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Extreme dude! A phenomenological perspective on the extreme sport experience

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Extreme Dude!

A Phenomenological Perspective on the Extreme Sport Experience

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

George Eric Brymer

BSc(Hons), MSc(Dist), Grad. Cert. in teaching in Higher Education (Dist), Grad. Cert.
in Bus.

**Faculties of Education and Psychology
2005**

Thesis Certification

I, Eric Brymer, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculties of Education and Psychology, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at another institution.

Eric Brymer

1 May 2005

Abstract

The phrase 'extreme sport' has been adopted as an umbrella term to signify everything from youth sports to lifestyle sports, from skateboarding to big wave surfing. Inevitably this broad definition has created a confusing array of seemingly dissimilar research findings. This study revisits the extreme sport definition to include only those activities where a mismanaged mistake or accident would most likely result in death, as opposed to injury. A broad hermeneutic phenomenological approach has been embraced to reveal findings that critique the assumed relationship to risk-taking, the death wish and the concept of 'No Fear' and reposition the experience in a hitherto unexplored manner. Data sources include direct interviews with male and female participants over 30 years of age and other first and third hand accounts. Participants report deep inner transformations that influence world views and meaningfulness, feelings of coming home and authentic integration as well as a freedom beyond the socio-cultural that is best described as a relaxation from mental chatter. Excitingly participants also describe moments of ineffability that include enhanced sensory, mental and physical prowess, perceptions of time slowing, returning to a primal state, feelings of floating and flying and a deep intimacy with the natural world. Phenomenologically, these experiences have been interpreted as transcendence of time, other, space and body. The implication of these findings is that the young, male, thrill-seeking, adrenaline junky stereotype is exposed as an over simplification. Instead extreme sport participation points to a more potent, life-enhancing endeavour worthy of further investigation.

Acknowledgements

As I sit once again struggling to compose just the right words it is finally dawning on me that this project is near completion, a project that has inevitably engaged numerous people in numerous ways. Thus this section is a welcome opportunity to revisit the process in order to recognize those without whom this thesis would never have been completed.

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Foreword

This thesis represents the culmination of an interest that has spanned almost two decades, of which only the last four years have been of a formal nature. I have had to ride an enormous learning curve in that period which often left me exhausted and questioning my sanity. Still if I can claim nothing else at least I can now say and spell phenomenology with confidence. Thus not only have I been surprised and excited by the findings in this study and the implications that they present to understanding human potential but I have also been pleasantly exhilarated by the research process itself. Still with time and the benefit of hindsight I now realise that there are a number of factors (perhaps best described as a wish list) that might have benefited this study and would definitely be beneficial for future studies.

First and perhaps most important is the use of video when interviewing. Whilst such a suggestion would inevitably influence ethical requirements I believe the inclusion of video interviews would enhance the analysis process. My particular point is the importance of combining body language with the spoken word. Whilst I attempted to keep accurate diary notes I found that on many occasions I wished I could revisit the interview to make note of facial expressions. The use of video would also be extended to collecting video material of interview participants in action.

A second wish would be the inclusion of brain activity mapping. Undoubtedly phenomenology does not require the use of physical measures and neither should it. However, it would have been fascinating to follow brain activity as, for example, a B.A.S.E. jumper approaches, jumps and lands. Perhaps even to relate the reflected experience to the physical. My third inclusion would be the addition of photographic representations of interview participants in action. The main reason for this is to help clarify an extreme sport as distinct from its cousins.

My fourth improvement would be to fully explore the phenomenological structure of each distinct activity before attempting to consider the phenomenological essence of the global concept of extreme sports. That is it might have been interesting to determine the phenomenological structure of say B.A.S.E., of big wave surfing or of waterfall kayak-

ing before considering how they all relate. Whilst this study clearly demonstrates that there is such a thing as an extreme sport experience such an approach would add value to future studies by exploring the uniqueness of each activity. For example in the process of undertaking this study mountaineers spoke about being joined by an essentially invisible third person, whilst other extreme sports did not speak of such a phenomenon. However, to effectively undertake this approach it would be imperative to ensure an appropriate number of participants from each activity; a luxury I neither had the time nor the required number of participants to enjoy.

My fifth and final point relates to the research process itself. This study required a deep understanding of phenomenology and the phenomenological process, including the realities of bracketing. My initial sojourn into developing a literature review ended up confusing the research process as I found it extremely difficult to bracket those descriptions and theories already discussed as part of this review. Whilst I believe that I have been ultimately successful it would have been more useful to understand the phenomenological process first. In this way the literature would be better explored.

Still, despite this wish list the study has been successfully completed and is presented in the pages that follow. Though, of course, this is only the beginning. Whilst it would be ethically difficult to create cause and effect research it might be possible to follow would-be participants through their own personal journey to determine the strength and direction of the transformations. As suggested above future research might also help realise an understanding of the brain processes involved. Phenomenologically it might be possible to explore the structure described as natural world as teacher more deeply. As it would be intriguing to explore the type of freedom described here as the release of fear and mental chatter. It might also be interesting to explore the role of certain leisure activities in the development of human potential. However, for me the most intriguing area of research relates to the possibilities uncovered by descriptions of time slowing, enhanced sensory, physical and mental abilities. That is those experiences that lie beyond the norm and yet open up possibilities for us all. Those experiences that point to a deeper comprehension of what it means to be human.

