

On norms and their transgression in serious leisure: two case studies from rock climbing

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Abstract

As interest grows in the subject of sport, play and games as social practice, it becomes more important to elaborate on the contribution serious leisure makes in the formation of hegemonic power and the margins of everyday life. There are alternative models of what constitutes serious leisure and in particular the experience of leisure transgression. Case study based qualitative data are presented which illuminate several important influences within two settings featuring the adventure activity of rock climbing. I suggest that organisation and organising is one of a range of factors impinging on the theme of serious leisure. An implication is that climbers in the present may have more difficulty than did their predecessors in resisting both the encroachment of rationalised society and capture by market driven forces.

Keywords

Case studies, organisation studies, rock climbing, serious leisure, transgression

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Introduction and background

As a pleasurable way of living, leisure ought to call up a happy vision of relative freedom from the constraints and obligations of work—for the purposes of this article, paid employment (Stebbins 2001). It seems odd therefore that a significant proportion of people use their leisure time freely to choose activities with a work-like purpose.

For social historians, systematic interest in popular culture and debate over the use of leisure activities goes back to the 1950s. Modern industrial capitalism established a formal concept of leisure during the latter part of the nineteenth century, which, as Hoggart (1957, 336) noted, ‘helped to bring about considerable improvements in the material lot and status of all working-class people’. It also gave urgency to interest in leisure promoting a sense of social purpose (Cherrington 2009). Whereas in pre-industrial society popular (male) recreation tended to centre on the public house, sport or violence (Hargreaves 1986)—dog and cock fighting remained common ‘working class’ entertainments—the ground for endless hedonistic pleasure (Hoggart 1957) began to shift with the onset of industrialisation.

By the 1870s, notably in Britain’s metropolitan north, many (often opposed) political activists—evangelical moral reformers, bourgeois capitalists and working class people—saw these traditional forms of popular recreation as something that was counter-productive to a modern, rational outlook. This is the ‘Weberian-inspired’ vision of the modern person, both as ‘an ascetic, committed, hard-working’ individual ‘motivated by rational goals’ (Hetherington 1998, 42) and as a ‘reasoning subject’ who is capable of articulating the identity of their interests around work and non-work time (Stedman-Jones 1977). As a consequence, numerous local, national and international institutions—schools, churches, firms and trades unions—formed sports clubs, service groups, fraternal societies and other organisational affiliations, engaging working people in, if not completely different cultural values and behaviours, at least different types of relationships and different degrees of participation in leisure activities (Cherrington 2009). The essential part of these relationships is that people began to organise their leisure activities (or else had them organised) to engender a work-like style.

In contemporary leisure studies, activities that share work-like properties are consistent with the ‘serious leisure’ perspective originally outlined by Stebbins (1992, 2001). In brief, serious leisure is ‘the steady pursuit of an

amateur, hobbyist, or career volunteer activity that captivates its participants with its complexity and many challenges' (Stebbins 2001, 54). Not that distinguishing serious leisure is as straightforward as this, far from it. There may be activities that exceed the given conditions of serious leisure. If the fact is that serious leisure is by nature intrinsically 'good'—encouraging personal initiative and independence, offering prime opportunities for self-improvement and a means of contributing to society, and so forth—it might not easily let us consider 'forms of transgression' (Franklin-Reible 2006, 56). As a result, it may be necessary to problematise the concept of serious leisure.

In an effort, symbolically or literally, to resist or subvert attempts to impose the kinds of behaviour that anticipates a work-like attitude to free time, people often engage in serious leisure as a form of transgression. In phenomena such as sexual activity (Brewis and Linstead 2000), sadomasochism (Franklin-Reible 2006; Newmahr, 2010), oppositional youth (Hebdige 1979) and drug subcultures (Wray-Bliss 2003), researchers have found types of serious leisure behaviours that challenge social norms—the usually hidden set of rules, codes and conventions—taken to be universal and 'given' for a society (Hebdige 1979). However, whilst specific subcultures can, and often do, challenge the ruling forces in a society, they can also be symbolically 'repossessed' (Hebdige 1979, 17) by everyday life, and even appropriated by participants into forms implicitly oppositional to the subculture itself. Take, for example, the adventure activity of rock climbing, which today, anecdotally at least, appears to embrace consumerist culture, emphasising an 'image' (Kiewa 2002) identified more easily with clothing and equipment produced and promoted by multinational capitalist corporations than with a form of resistance.

From a social science perspective, serious leisure activities that challenge the structural and cultural 'normalisation' of leisure raise fundamental issues about identity formation, the fate of community and place, and the ideological character of the consumer world. A key issue is therefore how serious leisure participants might continue to resist the tendency towards uniformity, particularly in a context of increasingly mass culture. One way of gaining a purchase on the possibilities for transgression in the context of serious leisure activity in the present is to understand how transgression in leisure practices in the past subverted the normal expectations of society (Hargreaves 1986).

In this article, I present two historical case studies of rock climbing. The research project is exploratory in nature and makes use of in-depth qualitative studies, data from semi-structured interviews, short periods of participant

observation, as well as published and unpublished literature to identify emerging themes. First, I characterise the phenomenon of serious leisure originally theorised by Stebbins. I then explore the inherently complex and ambiguous boundary that constitutes the experience of leisure transgression in relation to the overall pattern of normalising constraints. As illustration, I investigate two small historical communities of rock climbers active in regions of England and Australia, mid-1940s-1980s, whose participation in serious leisure exemplifies the practice of resistance through transgression.

Finally, those involved in these sorts of counter-cultural leisure lifestyles in the past might have been more able to resist the structural and cultural organisation of their alternative interests than those in the present. One can certainly say that contemporary interest in mass consumption is hostile towards any activity that escapes its ambit and always seeks to recapture what breaks from mainstream society (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). However, I suggest that moments of transgression can exist in rock climbing today (Kiewa 2002; Wood and Brown 2011, 2014), and in forms close to the oppositional cultures found in new social movements, where communities find uses for many old sites as spaces of resistance (Hetherington 1998; Standing 2011).

Organisation of leisure

Changes in working class culture, especially in relation to leisure, were an important part of influential studies by Hoggart (1957), Thompson (1966) and Williams (1961), through to the contemporary analyses of Coleman (1993) and Putnam, (2000). Additionally, in part because of efforts to transform leisure values and behaviour, each of these writers draws attention to the ways in which people start to use the image of work to explore leisure hours.

