy initiatives, particularly sport for development and peace initiatives like *Skatistan* in Afghanistan (see Thorpe, 2014; Thorpe and Rinehart (2013)).

The political potential of these activities, particularly to challenge the dominant sport cultures remains an important question for research and debate. In their early years, lifestyle sports offered participants different and potentially more inclusive spaces for the construction of cultural identity than many traditional, institutionalised sports. But can they continue to create alternative spaces where *different* types of athletic identities that do not emulate the hypercompetitive and hierarchical characteristics of modern sport can exist? Or when new sports are no longer new, is their appropriation – institutional, commercial and educational – inevitable? Regardless of these questions, it is undeniable that lifestyle sports have altered, and are continuing to change the sporting landscape.

─**CHAPTER SUMMARY**─

- There are a number of characteristics that make lifestyle sports distinctive activities and help us to define what they are.
- Key themes in understanding the sociological significance of lifestyle sports include the impact of commercialisation processes on their cultures, the importance of risk, their increased regulation, and the urban politics associated with street sports like skateboarding and parkour/free-running.
- Lifestyle sports contain specific politics of identity, shaping who is included and excluded, and their representation and in their cultures. Like many traditional sports, lifestyle sports are bastions of masculinity, where sporting identities are tied to the reproduction of white male power.
- Lifestyle sports potentially present an alternative to the dominance of Western achievement sport, challenging what sport is or could be.

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NOTE

1   The research and ideas presented in this section are based on a collaborative project with Dr Holly Thorpe, and are drawn from the output of that project. See Thorpe and Wheaton (2011a; 2011b).

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