The Journey Begins

∞

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

(The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost, 1999)

∞

The Road less Travelled

the journey begins

My exploration into the extreme sport experience involved a considerable number of formal and informal discussions and experiences well before I was accepted to read for a PhD. I met with numerous readers in numerous universities, spoke at conferences, discussed extreme sports in cafés and balanced all this with conversations with participants. Over the years that I have been interested in the extreme sport experience these informal conversations and more formal presentations have invariably resulted in posited explanations that attempt to box the experience into people taking crazy risks, a desire for death or the undertakings of the fearless. That is, explanations and view points have been voiced in the negative (Groves, 1987). A realisation echoed by Bane (1996) in his attempt to explore the appeal of extreme sports with friends and acquaintances: ‘The answers have a boring monotony about them: Because some people are stone crazy. Or, because some people are addicted to adrenalin’ (Bane, 1996, p. 23).

On the surface it seems clear - and I can fully comprehend the logic - to participate in an activity, for fun, that has a strong chance of resulting in one’s death has got to be crazy. After all why would someone want to increase their chances of personal physical, mental and emotional annihilation? We are not talking breaks, scratches and bruises; we are talking about the end of life. The extrapolation is clear, one must be crazy to spend leisure time pursuing such an activity, taking unnecessary risks, have no respect for life, or if not crazy then fearless. Not just any kind of fearlessness but an unhealthy one, one that means life has no worth. There are even web-based discussions on whether society should ban such crazy, unnecessary activities (e.g. BBC news online talking point, BBC, 1998).

As I became more familiar with the written texts of researchers and other ‘objective’ studies I was noting a similar set of preconceptions. Yet I was finding that participants did not seem to share these viewpoints. Perhaps then Ogilvie (1974) had made a valid point, ‘interpretive difficulties arise’ (Ogilvie, 1974, p. 88) when non-participants attempt to understand the experience by metaphorically placing themselves in the extreme participant’s shoes. Perhaps even the expert ‘conjures up a wide range of negative images’ (Ogilvie, 1974, p. 88). As Celsi, Rose and Leigh (1993) noted ‘all skydivers will say “to experience it is the only way to understand it”’ (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 13). Perhaps a point most succinctly expressed by the immortal words of the great mountaineer,

Edmund Hillary 'if you have to ask the question you will never understand why' (Hillary cited in Ogilvie, 1974, p. 94). Yet ask we have.

I must admit that this path of exploration began with a state of inner clarity as to what I was studying, however this soon turned into a state of utter confusion. Whilst I was sure what an extreme sport was in my mind, I was finding little evidence to support my perceptions. At first I was concerned by the focus on activities being high-risk based and then I found it difficult to determine, from the studies, what level of activity was being studied. 'Extreme', 'lifestyle', 'alternative' to name but a few were used interchangeably by serious researchers as if describing the same type of activity (C. Palmer, 2004; Wheaton, 2004). Yet many of the activities discussed were far from extreme. For example, a kayaker on white water can be a relative novice on grade 2 and would hardly be facing death but would need to be extremely advanced to paddle grade 6 plus or waterfalls, where death is a possibility, yet this factor was often not considered. In non-formal and other mediums I also found a multitude of unrelated activities all sheltering under the extreme sport umbrella.

On my journey I began to realise that some of the inefficiencies brought out by scientific and other third party mediums could be balanced by considering some of the many personal accounts that exist. In these chapters I have specifically considered those accounts that come within the research boundaries set in chapter IV. Also those books and articles that detail only technical information or chronological details of a journey have been included, sparingly.

For me, an exploration into the extreme sport experience cannot be effectively conducted without considering what is already known. Certain individuals have sought and developed skills in activities that, on the surface, seem to have little purpose. Effective extreme sport participation requires a high level of skill, and therefore hard work. Getting it wrong would most likely result in death. There is little if any extrinsic reward, in the form of fame or fortune, for a majority of participants. The nature of an extreme sport means that the participant is subject to the whims of the natural world. No water in the rivers means no kayaking; the wind in the wrong direction means no B.A.S.E. jumping. Yet despite these obvious hazards and constraints people still choose to participate.

the journey begins

This thesis is about the experiences of those who participate at the extreme of their chosen sport. My aim has always been to stay true to the experience and develop an understanding of what participants consider to be the essential elements of extreme sports. Thus a multitude of activities have been included. On the surface, for example, mountaineering and big wave surfing may not immediately strike one as being in accord and indeed there may be distinct mountaineering essences that are not big wave surfing essences. However, the focus is on the extreme sport experience and as such only those comparable elements have been explored. This in itself has presented an enormous challenge that has opened up an opportunity for me to comprehend the experience as experienced.