In the *Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart (1957) was interested looking at working class culture as a whole way of life. For Hoggart, the totems of high culture, such as poetry, books and art amount to an exogenous organisation of society from outside that does not necessarily express the texture of experience in working class culture. Working people actually experience and express their everyday lives through self-organisation, through cooperative movements, through strong family values and those things endogenous that are embodied in practice. Similarly, Williams (1961) looked at everyday culture as an extension of and embodied in certain kinds of work and institutions through which members of society regulate and control their own environment. Thompson

(1966, 57–59) also saw the making of early working-class leisure culture as a possible interplay between endogenous and exogenous factors, not set exclusively against industrialisation, social and economic conditions but rather embodying the utilitarian attitudes of the new manufacturing class. Meanwhile, Coleman (1993) and Putnam (2000) both lament the declining trend in collective engagement and the social connectedness of (American) civil society. For Coleman (1993, 1), the decline of endogenous ‘social organisation’ and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other, has been accompanied by a compensatory rise in the exogenous insertion of organisation based on new ‘corporate actors’, who typically provide mass recreational products for today's population of individuals. Whilst for Putnam (2000, 216), *Bowling Alone* is a metaphor for the ‘privatising’ or ‘individualising’ of leisure time over the last two decades of the twentieth century and thus the disruption of many opportunities for endogenous social processes to form.

Nonetheless, leisure and entertainment as sources of collective value did feature prominently in earlier ideas for social change. The later 1870s into the Edwardian era saw massive growth in working class cultural and sporting activities and these combined into a distinct ‘organisation of life’ (Williams 1961, 52). The pattern of mass participation in organised sports and pastimes sprung from attempts by industrial and commercial capital to adapt and modify behaviour and attitudes amongst working people towards a valued system of ‘rational recreation’ (i.e. a healthy workforce and workers improving themselves) (Hargreaves 1986). Here, employers who wished to emphasise the image of work as the most fitting and proper way to look on popular leisure in highly industrialised societies tended to maximise their complementary features (i.e. healthy minds and bodies leading to productive workers) as a desirable cultural product of modern capitalism (Cherrington 2009; Rojek 2002). Together, these institutions helped to project ‘an image of the ideal’ of leisure behaviour as ‘normalised [...] organised and disciplined’ (Hargreaves 1986, 60).

Currently, leisure activities promoting collective values or a sense of social purpose are consistent with characteristics of the ‘serious leisure’ perspective, originally outlined by Stebbins (1992). Stebbins coined the term serious leisure to focus researchers’ attention on complex forms of leisure involving ‘the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills,

knowledge, and experience' (Stebbins 1992, 3). To clarify its meaning further, Stebbins and other researchers in this area have tended to contrast serious leisure with 'casual', or unserious leisure, often unplanned, carefree and requiring only minimal effort, 'as exemplified in activities like taking a nap or strolling in the park or, when pursued as diversions, watching television or reading a newspaper' (Stebbins 1997, 17; Bryan, 1977).

In this respect, evidence from leisure studies suggests that the way in which leisure activities are organised, fulfilling both endogenous and exogenous needs, is not via two distinct structures or categories but through 'an active process', which owes as much to the 'agency' of participants as to 'conditioning' by establishment pressures (Thompson 1966, 9). To paraphrase Thompson (1966, 9), serious leisure participants for the most part do not just 'rise like the sun' and express certain behaviour and interests that match the qualities valued by their bosses. In truth, the relationship between leisure and organisation is largely a response to a broader sphere of 'traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms' (Thompson 1966, 10), derived from and embodying past initiatives.

The structures of this relationship took a new turn in the mid-twentieth century when, as Charles Wright Mills noted, a 'whole machinery' of the culture and leisure industry began to manipulate the lifestyle and entertainment habits associated with the masses. At that time, people's leisure consumption practices functioned ineluctably to *reproduce* 'the glamorous worlds' (Mills 1956, 336) of film stars, other popular entertainers and sports stars that achieved celebrity status and became icons. In an equally dramatic way, the prevalence of celebrity culture continues to work through contemporary leisure-time consumption. For example, in the veneration of our own selves and the need for shared approval and self-affirmation in the digital age, a vast range of communication vehicles demand and are ideally suited to produce these effects. Today, the presentation and promotion of our own lives and the private spheres of other infamous people rather than the life worlds of famous personalities tends to provide the principle content for idolisation (Day 2013). Now, the concern mostly is for salacious gossip or information about valuable friends, hobbies, autobiographical information, styles of consumption, stereotyped personal problems, and so forth, as people work hard to establish media identities and the social approval they think will equip them for success.

Depending upon the specific ways people think about and respond to the intensification of the culture and leisure industry, the popularity of new

phenomena, such as the narcissistic ‘selfie’ (Day 2013), may not only question but appear strongly to undermine Stebbins’s perspective on serious leisure—as assisting in society’s ongoing betterment and improvement. However, to the extent that serious leisure experiences offer special identities to those who participate in them, including, I concede, some entrepreneurial, online self-marketers, the term itself still has a basic interpretive and definitional value and everyday currency.

In general, researchers continue to use the serious leisure framework to study a wide array of pastimes, including amateur artist groups (Bendle and Patterson 2009), dancing (Brown 2007), football spectating (Weed 2006), singing (Liu and Stebbins 2014; Nash 2012) and photography (Cox, Clough and Marlow 2008). As such, I frame this project with the outlined characteristics of serious leisure, as a way to describe the varying historical and contemporary approaches to leisure by activity participants. After all, what is sometimes exciting for people involved in serious leisure is being part of something different. Thus, rather than feeding dominant ideas within a given setting, it is possible for serious leisure participants to pose challenges in order to ameliorate the absence of core values in social life. This orientation can lead to the existence of different subcultures, each advancing different versions of reality.

Transgression in serious leisure

A major theoretical assumption underlying this research project is that rock climbing is a form of serious leisure offering ‘a major lifestyle and identity for its enthusiasts’ (Stebbins 2001, 56). Moreover, in themselves, we can also view climbing lifestyles as behavioural expressions of distinctive personal qualities and values, which, to some extent, the dominant society identifies as a mode of transgression. Historically at least, subordinate groups of climbers have tended actively to engage with forms of leisure identifiable with transgression in a gesture of defiance, which challenges the process of normalisation (Craig 1996; De Léséleuc, Gleyse and Marcellini 2002; Heywood 1994; Kiewa 2002; Lewis 2000; Wood and Brown 2011, 2014).

Many other adventure recreation activities fit within the serious leisure framework. Examples include figure skating, rugby and alpine skiing (McQuarrie 1999), amateur cycling (O’Connor and Brown 2010), BASE-jumping (Lyng 2005), ocean surfing (Cheng and Tsaur 2012) and white water kayaking (Bartram 2001). Stebbins (1992) also recognises rock climbing as

leisure of the serious variety. However, he notes how, as a pastime, it has moved from a practice of completing a successful ascent, to a highly competitive sport. In this situation, compared with the distinctive subcultures in the climbing worlds of the past, the contemporary climbing world has grown into a mass recreational product that is both widespread and uniform (De Léséleuc et al 2002; Kiewa 2002; Lewis 2000; Wood and Brown 2011, 2014). Now popular everywhere, as play, relaxation, and entertainment at school, in health clubs and on luxury-ocean liners, participation in contemporary rock climbing often involves a non-serious suspension of consequences (Stebbins 1997) and its character offers an easy target for simulated behaviour.

We can view this style of consumption much more accurately as a type of 'casual' leisure as, most often, it makes only a limited contribution to self-identity (Stebbins, 2001) and/or community and the perceived qualities of freedom and resistance as pursued by 'serious' others (Kiewa 2002). Moreover, research seems to show that climbers in the present have more difficulty than did their predecessors in resisting both the encroachment of rationalised society and capture by market driven forces (De Léséleuc et al 2002; Kiewa 2002; Heywood 1994; Siderelis and Attarian 2004). For example, in a study of user reactions to regulatory changes in the management of a climbing site in the United States, Siderelis and Attarian (2004) found that significant numbers of climbers responded negatively to the proposed changes, implying that the imposition of elements exogenous to the climbers' cultural group acted as a constraint to climbing behaviour and participation. Other authors suggest that, whilst we can still find forms of resistance, the economic punch of integrated world capitalism tends to bring activities like rock climbing into the orbit of the mass-consumer market (Wood and Brown 2011, 2014).

Although these investigations show how the processes of rationalisation and commodity production characterising society in general may normalise and transform the relative forms of self-determination and freedom historically found in rock climbing, these forces may actually lead contemporary leisure communities to pay attention to exactly the same intolerant structures, values and ideals (De Léséleuc et al 2002; Kiewa 2002). As illustration, in a study of how climbers in one particular community negotiated this threat, Kiewa (2002, 159) found a 'schism' among climbers whose behaviour demonstrated 'a form of escape from the malaise affecting the modern world' and climbers who embraced 'a high level of predictability and consumerist orientation'. Even further, De Léséleuc et al (2002) found a small enclave of protagonists who

simply preached their own exclusiveness and neo-tribal superiority (including violence); giving those with power in the community a source of freedom they denied others. The hierarchical behaviours they display exclude different members and seem at odds with the pursuit of leisure activity as contributing to the development of community or as something to be lived pleasurably (Bauman 1993).

Taken together, the literature on rock climbing as a serious leisure activity suggests the climbing world of the past may provide a more fertile ground for an investigation of leisure activity, as a way to resist, challenge and even dissolve the proclivities of everyday life under modernity (Lewis 2000). In order to get a comparative grip on changes in the relationship between leisure that ‘invites transgression of conventional restraints’ (Foley 2006, 232) and the rationalist desire to sanction seriousness, it is useful to place activity inside an historical context (Foley 2006). I can no better demonstrate the connection between history and leisure-focused transgression than in the lives of two communities of rock climbers in the past.

I illustrate the connection between history, serious leisure and transgression by examining the ways in which rock climbers that went before us experienced their activity participation within the structural, ideological and cultural context of their social world. Accordingly, I investigate two small, historical communities of rock climbers active in regions of England and Australia between the 1940s and the 1980s. Despite differences in time and space, these two communities display apparently similar transgression as a feature of their serious leisure activity. My focus is upon the ways in which dominant discourses in society could hold the behaviour of those participating in the two communities to be transgressive. The premise is that transgression in serious leisure behaviour was more tolerable in the past, or at least generated less ‘significant or effective communal attempts to control it’ (Stebbins 1997, 22), than in the present.

In the historical case of rock climbing, climbers who participated in the setting or the way of life are a crucial source of both information and insight in order to understand meaning. By understanding more thoroughly the reasons for involvement in rock climbing in the past, where behaviour fits the description of transgression, we might gain knowledge about the extent to which serious leisure participants in the present can retain their freedom from or must defer to styles of consumption in a mass society.

Research process

This study uses a qualitative and comparative, specifically case study based design. A qualitative research methodology is more sensitive to the impact of context on how people experience their daily lives than other quantitative methods (Yin 2014). This is particularly important where there is a range of different stakeholders, each potentially advancing a different version of reality. The consideration of context and experiences and the establishment of an analytical frame are then important advantages of the methodology.

I undertook theoretical rather than random sampling, carefully selecting case studies that would best enable me to explore propositions about transgression in serious leisure (Franklin-Reible 2006). I have drawn on periods from the late-1940s to the early-1950s and from the late-1970s to the early-1980s, since major re-compositions of economic, political, and cultural relations occurred during both of these eras. I have also chosen settings that narrow the place for analysis. The shared leisure paths of the United Kingdom and Australia, which the experiences of Empire and now Commonwealth have shaped, provide settings that are likely to give the greatest chance of providing similar patterns in the available data (Kirk 2005).

Comparing historical British and Australian settings, I have selected two case studies as a matched pair: the 'Bradford Lads' (Yorkshire, England 1947-1953) and the 'New Wave' generation (Victoria, Australia 1977-1983). Primary data collection was by interviews with a targeted sample of informants (men and women) and supplemented with participant observation in contemporary settings. I also examined secondary data from archives, auto/biographies, the formal, peer-reviewed academic literature, snippets from personal correspondence and grey literature. These latter included minutes of meetings, club records, and other papers and correspondence produced outside of commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels.

I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews. These lasted between 50 and 120 minutes duration with respondents ranging in age from early 50s to over 80. As an 'insider' (Brewer 2000, 13), having been a serious rock climber for over 30 years, I personally knew a few respondents, some I had already identified within the literature and others I contacted using a 'snowballing' approach. I carried out each interview face-to-face, using digital audio and/or video recording and a core pro forma. Some interviews also contained a number of secondary customised and context specific questions. Unlike previous studies

of contemporary climbing (e.g. Kiewa 2002), I did not try to include equal numbers of women and men. This would have been impossible because, whilst not deliberately exclusive, there were historically only a very small number of female climbers in these communities.

In both cases, I supplemented formal interviews with short periods of participation and observation in contemporary settings that shared similar cultural conditions to the historical fields I was studying. In examining my two contemporary settings, I sought to build my identity as a perceived insider (Brewer 2000). For instance, I went climbing, walking, camping and drinking with some of the people I interviewed. I attended several informal gatherings and had additional, casual conversations with respondents, who also introduced me to a wider field of acquaintances.