This thesis is structured as three distinct sections. Each section is introduced and summarised with a preamble and a post-amble. The preamble acts as both an introduction into the section and a means to make explicit any relevant thoughts and beliefs about the section. The post-amble attempts to succinctly précis the essence of the section. The first section, section 1, includes three chapters that detail the philosophical, theoretical and practical scaffold that has framed the research project. The second section also includes three chapters and considers those perceptions that have been most typically associated with the extreme sport experience (risk, death and fear) and critiques such views against the words and perceptions of participants. The third section is made up of four chapters and delves more deeply into what the participants are describing when asked to express their experience in words. To be true to the experience all chapters are designed to stand alone and are a mixture of reviewed and critiqued literature, examples from findings, and a discussion that brings in literature and information from other fields of thought.

The sections (1, 2 and 3) have been created to lead into the aim of this theses; that is to gain a phenomenological description of the extreme sport experience. Each section and each chapter is also presented with a mixture of images designed to aid this process. It is not until the final chapter that the full phenomenological description is attempted. So if phenomenology is your sole interest then skip to the final chapter now. However, you may be missing something exciting; something perhaps only experienced by a few but arguably wished for by many of us. As Schultheis (1996) so eloquently observed ‘something is definitely happening Out There’ (Schultheis, 1996, foreword).

There is a Mystery Zone out there, beyond the edge of the human world, in the back country, the empty skies and waters of the planet (Schultheis, 1996, foreword).

On my journey I have had the privilege of meeting many extreme sport participants and have to agree with Olsen (2001) who wrote in the introduction of her book on women who participate in extreme environments that ‘they are pioneers, exceptional examples, women who should inspire all of us to be all that we can be’ (Olsen, 2001, p. 3). That is I have found all those I have had the pleasure of speaking to, even outside of this thesis, wonderfully inspiring people who, like others taking the road less travelled, could teach us a great deal about what it means to be human, if we could but stop for a while and listen.

the journey begins

Section 1

☪

To look at any thing,
If you would know that thing,
You must look at it long:
To look at this green and say
"I have seen spring in these Woods,"
Will not do - you must
Be the thing you see:
You must be the dark snakes of
Stems and ferny plumes of leaves,
You must enter in
To the small silences between
The leaves,
You must take the time
And touch the very peace
They issue from.

(To Look at Any Thing by John Moffitt cited in Anderson, 1998b, p.
149)

☪

- Framing the Exploration -

A photograph of a surfer riding a wave. The surfer is shirtless and wearing red shorts, leaning forward on a surfboard. The wave is breaking, creating white foam and spray. The background is a bright blue sky.

Preamble

Phenomenology can be considered as a philosophy, methodology and research process (van Manen, 1990, 1997b). This section outlines strengths and weaknesses of phenomenology and suggests extensions and alternative ways of knowing that enabled the processes used in this study. However, before detailing how this section is organised I feel that I must declare my bias. For as Gadamer (1977) observed the meaning of phenomenology is always related to a researcher's own philosophical standpoint.

As a global concept phenomenology has fitted easily within my personal world-view, essentially I believe in a reality that can be known through its indelible connection to a knower. That is, the knower comprehends the known through the act of knowing. Whilst all three (knower, knowing and known) are inseparable it is still possible to define the known. For me then, the overall concept of phenomenology has been influenced by my personal experience and the desire to develop fresh understandings. However, the details of the philosophy and the explication of this understanding has been an altogether different experience. Contrary to the advice of van Manen (1990; 1997b) who advocated the importance of continued writing I must declare allegiance with Gadamer (1977) who considered the experience of doing and reflecting on phenomenology the best route to enable the clarification processes. Devenish (2002) succinctly described this struggle as a search for clarity on how to apply the philosophy in a research project.

Much of this section has been written after the fact, as a result of doing phenomenology I have begun to grasp the intricate make up of phenomenology. I admit to be just a beginner on the journey. Sometimes this journey has been hindered by language that is shrouded in 'technicalese' and sometimes through my inability to grasp the intricacies that form the detailed structure of phenomenology. Having admitted these weaknesses I must also express my gratitude to the writings of Spinelli (1989; 1997), a far more experienced and learned follower of phenomenology who seemed to directly articulate my thoughts.

Phenomenological philosophers are notorious for the obscurity of their language and the convoluted manner in which they express their ideas (Heidegger, for example, is a perfect case in point), so that, at first, it may seem that phenomenology's central arguments are not likely to be easily grasped, or correctly understood, by non-philosophers (Spinelli, 1989, p. xii).

Here I must further state my philosophical location; I position myself firmly outside of the field of formal philosophy. My education and training has scarcely considered the philosophical disciplines let alone critiqued specific philosophical debates or philosophers. Still, this study depends on an understanding of phenomenology and the position that I have taken. As such I have attempted to write this section in a manner that I would like to have read. In other words the style I have chosen is for those who do not claim to be philosophers, as I do not hold to that claim. Whilst I have brought in technical language where it seemed appropriate my main aim was to explicate what phenomenology is and how I followed the process.