The past nature of my two cases meant that I could not investigate first-hand the actual historical periods and places. Even so, one of the dominant approaches in comparative historical research is comparison of ‘most similar’ settings (Berger and Patmore 2005). Here, we can distinguish an ‘illustrative’ approach to comparative study (Bonnell 1980, 157). In such a framework, the main point of comparison is not between research settings but between each setting and a theory or a concept. This appears to confirm that I can usefully make comparative analysis of the contemporary settings and the historical experiences of people, providing my selection, organisation, and interpretation of empirical material relates to my analytical preoccupations, which serve as the main heuristic device (Bonnell 1980).

I performed a simple content analysis on the data, which produced empirically grounded themes across the respondents/settings. These themes are not necessarily ‘objective’ categories but rather reflect the complex interplay between the ideas, opinions and values expressed by the people I studied and the norms, conventions and influences apparent upon them. In each case study, I used a combination of natural language (e.g. verbatim quotations from interviews), field notes and document analysis. Processed as a whole, these narratives helped me to understand the beliefs and shared values of the participants and to ensure that theory and empirical material work together, whilst also acknowledging the undoubted effect of my own lived experiences on the data.

Context and history of the climbing cases

In this section, I present a brief overview and contextual framework of the two case studies. This provides the basis for more analytical discussions to follow. The acronyms appearing in parenthesis in the case studies (for example, BL1 2009; NW2 2013) refer to the code categorisations utilised in the data analysis and identify individual respondents. I apply these throughout subsequent sections to identify the source of direct quotations.

Bradford lads

We can generally accept that British rock climbing was ‘invented’ in the late 1880s. However, control exerted by amateurish ‘gentlemanly’ individuals, who had the time to devote to leisure interests, kept the pastime predominantly exclusive into the 1920s and 1930s. They prevailed, despite attempts by the working class from industrial areas in the north to gain access to wild upland countryside (Urry 1990). However, immediately post-World War II (WWII), working people won their recognition and subsequent interest en masse in outdoor leisure activities grew rapidly.

Towards the end of the 1940s, there emerged from the mills and works in the northern provincial city of Bradford, a daring but unusual group of climbers—the Bradford Lads (Craig 1987; Drasdo 1997; Gray 1970). Unlike respectable/genteel/establishment clubs, themselves the product of prevailing thinking, the Bradford Lads were a shifting, nebulous, and irreverent group, who, being quite radical in outlook, ‘were against everything which smacked of authority’ (Gray 1970, 22).

The Lads used ex-Commando karabiners; pitons forged under the noses of supervisors in factories and coalmine workshops. They wore utility style clothes, ex-War Department khakis and greys were cheap to acquire. On their feet, hefty boots or Woolworth’s gym-shoes, with the edges razored thin to put the toes more sensitively in touch with the rock. They had remarkably little climbing equipment: a few knotted slings to fix around flakes, a selection of small stones for inserting into cracks and a single manila rope, which was hairy and heavy and tended to snap (Wilkinson 1986). It was typical of the Lads to make famously reckless journeys from Yorkshire to the English Lake District on motorbikes, as it was to name some of their new routes *Anarchist* or

Communist Convert, out of their militant chagrin that a team with no working-class members had just climbed Everest.

By 1953, they were at their brilliant adventurous peak: carefree, in their prime, enjoying themselves to the top of their bent; no doubt with many a ruthless in-joke shouted along or down the rock face, or later in the climbers' bar of a local hotel, letting rip with their own rivalries. However, when a particular leading light among the Lads died, in a fall from the French Alps, the energy faltered and the flame went out.

The new wave

Rock climbing in regional Australia is a relatively new activity. Although we can date the earliest ascents back to the 1930s, the south and eastern states post-WWII were landscapes to which few working people from the metropolitan cities ever ventured. Early climbing, inspired by the exploits of Hilary, Shackleton, and Scott on Everest and Antarctica, developed from an interest in camping and bushwalking.

By 1963, a cadre of keen and ambitious university-based climbers from the conservative suburbs of Melbourne began travelling the long distances west to the flat cereal growing plains of Victoria known as the Wimmera, as well as to the nearby Grampians the region. Whilst not really rebels—most joined local clubs and paid their fees—their advances marked the beginnings of an increase and diversification in the climbing population.

A turning point for Australian climbing was the appearance in the late-1970s of the full time 'climbing bum'—a subculture of jobless or relatively jobless climbers forging ahead to new levels of climbing difficulty. Mt. Arapiles, a crag of world renown in the midst of the Wimmera, was the social centre of the anarchistic 'New Wave' generation. Some of the participants established the area's hardest new climbs, forming the basis for a special identity as members of a distinctive group of serious leisure enthusiasts.

Most participants had no real interest in working, or dropped out of university. It was not that they were too lazy to look for work but rather they were worried that it would interfere with their climbing. Instead, members actively spent their time making their own equipment and hitchhiking from Melbourne or Adelaide to 'Arap', and, in those activities, they found 'a major lifestyle and identity' related to their 'central life interests' (Stebbins 2001, 56). In this respect, the New Wavers looked on themselves as rebels against

authority: ‘disgraceful, disregarded, and disowned’ (NW5 2014), and, to some extent, the larger community dismissed and denounced them, treating them at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons for their alternative leisure lifestyles.

However, the creation of mass leisure practices eventually annulled the distinction between the New Wavers and the larger community. For example, within the 1980s decade, popular leisure practices, once symbolically endowed with meanings implicitly oppositional to the original subcultural group’s identity and lifestyle, proved to be universal. Now, a certain kind of generalised leisure ‘scene’ incorporates participants, many of whom began getting jobs, having families and starting businesses. The idea here is that the commitments of most New Wavers have become less ‘committed’ and more ‘casual’ (Bryan 1977).

Findings

Analyses of the two case studies suggest three overarching themes: (1) the breaking of stable relations, (2) a strong sense of group members’ connectedness, and (3) running hard against social organisation. These themes provide an interpretative frame potentially productive in exploring the general social processes that make the local practices observed possible.

Breaking stable relations

The succession of changes associated with certain social controls, like class, political affiliation and geographic constraints in pre-WWII Britain and in Australia from the 1950s onwards, allowed mobility and facilitated the breaking of stable relations amongst working people engaged in serious forms of leisure.

For example in 1932, to highlight social organisational attempts by the landed class to deny hikers access to the countryside, some 500 men and women took part in a mass trespass onto contested areas of open country in the Derbyshire Peak District. This notable direct action—and the land use and lifestyle issues associated with it—led to the opening up of public paths and, eventually, to the passage of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The passage of the Act, which extended rights of access to the countryside for everyone and led to the creation of national parks and Areas of

Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales¹, had an enormous effect on rock climbing in the period.