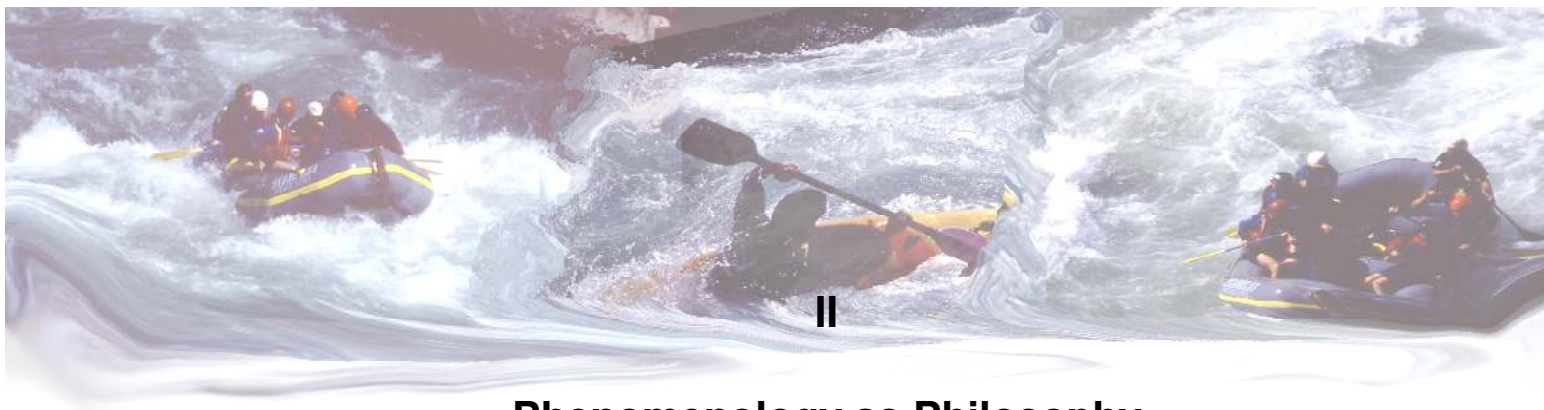
This section then has been designed to plot a route through phenomenology that explains my methodological process. However to understand this methodological process it is important to have a rudimentary understanding of how the philosophy positions itself in the worldview of today. Equally, for this study to claim allegiance with phenomenology it is important to understand what phenomenology is and how the methods used to explore the extreme sport experience are indeed phenomenological. As such this section is in three parts.

The first chapter outlines the philosophy of phenomenology and critically assesses its role in examining the human experience. The second chapter considers a more detailed approach to phenomenological methodology and the third chapter shows how these theoretical perspectives were applied. My decision to separate philosophy from process is not meant to indicate that there is a separate system that supports a phenomenological philosophy. Indeed, as the reader will see, it is perhaps a falsehood to consider that philosophy, method and process can be written as distinct elements. As it is perhaps a falsehood to consider that the phenomenological process can be systematically determined. However, for better or for worse, I have conceptualised them as three parts of the same whole for ease of understanding.

As the flow of this section culminates in a definition and detailed description of the data gathering and meaning making process it is important to understand what world-view frames the enquiry. Asking a question from a world-view that considers no object reality implies a different set of assumptions from one that considers that object reality can

framing the exploration

be defined. Equally asking a question from the point of view that reality is constructed would lead to a different set of assumptions about the answer than asking a question from the point of view that answers can lead to knowledge about a phenomenon that truly exists. It is therefore important that the framework that underlies this study is explicitly determined and its roots appropriately explored. The following chapters consider these points whilst paying attention to the unique requirements in exploring the extreme sport experience. As Devenish (2002) noted the application of phenomenology in a specific project may depend on the experience of the researcher and the project in question. However, precise procedures cannot replace the 'need for a careful understanding of the theoretical basis of philosophical phenomenology' (Devenish, 2002, p. 19).



II

Phenomenology as Philosophy

Most of the misunderstandings of phenomenology come from interpretations that are still so caught up in the problems and positions of modern thinking, still so trapped by the Cartesian and Lockean tradition, that they fail to grasp what is new in phenomenology. Phenomenology calls for a major readjustment in the understanding of what philosophy is, and many people cannot make this change, because they cannot free themselves from their background and their cultural context. Phenomenology restores the possibilities of ancient philosophy, even while accounting for new dimensions such as the presence of modern science. Phenomenology provides one of the best examples of how a tradition can be reappropriated and brought to life again in a new context.

(Sokolowski, 2000, p. 62)

The aim of this chapter is to briefly consider the philosophy of phenomenology and provide an underlying foundation for phenomenological exploration. This chapter also considers how phenomenology has been extended by different world views. The underlying intention is to demonstrate how, and in what form, phenomenology provides a basis for the specific context of this study. As such, this chapter also resolves to reframe what Merleau-Ponty (1999) appreciated as the prejudices and judgments of extreme objective or subjective world views. Still, as Charles Laughlin a professor of anthropology noted the term phenomenology needs some clarification as it is often confused with any experientially based methodology (Laughlin, 2001). A point also succinctly made by Varela (1996) who summarised his review of a text supposedly critiquing phenomenology as phenomenologically ignorant. As Sokolowski (2000), in the quote introducing

framing the exploration

this chapter, implies this ignorance is a symptom of current Anglo-American philosophical thought.

Essentially then, this chapter outlines the ‘what’ of phenomenology. In some ways this chapter has been written upside down. That is, my phenomenological journey started with a multitude of diverse readings of phenomenological studies. I slowly began to realise that not all phenomenologies were the same and that, in actuality, some studies that were presented as phenomenology were not. From this point I began to form a process of categorisation that clarified my understandings. I began to associate some studies with transcendental phenomenology, others with existential phenomenology and so on. At a certain stage in this journey it became clear that a great deal of phenomenological writings were of little use to this study. At this point my focus changed to that of considering what phenomenology was and how it could be used in this study.

It is not my aim to explicate or explain every adaptation or phenomenological development as to do so would miss the point, those who are interested in developing an understanding of how phenomenology could be used in their own situation would be better developing their own understandings. As has already been noted phenomenology is now a vast field of study that expands the world and that is realised in a multitude of ways, from social phenomenology to transpersonal phenomenology to neurophenomenology (Laughlin, 2001; Laughlin, McManus, & d’Aquili, 1990; Varela, 1996). However to map the journey I took, certain pre-developments are required. As an analogy, it is important to climb the trunk of the tree before one can reach the specific branch that holds the specific fruit that held the attention of the original desire. The journey I took started at many fruits and worked backwards through a multitude of twigs and their ensuing branches to eventually uncover my comprehension of the trunk. However, I have written this chapter starting at the trunk and mapping only the route that eventually lead to the fruit that was most appropriate for this study.

Phenomenology as philosophy: An introduction

Phenomenology as currently debated was formally introduced to twentieth-century thinking through the seminal works of Husserl in the early 1900’s (Embree, 2001; Macann, 1993; Sokolowski, 2000). However, the term, ‘phenomenology’ had been part

of philosophical language prior to the writings of Husserl and the structuring of phenomenology as a philosophy arguably attributed to Franz Brentano, Husserl's teacher (Sokolowski, 2000). Equally the practice of phenomenology has been traced still further back and attributed to philosophers from the wisdom traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism (D. W. Smith, 2003). Still as Sokolowski (2000) noted Edmund Husserl's (1900, 1901 cited in Sokolowski, 2000) work, 'Logical Investigations,' has most often been considered the first true phenomenological work. Essentially, Husserl's aim was to turn toward the world as it is experienced in its felt immediacy (Husserl, 1977). In the words of Abram (1996):

Unlike the mathematics-based sciences, phenomenology would seek not to explain the world but to describe as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arrive in our direct, sensorial experience. By thus returning to the taken-for-granted realm of subjective experience, not to explain it but simply to pay attention to its rhythms and textures, not to capture or control it but simply to become familiar with its diverse modes of appearance-and ultimately to give voice to its enigmatic and ever shifting patterns-phenomenology would articulate the ground of the other sciences. It was Husserl's hope that phenomenology as a rigorous "science of experience," would establish the other sciences at last upon a firm footing-not, perhaps, as solid as the fixed and finished "object" upon which those science *pretend* to stand, but the only basis possible for a knowledge that necessarily emerges from our lived experience of the things around us (Abram, 1996, pp. 35-36).

The philosophy developed through two main schools in Germany, Gottingen and Munich, and eventually into France and world-wide (Embree, 2001). These developmental stages also initiated a number of phenomenological schools of thought and philosophical thinkers. As such, the field of phenomenology provides numerous examples, often seemingly dissimilar depending on the world-view that one wishes to follow (Sokolowski, 2000).

Crotty (1996a) observed that these diverse phenomenological disciplines are more easily sectioned into two categories, a traditional category and a new category. Whilst the language used to describe both categories indicates a uniform phenomenology, the definitions placed on the language tend to be vastly different. Essentially, the phenomenology that follows the new route sets out to understand the 'subjective experience of the people it studies' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 3). The traditional phenomenology is concerned with the objects of human experiences. That is, traditional phenomenology

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enquires into what the phenomenon is, as distinct from how we as humans subjectively experience or make meaning from the experience of the phenomenon. In essence, the aim of traditional phenomenology is to pave a route back ‘to the things themselves’ (Spinelli, 1989, p. 16). As Husserl (1917) once observed ‘to every object there corresponds an ideally closed system of truths that are true of it’ (Husserl, 1917, para 6). However, as I shall outline in the following texts even this claim has a multitude of representations (Willis, 2001).

Crotty (1996b) believes that whilst the new phenomenology has a role in modern research something valuable is lost when this new phenomenology is followed blindly.

That so called phenomenology [*new phenomenology*] simply describes the state of affairs instead of problematising it. It looks to what is taken for granted but fails to call it into question: on the contrary, it perpetuates traditional meanings and reinforces current understandings (Crotty, 1996b, p. 7 – [*brackets mine*]).