Before WWII, British rock climbing had been a very upper-middle class recreation. Indeed, on the approach to one crag, there is still an old wooden sign displaying its age by stating that ‘Permission to climb must be obtained from the Chatsworth Estate’ (BL3 2010)². There were exceptions, of course: ‘There had been strong groups of pre-war climbers, in such working class strongholds as Glasgow and Sheffield. You had the Creagh Dhu [a working-class climbing club from Glasgow] and the Sheffield steel workers, but poor material circumstances stopped them from dominating the sport (BL3 2010). Furthermore, a revolution was taking place.

Participants in this research were eager to point out that, post WWII, there was an ‘enormous feeling of relief ... [a] tremendous hope and expectation for a better world [and that] life was going to get better’ (BL5 2010). For many, their ‘horizons widened [...] they had been radicalised by the war and they had seen that there was a lot more to life than just getting up and going to work’ (BL3 2010). In effect, although many people still worked extremely long hours—‘eight ‘till five, Monday to Friday, eight ‘till two-thirty on Saturday’ (BL3 2010) —, individuals had some degree of choice when it came to issues of identity and of lifestyle. Many respondents saw their life choices at that time as less fixed and certain: ‘We were the first teenagers. We didn’t dress like our parents and had more spending power’ (BL4 2011), leading some to see it as a source of freedom: we ‘just wanted adventure’ (BL5 2010).

Likewise, Melbourne, which post-WWII was ‘a cultural melt point of refugees from Europe’ (NW1 2013), presented choices associated with lifestyle in the spaces of everyday life. In the past, ‘Melbourne was a very conservative city, very dour, Presbyterian, Catholic, polite society ... the pubs closed at 6-0’clock’ (NW1 2013). This led some respondents to see climbing as an ‘escape’ (NW1 2013), emerging as a challenge or ‘opposition’ to the hegemonic hold of ‘authority’ (NW4 2013).

The possibilities for producing different lifestyle identities led to a stream and then a flood of new groups from the working and lower middle classes. In this context, people had the chance to found numerous clubs and social groups ‘with no baggage of tradition holding them back’ (BL3 2010). Young people, many of who were (still are) rebellious, mainly made up the new clubs, most of which, unlike more senior organisations, were keen to sweep away previous lifestyles and identities associated with tradition and custom. As one respondent

mentioned, the ‘Lads’ didn’t want the organisation of the FRCC [the English Fell and Rock Climbing Club]’, instead ‘they wanted freedom to do their own thing’ (BL3 2010).

In Australia, meanwhile, an emphasis on eliding earlier social relations also framed climbing development. Since some (university-based) climbing clubs in Melbourne were still ‘quite stodgy’ and ‘bureaucratic’ (NW4 2013), respondents generally expressed a desire to ignore structure: ‘no one was “in charge”’, there is ‘no such structure in climbing, everyone is an independent body’ (NW2 2013). One respondent even used the phrase putting ‘2-fingers up to the establishment’ (NW5 2014) to denote opposition in symbolic form to structure in climbing.

This disinclination towards structure, defined in particular by its difference to the everyday and the ‘humdrum’ of routine (NW1 2013), supports Kiewa’s (2002) observation that, generally, previous climbing communities could easily recognise one another simply because anyone who owned a rope or climbing equipment was a climber. These days, she argues, identifying as a climber is less clear-cut. Now, the style of climbing and the commitment to climbing all indicate different types of climbers. For example, ‘pretend’ climbers are those who incorporate the values of rational society and industry, whereas a ‘real’ climber is generally one who uses this activity as the expression of identity and difference from the rational society (Kiewa 2002).

The qualities of transgression depicted by respondents are in response to changes in areas of economic and cultural life at particular places and times. What emerges from my interviews is a felt sense of wanting the freedom to do their own thing in the mass-industrial society of the 1940s and 1950s and to escape from the blandness of the modern world in the 1970s and 1980s. There is evidence that rock climbing became a whole way of thinking and living, in which their various activities combined into a break from certain norms of a society, and, in the case of the New Wave, the meanings and values in institutions and any forms of (work-like) behaviour that would interfere with the quality of their climbing lives.

The experience of mobility is also important as a way of understanding these serious leisure lifestyles. In Britain, the creation of National Parks presented people from the big northern provincial cities, such as Sheffield, Liverpool, Leeds/Bradford and Manchester, with the opportunity to spend their brief hours of leisure in the pursuit of some form of freedom in natural surroundings. The moors on the margins of what are now termed the inner cities

made a number of new climbing outcrops and crags more easily available and attractive to local groups of working class climbers.

Nonetheless, because the situation of working people post-WWII had not significantly improved in terms of material prosperity (although social security protection was a product of the period), few among the respondents could afford independent mobility in their leisure time. Cars were not widely available and it remained ‘a major task’ (BL3 2010) to go climbing, even to the outcrops and crags almost on their doorstep. Consequently, ‘no one went really [sic] very far very often’ (NW1 2013). By contrast, nobody today puts in the same kind of effort, hitch-hiking everywhere, which ‘could take you days sometimes’ (NW5 2014) or ‘walking between climbing venues before catching a bus back to the city’ (BL3 2010), but in 1940s and 1950s Britain and, I suppose, 1970s Australia, climbers ‘were hardy’ and ‘just got on with it’ (BL3 2010).

Many respondents themselves spent a lot of time getting to places. Two climbers told of working their passage (6 weeks) by boat to climb in Britain. As a result, at the time, ‘conversation was [often] more about the peripherals of [getting to] climbing rather than the technicalities of the climbing itself’ (BL3 2010). No one had transport initially, but a few climbers acquired (sometimes stole) motorbikes: ‘Frank [...] sat on pillion, Pearl in the sidecar’ (BL6 2011). By the mid-1950s, a minority of climbers bought cheap cars and vans—the ubiquitous ‘Austin A35’ in the UK (BL1 2009) and in Australia old ‘Morris’s, Hillmans or VW Beetles’ (NW4 2013) and (later) ‘Holden or [Ford] Falcon station wagons’ (NW5 2014). Consequently, people were prepared to do anything to get to climbing. For example, one respondent recalls how ‘Dennis hitchhiked on a fire engine, [and] I got a lift on an open lorry with cowhides, full of hitchers trying to avoid the slime’ (BL6 2011), whilst another describes ‘early weekend trips in the back of furniture removalist vans’ (NW1 2013).