The distinction between these two philosophical camps is an important consideration for the satisfactory undertaking of this study. Essentially, on the one hand phenomenology could support a process that investigates an individualistic, subjective journey into understanding extreme sports. Whilst on the other hand the research could be investigating what the experience is. Equally, an explicit following of the new phenomenology would negate the need to follow writings and understandings that underlie the traditional forms of phenomenology. However, it may also be that the two distinct camps do not exist as wholly separate entities. That in fact the dissimilarities of style within each camp are so vast that the philosophy of phenomenology has become a continuum with the traditional and new forms positioned at opposite ends.

For clarification, understanding what phenomenology is may require a brief sojourn into the history of phenomenological philosophy as a means to differentiate between phenomenology and other qualitative frameworks. However, this sojourn does not imply a requirement for blindly following the original philosophy. As for example it may be necessary to explore Henry Ford’s model ‘T’ in the process of defining ‘car’. The importance of this process is in the definition, once ‘car’ has been defined and one knows that one is about to drive a ‘car’, as opposed to, say, a train, it is not necessary to drive the original model ‘T’. In fact the car has been developed to such an extent that a mod-

ern version would be more appropriate. It may even be the case that once 'car' has been clearly defined one may need to design a specific version for the specific journey. The following explorations seek to outline an understanding of phenomenology that is appropriate to this study. In the same way that phenomenology attempts to go back to the things themselves this section attempts to describe the thing called phenomenology.

Phenomenology and intentionality

Phenomenology as a philosophy recognises that consciousness is consciousness of something (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). Consciousness does not exist as a solo entity it must be directed towards an object (Bourgeois, 2002). However as I shall show under the transpersonal phenomenological section this view may also limit the complete understanding of the human experience. This premise lies at the core of phenomenological philosophy in that the concept signifies a realisation that we do not just exist inside ourselves; there is an 'outside world'. In the words of Sokolowski (2000) 'things do appear to us, things truly are disclosed, and we, on our part, do display both to ourselves and to others the way things are' (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 12). The technical term for this phenomenological doctrine is 'intentionality'.

Husserl adopted the term 'intentionality' from the work of Brentano, a descriptive psychologist (Crotty, 1996b). This concept differs from an empty or passive consciousness that may be attributed to empiricists as it does to those that consider that whilst we may develop knowledge of the 'appearance of things (*phenomena*)' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 38) 'we can never know the things in themselves (*noema*)' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 38). Intentionality, describes a clear understanding or grasping of reality, a state whereby object and subject are connected, where unity exists.

This is not to say that thought is always an active process as on occasion it may be that thought is more receptive (Willis, 2001). Equally, intentionality does not signify an intent or purpose. Crotty (1996b) in his critical analysis of thirty or so studies that explicitly claimed to be examining a phenomenon using phenomenology clearly noted this mis-construction of the term intentionality.

Here the everyday meaning on 'intention' seems to have taken over. In phenomenology, intentionality does not refer to conscious deliberation, or to goal-

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oriented behaviour, or even to the purposive activity based on habit or routine. It is an epistemological concept (for some phenomenologists, an ontological concept also) and not a psychological one. It has to do with union of object and subject (Crotty, 1996b, p. 42).

In human terms, intentionality allows for a common world, a consciousness of something that is not purely subjective (Sokolowski, 2000). And herein lies the ultimate goal of phenomenology the study of the object or phenomenon.

However, phenomenology rejects Cartesian dualism that considers mind and body as two distinct things (MacDonald, 2001) and objectivist opinion that the world is filled with objects that exist independent of human experiences (Crotty, 1996b). The point of phenomenology is that ‘there is no thing, which in any meaningful sense, exists independently of consciousness’ (Crotty, 1996b, p. 46). Essentially the reality that is to be studied is forever located in consciousness. That is a phenomenon does not exist as ‘an event in “itself”’ (Churchill, 2002, p. 89) but ‘as something that occurs “for someone”’ (Churchill, 2002, p. 89).

Intending in the pure phenomenological sense of the word differs in structure depending on the ‘object’ being intended. However, it is not the role of this preamble of the philosophy of phenomenology to detail the precise systems of all intentionalities. Suffice to say that memories, pictures, words and so forth have different intentional systems. For this study, one of the major concepts within intentionality is the concept of presence/absence. That is intending can be of an object that is present or one that is absent. This concept is important in the fact that it allows for the possibility of the description of absent objects that may be concealed or beyond our current comprehension. Equally, memories are the reliving of past intentionalities (Sokolowski, 2000). However, it may also be that as Searle (1999) noted ‘all intentional activity goes on against a background of *abilities*’ (Searle, 1999, p. 7), a point that is difficult to confirm through phenomenological methodology.

Noema and noesis

Inextricably linked to intentionality are the *noema* and *noesis*. To some extent the previous section has already shed light on their meaning as represented through

phenomenological philosophy. The aim, here, is to explicitly determine their meaning and relationship processes.

As I have attempted to clarify phenomenology considers that consciousness has to be consciousness of something. The noema is the 'what' of consciousness, that is, the object aspect of intentionality. The noesis is the 'how' or process through which we define experience (Spinelli, 1989), the intentional acts. Sokolowski (2000) considers both these terms as positioned well within a language he terms *transcendentalese* (language modified specifically for transcendental phenomenology). The importance of this consideration is that both the noema and noesis describe the 'what' and 'how' as considered through the phenomenological attitude, as distinct from the natural attitude.

The phenomenological attitude

Leading on from the concept of intentionality and the noema and noesis, the phenomenological attitude emphasises the importance of suspending or neutralising natural intentions. That is, when intentions are contemplated 'we should refrain from judging until the evidence is clear' (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 49). Technically this has been described as *époché* (Crotty, 1996b) whereby beliefs, attitudes, valuations, judgements and natural tendencies are suspended in a phenomenological desire to consider the intended object as it is (Balaban, 2002). As Balaban observed, phenomenological praxis even attempts to be free 'from falling into an intellectualistic reflection that substitutes itself for original thought' (Balaban, 2002, p. 106). In practice this is undertaken through a process termed bracketing (Luft, 2002), but I shall return to this concept later. For now it is important to appreciate that such an attitude encourages an understanding that should be holistic as opposed to partial. Phenomenological understanding requires the appreciation of science as a whole, rather than partial science; an understanding of being for being's sake.

It is not the intention of phenomenological philosophy to negate the validity of natural attitudes. In fact as Sokolowski (2000) pointed out philosophy can never substitute for the truth of natural attitudes. Phenomenology relies on the natural attitudes as a means to access things and world-views. It is only once information has been accessed that phenomenology can help clarify concepts. For example, phenomenology views a mem-

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ory as a reliving of a past perception (Rinofner, 2002). That is, a perception that once was is reactivated as ‘not just an object but an object as presenting itself there and then, and yet presenting itself again here and now, but only as past’ (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 68). However, memories are often illusive as the imagination may impose an aspect of deception. Again this is not to say that memory should be discarded, merely to emphasise a task of phenomenology as a potential process for distinguishing appropriate perceptual structures. Another perspective linked to memory is the role of the perceiver or self, initiating the memory. A memory requires the recollection of a previous self and the interaction of the self as memory maker. As such this interaction formulates the establishment of self as currently experienced.

Temporality is another concept that phenomenology explicitly examines. World time relates to clocks and calendar time. Internal time relates to conscious and experiential life. The third level of time, consciousness of internal time relates to the awareness that an individual has about internal time. The phenomenological description of time therefore includes the subjective experience of internal time and the objective experience of world time (Rinofner, 2002). However, underlying both these versions of time is a far deeper level; an understanding of time that has been presented as the clarification of the structure of memory. Sokolowski (2000) explains the phenomenon using the metaphor of frames in a movie film. To remember a previous frame assumes an awareness of past. Otherwise the ‘recollection’ of the previous frame would be presented as present with no attachment to past. Equally anticipation of future frames provides a similar quandary. It is these types of experience that the third level seeks to describe. Descriptions of this level of time rely on ‘metaphor and other tropes’ (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 145).

The phenomenological attitude solicits the adoption of a different point of view. One that is more radical and comprehensive than any other (Sokolowski, 2000). Essentially the phenomenologist must view the study in question as if being a disengaged observer, an onlooker or contemplator (Rinofner, 2002). For Merleau-Ponty (1999) this is akin to observing the world in a state of wonder, as if the familiar is suddenly unfamiliar. Thus, phenomenology is, in its simplest form, a method for exploring the human experience and defining its nature from a view-point that requires the transcendence of cultural conditioning and its ensuing understanding of self and consciousness.

Phenomenology and the human experience

Embree (2001) the principal editor for the Encyclopaedia of Phenomenology has described the development of phenomenology as a stage process. For Embree, whilst a number of traditions had connections with phenomenology, not all were phenomenological. Embree posited a five-stage process, four of which are historical and the fifth prepositional. Essentially phenomenology has moved from a realistic phenomenology through a constitutive phenomenology, existential phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology and is entering a phenomenology of the new millennium. Whether this new phenomenology is involved in exploring the natural world and non-human life or culture its essence will be collective. Van Manen (2000) on the other hand succinctly defines the orientations of phenomenology as a tree structure with, transcendental, existential, hermeneutic, linguistic, ethical and phenomenology of practice as its branches. Spiegelberg (1982) in his volume on the phenomenological movement notes how phenomenology has evolved as a function of cross fertilisation with other philosophies and modes of thought.

The following underlines those traditions that are phenomenological and that have in some way influenced my thinking and the development of the process used. To start the discourse I have chosen what could be considered as the trunk of the phenomenological research tree, transcendental phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology

The original adoption of phenomenology is the *transcendental phenomenology* outlined by Husserl as a way of ‘training the mind to perceive and intuit its own essential processes’ (Laughlin et al., 1990, p. 25). In Spiegelberg’s (1981) view the phenomenology of Husserl is phenomenology at its most rigorous. Essentially, this phenomenological theory, as determined by Husserl, is a ‘method of self-discovery’ (Laughlin et al., 1990, p. 26).