Despite the technical difficulties associated with geographical mobility, changes in people's experience of their leisure time may also have afforded them changes in social mobility. Through involvement with serious leisure pursuits, and the new social groups or friendships these can initiate, people's lives might take on an independent quality—independent from traditional patterns and arrangements—, which might contribute to changes in their expectations of mobility (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001).

In Britain, concurrent changes after WWII greatly increased the opportunities for working people in the broader sphere of society. To some extent, individuals' experience of social mobility connects with the expansion

of educational opportunities during the period (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). Removed from traditional patterns and arrangements, tertiary education became more widely available to and valued by working people. As example, the Bradford Lads, a group of mainly working-class companions, contained a proportion of critically minded individuals with an intellectual bent, several of whom ‘went on to prominent things’ (BL5, 2010), including academic and professional roles in schools, universities and national bodies.

Sense of connectedness

In the face of society changing dramatically on a national and international scale, the image develops of climbing subcultures not confined firmly within the overall pattern of social controls and relations handed down from one generation to another but rather formed around communities of common interests. My evidence shows that the importance of social connectedness amongst climbers in the two periods studied provides a key level of analysis.

In the cases of the Bradford Lads and the New Wavers, a lack of formal structure establishes itself as the basic feature. As an alternative, there is recognition by both groups of the role those aspects of relationships such as common bonds and a sense of belonging, as well as problems of intra- and interpersonal narcissism, play in supporting, or impairing, forms of connectivity between participants.

Recalling earlier climbers’ ‘great efforts’ (BL3 2010) to get to outcrops and crags, respondents saw climbing as something quite ‘vital’, ‘a way of life’ (NW2 2013). Climbing has a ‘very physical sense of bonding and dependency’ (BL2 2010) that had an important influence on their lives. This could breed obsessive behaviour (still evident among modern climbers), as if ‘nothing else mattered’ (NW1 2013). Respondents also described an ‘open and friendly atmosphere’ amongst climbers (BL3 2010), a ‘band of brothers type of thing’ (NW5 2014). This, no doubt, was partly by necessity as technical crag and route information was often limited to word-of-mouth (oral-culture), there being no or at least very few up to date guidebooks.

Yet, perhaps because mid-twentieth century rock climbing was ‘predominantly a male environment’ (BL2 2010), respondents also described the scene as ‘very cliquey’, ‘ego driven’ (NW5 2014), ‘highly competitive’ (BL1 2011) and suspicious of ‘newcomers’: we ‘just [kept] an eye on them’ (NW5 2014). For example, as one individual pointed out, ‘There was a rivalry

between [two Bradford Lads]. ‘They were two different [personalities] ... If [first Bradford Lad] put a stone in a crack [second Bradford Lad] would go the following week and pull it out. There was a rivalry there’ (BL6 2011). ‘For sheer nerve, no one would exceed [second Bradford Lad]’ (BL2 2010) and (in relation to an infamous ‘peg’³ incident on *Kipling Groove*, a famous climb in the English Lake District, so named because it was ‘Ruddy ‘ard’) he [second Bradford Lad] ‘had a big audience; word got around’ (BL4 2011). Likewise, in Australia competition also existed between climbers: ‘There was definitely an edge to the rivalry [between Victorian and interstate climbers] at the time’ (NW7 2013) and high-grade⁴ climbers ‘consciously or unconsciously looked down on lesser climbers’ (NW3 2013). Moreover, ‘the “game” was to try and “downgrade” your mate’s routes’ and ‘sandbagging’⁵ was an art form’ (NW5 2014).

At Arapiles, there were two types of climbers: the serious climbers, most of whom were very experienced as a consequence of living semi-permanently in the central camping area called ‘the Pines’, and the rest: casual weekenders from the city (see also Kiewa’s [2002] characterisation of ‘real’ and ‘pretend’ climbers, above). The local grain and sheep farming community deemed the serious New Wavers ‘dole bludgers [unemployment benefit recipients]’ (NW5 2014), even though not all were on the dole. In fact, whilst many ‘serious climbers gratefully accepted unemployment benefits in the same way that scientists and artists accept their grants’ (NW6 2013), some drifted in/out having ‘scattered employment in Melbourne’ (NW6 2013), or doing ‘stints on local farms’ (NW5 2014).

An article published towards the end of this period in *Mountaineer*, a Melbourne University Mountaineering Club journal, gives glimpses of a subculture whose members were trying to tear themselves away in their living rough, their casual manners, and their restricted expenditure:

Their tents are in various states of “decay” and range from a large “bivvi [bivouac]” bag to family tents, often with only one occupant. If tent pegs cannot be obtained ... guys are often fastened to logs and rocks. The ground around the tents is trodden bare and dry, with only the thin pine canopy overhead repelling any rain that would soon turn the area into a mud heap. The main campfire shows how established they are: large pine logs, oil drums, upturned milk crates and even the front seat of a car serve as seats and food is stored in clothes baskets, ancient eskies [cooler

boxes] and milk crates. Billies look as though they've gone ten rounds with a Wonnangatta cow. The vegetarian would feel at home here—whether or not a lack of meat is due to health consciousness or lack of refrigeration, I'm not sure (Hallebone 1985, 20).

Some prominent New Wavers were totally driven: 'the truly affected' (NW5 2014). For them, climbing was a religion, 'nothing else mattered' (NW1 2013). Nevertheless, this easily bred arrogant and obsessive behaviour. There were many egos and personal rivalries became especially dramatic. Competition was intense and some of these 'anti-heroes' became elitist, surrounding themselves with entourages of 'belayers' [people who control the safety rope for a lead climber]. Indeed, with the importation of ethics from overseas (especially the United States, Britain and France) lines [climbs] began to bristle with [protection] bolts, [hand] holds were chipped [improved] and the climbing became 'a fierce competitive race' (NW6 2014).

For most, however, climbing was not really about obsession but more about the break away from rules and regulations and their general attitude vis-à-vis 'working for the man' (NW3 2014). Moreover, it became apparent that the central focus for some respondents was precisely a lifestyle that presented positions of marginality and resistance: 'When the world is wobbly, everyone loose ends up at Araps' (NW6 2013); climbing attracted characters that were 'slightly off centre' (NW1 2013).

Running hard against organisation

At the same time, in both cases studied I found a tension between apparently stable social structures and the internal composition of the climbing subcultures, which often resisted and challenged formal modes of social organisation. For example, whilst there was a mixed response to the question of how 'wild' or 'rebellious' behaviour and attitudes were among the two groups of climbers, it was 'typical Bradford Lads' to be 'pretty anarchic' and sometimes descending into 'outright criminality' (BL5 2010) and anti-social behaviour. They enjoyed 'monkeying around' performing motorbike stunts, like 'desperados, pirates' (BL2 2010), racing up and down valleys. One member—who went on to become a Classical scholar at Cambridge, no less—reportedly pretended to 'blow up' a famous rock pinnacle in the English Lake District, logo of the elite, upper-class Fell and Rock Climbing Club (FRCC) and England's 'first rock

climb'. Certainly, the loosely grouped 'Lads did not ape the respectable/genteel Establishment of the FRCC. All of the accounts suggest that they looked on the FRCC with a jaundiced eye, consciously dissenting from all the 'nonsense about membership, or office bearers, or rules' (BL2 2010). This is the kernel of the disrespect of the 'Lads.

Likewise, by the late-1970s, the youth-focused climbing scene in Australia had passed from an earlier generation of ex-grammar school boys into the New Wave era, accompanied by a soundtrack of 'no future' (Sex Pistols); 'kill the poor' (Dead Kennedys); 'love will tear us apart' (Joy Division) (NW5 2014). Although apparently separate, punk and the Mt Arapiles social scene were connected. It seems that the punk revolution played back the strangeness and incomprehensibility of the New Wavers to themselves. Not surprisingly, the tendencies towards narcissism, obsessiveness, alienation and an aura of forbidden identity, together with the absence of recognised boundaries and boredom with formal club structures—'too orchestrated ... too much like the society we were trying to get away from' (NW5 2014)—, pushed these inexperienced teenagers to disconnect from society rather like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. As example, they effectively turned the public space at Mt Arapiles into a riotous, semi-private social centre—when weekenders rudely awakened one 'resident'; he would leap out of his tent 'nude' to remonstrate (NW6 2013)! The anarchistic behaviour is quite consistent in reminiscences of the lifestyle, now as then:

During the 70's the hopes and the dreams of the 60s, with the white picket fence and white fluffy dog ... dissipated and just disappeared ... We could see that a lot of our parents were floundering. They were treading water and getting nowhere ... We couldn't see ourselves being burdened or knuckling down and doing the same thing and getting nowhere ... We'll climb now work later ... before we're finally captured and pressed to work and buy a house' (NW5 2014).

Evidence suggested that the era of the Bradford Lads and the New Wave generation were 'one brief foray' before these eclectic groups of free spirits 'had to buckle down' (NW5 2014). By the mid-1950s, many of the remaining 'Lads stopped climbing when they got married, or else were 'called up' for National Service⁶. It is certainly true that climbing equipment during the period

was very rudimentary and it is possible many climbers could not defend the risks set against family life.

In a similar vein, albeit for different reasons, most New Wavers started to exit the ‘scene’ in the mid-1980s. According to one respondent, the period provided him with ‘formative experiences [that] satisfied something inside’, they were the ‘best years of my juvenility’ (NW2 2013). However, by the mid-1980s many began to want the things their parents had achieved: a house, car and new clothes. Not all respondents have chosen recapture.

A minority of respondents continue their resistance to mainstream society: ‘I had assumed that I would drift out of climbing and swap my rope for a lawnmower and a pram. I thought I’d grow up. Not so fast!’ (NW6 2013). At the same time, others have found it possible to make a little bit of money from climbing. For example, by running cafes, becoming outdoor instructors and guides, taking photographs for magazines and gaining limited sponsorship from manufacturers (either financially or, more typically, through the provision of equipment). Ultimately, however, rather than climbing purely for pleasure and adventure, the structure of institutions and the characteristic forms of rationalised society began to ‘repossess’ the majority of respondents—*New Dawn Fades*, perhaps.

Analysis and wider implications

Analysis

A major feature of the two case studies is the depiction of climbing as freedom from and transgression of dominant meanings and values. In this respect, evidence suggests that, as a leisure subculture, rock climbers in the past had less difficulty than do their successors today in presenting subaltern positions of resistance to the rules and regulations vis-à-vis work or to the things on offer in the leisure and consumption society.

Respondents demonstrated a strong identification with the climbing community through the distinctive (anti-establishment) experiences they shared. These included a ‘sense of bonding and dependency (BL2 2010) often developed during time spent ‘getting to places’ (BL3 2010), being a ‘tighter group than many clubs’ (BL4 2011), key players ‘living at Arapiles’ (NW6 2013), ‘camaraderie’ within a group (NW4 2013) and feeling ‘like gladiators’ (NW5 2014). In other words, participants recognise each other and are to some

extent recognised for the distinctive set of values and beliefs that Stebbins (2001) claimed must characterise serious leisure.

These activities are creative, and energetic and potentially transformative, as distinct from casual leisure, which requires neither planning nor skill (Stebbins 1997; 2001). Nevertheless, there was a range of views about how identity proceeded in each group, socially and culturally. Some respondents insisted ‘there was no strong ethics of philosophy, or a [collective] sense of climbing history; everyone sort of made it up as they went’ (NW6 2013). However, others (perhaps the less accomplished, or else due to the predominantly male environment) advanced a quite different view, based on ‘rivalry’ (BL1 2011), ‘hierarchy’ and ‘entourages following the lead climbers out—like Brave Sir Robin in Monty Python’s Holy Grail’ (NW5 2014).

Certainly, no one was—indeed did not wish to be—in charge, (climbing is a good leveller) although ‘[climbing luminary] set himself up on a pedestal surrounded by his many loyal subjects’ (NW6 2013). What emerges is the feeling of two definite ‘scenes’ and many of the early climbers who were ‘pretty anarchic’ (BL5 2010), a ‘wild bunch’ (BL4 2011), where ‘the craic⁷ was fierce, the rivalry intense and the camaraderie roguish’ (NW5 2014). In other words, both groups of climbers for the most part had a freedom and a space for their own cultural activities that is less and less possible today.

Working people earned their mobility, technically as well as socially and culturally, slowly from the mid-twentieth century. This led to communities forming around physical places: for example, convenient pubs, cafes and campsites, all of which helped to maintain group relationships. The stability of these structures, on which endogenous social and cultural capital formation depends, has lost much of its meaning, as the growth in car ownership influences mobility styles that break the necessity of community experiences. A worrying aspect is that the loss of a sense of group belonging and solidarity goes with a growth in travel practices that involve the crude processes of privatisation and individualism (Putnam 2000; Urry 2007).

Lastly, the leisure and culture industry had not yet made any real foray into the case studies, although climbing offered a major lifestyle and identity for its enthusiasts. A very few respondents reported that their ‘interests expanded into different areas’ (NW7 2013) as a practical means of making a living, including guidebook publishing, photography and commercial instructing. However, each successful attempt by a climber to change their leisure time into work created a counter reaction among some other ‘lazy, unwashed,

disorganised types', for whom such imitative behaviour 'looked like soulless hard work' (NW6 2013) and, it is a fair to say, 'humdrum' (NW1 2013); 'being burdened or knuckling down' (NW5 2014). There are members of the Bradford Lads too, who, by no means work shy, made work choices based on maintaining a space and vigour for climbing: 'the only reason he took the job at [textile mill] was because he was on the road to the Lakes' (NW3 2010).

Whether serious leisure activists like rock climbers can continue to resist might depend upon their capacity to adapt some of the variety of ways in which new social movements have challenged the taken-for-granted rules that dominant groups use to frame social encounters. The future of transgression in serious leisure certainly seems worth exploring.

Possible wider implications

Researchers have tended to contrast those activities that require serious understanding, critical judgements and some application, with those which are just there in the background, so to speak, and which offer relatively casual forms of leisure (e.g. Stebbins 1992, 1997, 2001). This study draws attention to the practices of resistance and transgression in the serious leisure subculture of rock climbing and the social order it seeks to challenge.

Other studies of serious leisure undertaken by different researchers suggest similar findings. For example, Franklin-Reible (2006, 69) suggests that deviant activities 'possess the potential to provide a fulfilling leisure experience as well as the potential to build social capital'. An attitude also demonstrated by one group of climbers in Australia studied by Kiewa (2002, 159). Here, the climbers attempted to achieve a 'relative freedom' that retains 'the characteristic of resistance' to 'the encroachment of rationalised society'.

Although I have depicted rock climbing as a serious leisure practice that prioritises expressive identities and alternative lifestyles, it is a fair generalisation to say that the relation between transgression in serious leisure and the expectations of purpose and productivity in society is a largely one-sided affair. The proportion of serious leisure participants who are able to avoid selling out after longer or shorter periods of alternative lifestyles that may offer a challenge to the ways of society is now very small. Currently, the rationalised society appears to keep serious leisure participants integrated within the dominant value patterns through their capacity as consumers of leisure.

On the one hand, the focus on two evanescent climbing subcultures involving youthful light-heartedness and a suspension of (work-like) consequences might appear to militate against concentrating on serious leisure. However, the issues and practices in the two case studies play important roles in the process of identity formation and its associated politics and lifestyles between the two 'neo-tribal groups' (Kiewa 2002, 159; see also, Hetherington 1998).

First, the production of identity involves a high degree of embodiment. Hetherington (1998) looks at questions of embodiment in terms of ideas about 'carnival' (Bakhtin 1984; see also Franklin-Reible 2006). For my respondents, this embodied identity continues to express itself through alternative lifestyles and identification with climbing well into old age. In these and other respects, they have managed to attain a relative freedom, which can be difficult otherwise to maintain under the ubiquitous conditions of contemporary consumer culture. In other words, they still speak of a major lifestyle and identity that functions as a break, as a challenge to the ways of society, that is, the social structure to which they are connected (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Second, certain places, campsites, cafes, crags, hostels, and so forth, took on a social centrality that respondents invested with values that expressed an alternative to existing society, as a space of freedom, resistance and embodied inclusion, all values identifiable with community (Hetherington 1998). For example, the Bradford Lads chose to set up camp in a forgotten barn in the English Lake District, whilst in Australia Mt Arapiles was at the centre of the New Wave social scene. Both groups turned these 'no-places' on the margins into counter sites central to their alternative lifestyles (Hetherington 1998). Hetherington utilises Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia to analyse such spaces as places for alternative ordering. These centres, from cooperatives to self-managed online spaces, imply different conditions to exogenous societies and become the basis of new modes of organisation that incorporate endogenous perceptions.

In spite of this, an emerging proposition is that trends over the past forty years have taken away the spirit of community from serious leisure activities. It appears that rock climbers in the past may have experienced fewer controls than those in the present. The implication is that the leisure and culture industry today is very good at recapturing acts of resistance and transgression. Nonetheless, some contemporary authors (Standing 2011; Swann 2014) have written of reappraising collective action in the manner of the commons, as a

counter-balance or antidote to some of the more destructive features of capitalism in the early twenty-first century. If confirmed empirically, then there are implications for research into alternative communities. It would suggest that rock climbers in the present might take a lead from new social movements like the creative commons to revive types of embodied nonconformity and question the viability of alternative community experiences that challenge current privatised and individualised styles of leisure consumption society.

Conclusions

In the climbing communities that I studied, we can best understand rock climbing, after Stebbins, as a serious leisure activity. Analysis of the free spirited Bradford Lads more than half a century ago and the riotous behaviour of the New Wavers in the early 1980s, draws attention to rich and complex forms of social dis/organisation that are constructed around an immersive recreational pursuit. Long before the trend for professional jobholders to attempt to establish alternative communities or ways of life in order to reduce the stress of frenzied labour and consumption, these historical groups of rock climbers found spaces associated with ideas of freedom and transgression. This finding is consistent with previous analyses of serious leisure behaviour that challenge and even break with structuration in a more general sense. The significance of understanding rock climbing as serious leisure and as a source of transgression for those who adopt values and behaviours perceived as strange and incomprehensible within society is that it allows for a further exploration of recreation participants who have chosen alternative identities and lifestyles. Taking the practice of serious leisure as a model, I suggest that the identities and lifestyles in question stand in opposition to a growing casualisation of leisure and challenge us to re-examine the constraints on transgression more broadly.

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Notes

¹ The first national park, fittingly the Peak District, opened in 1951.

² The Duke of Devonshire, an influential peerage of England since the sixteenth century, owns the Chatsworth Estate.

³ Pegs or Pitons are steel pegs with a circular hole or eye at one end that will accommodate a karabiner (a steel or alloy chain link with a spring-loaded gate). They come in different thicknesses and lengths and climbers hammered them into cracks and holes in the rock. They

were commonly used pre and post WWII before the development of modern protection devices.

⁴ All climbs present challenges of varying difficulty and complexity. These can be physical, psychological and technical, or a combination of all three. In climbing terminology, the grade of a particular climb or route provides an appreciation of these challenges and the more difficult and complex the challenges the higher the grade. Grading systems vary from one country to another.

⁵ A 'sandbag' is a climbing route that receives a much lower grade than deserved. 'Sandbagging' refers to the act of hiding the difficulty of a route to someone early in an engagement.

⁶ From 1 January 1949, healthy British males 17 to 21 years old served in the armed forces for 18 months. Call-ups formally ended on 31 December 1960.

⁷ Irish word for fun/enjoyment brought into the English language, usually when mixed with alcohol and/or music.