The term *method* is not used here merely in the ‘small m’ sense of a specific sociological or psychological technique. Rather, the claim of phenomenology to the status of methodology is radical: it is nothing less than a spiritual discipline with all the attendant techniques and intuitive insights requisite for leaving the psyche of the practitioner essentially changed (Laughlin et al., 1990, p. 26).

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Husserl's aim was to develop a philosophy that would underlie all other philosophies whereby the need for a multitude of systems would no longer be required (Crotty, 1996b), a philosophy that searched for a knowledge, understanding and explication of reality. Transcendental phenomenology searches for objects through subjective consciousness. The ultimate aim is to return to immediate or primordial experience through intuition or insights. Moustakas (1994), a self-proclaimed follower of Husserl, noted that transcendental phenomenology was transcendental because 'it moves beyond the everyday to the pure ego in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Moustakas also noted the inseparable nature of the process of transcendental reduction, which in a phenomenological sense signifies the journey back to intentionalities (Sokolowski, 2000). To this aim Husserl specifically and deliberately refrained from building a philosophy that could be precisely ordered.

For Moustakas (1994) however, the application of transcendental phenomenology to the study of human experiences can be summarised in nine principles. First, an unbiased focus on the things as they are given. Second, a whole examination of the entity from a multitude of perspectives, sides and angles. Third, Moustakas noted that the appreciation of the essence of a thing is obtained through intuition, insights and experiences. Fourth, transcendental phenomenology is interested in descriptions as opposed to explanations. Fifth, the researcher is generally involved in or has a passion for the knowledge sought. For Moustakas this is a personal, autobiographical journey. Sixth, subject and object are interconnected. Seventh, every perception on reality begins with the researchers own experience whilst allowing for the intersubjective nature of things. Principle eight recognises that the researchers own experiences provide the principal data. Principle nine emphasises the importance of constructing the question effectively. Whether stated in terms of general principles or overall concepts transcendental phenomenology as outlined by Husserl is concerned with general universal principles (Spiegelberg, 1981).

Existential phenomenology

However, for some, phenomenology moved away from this 'transcendental idealism' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 31). The early Heidegger (1996), a colleague of Husserl, has often been credited as encouraging more of an existential view of phenomenology based on a

number of criticisms of Husserl's viewpoint (Hanna, 1993a). Though, the criticisms have been considered contentious and based on a limited understanding of Husserlian phenomenology (MacDonald, 2001). Followers of the existential view of phenomenology include such eminent philosophers as Simone de Beauvoir (in Levering & van Manen, 2002), Jean-Paul Sartre (e.g. 1956) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (e.g. 1999). Though it is perhaps the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty that most precisely fits the term "existential phenomenology" (Bourgeois, 2002). It should also be recognised that crediting Heidegger with the initiation of existential phenomenology is most likely based on a misunderstanding of his original work, *Sein and Zeist*, in the 1920s (Embree, 2001; Grossmann, 1984). Furthermore the roots of existential phenomenology have also been traced back to the nineteenth-century philosophers, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Kaufmann, 1975; Spinelli, 1989).

Existential phenomenologists consider phenomenology to be the philosophy of experience (Anderson, Braud, & Valle, 1996; Valle & Mohs, 1998). For some, this is further defined by a marriage between humanistic psychology (3rd Force psychology) and existentialism (philosophy of being)¹ to manifest itself as *existential-phenomenological psychology*. Thus human experiences and the meaning of existence as it presents itself to awareness are honoured. Spinelli (1989) succinctly positions existential phenomenology as:

Existential phenomenology, or existentialism – arose as a result of the refocusing on the implications of such issues for the very meaning of existence. As such, the principal task of existential phenomenology became the explorations of the potentials for freedom and the unavoidable limitations inherent in human beings' experience of themselves as being-in-the world (Spinelli, 1989, p. xi).

Existential-phenomenology recognises that the individual and the surrounding environment are 'inextricably intertwined' (Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 97). As such both the experiences of the individual and the external situation are relevant in choice making. The human being and the world are said to co-constitute each other (Valle & Mohs, 1998).

¹It is recognised that arguments exist that question the relationship between European Existential Psychology and American Humanistic Psychology.

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Essentially the basic concepts of transcendental phenomenology are accepted by those following the existential route, however, what changes is the understanding of the essential meanings. MacDonald (2001) succinctly outlines these differences whilst also reflecting on the potential that the differences may be superficial, based on mis-directed assertions about Husserlian phenomenology. However, it is not my intention to venture too far down this path as better able and more adequately prepared philosophers and writers have already crafted a more comprehensive set of arguments than I could possibly undertake. Suffice to say that MacDonald outlines six divergent understandings. Essentially, and in brief, existentialist criticisms are based on the following points:

1. Husserlian phenomenology considers the intentional directedness to be, for the most part, cognitive.
2. Human understanding can be best determined through 'rational insight and higher-order intuitions' (p. 3) and the ability to reflect on personal experiences.
3. Transcendental ego is not engaged in or part of the everyday world.
4. The point of transcendental reduction is to arrive, finally, at essential natures of things, however a human being cannot have such an essence.
5. Transcendental phenomenology considers consciousness to be an impenetrable fundamental and singular entity. Existentialists consider this equivalent to considering that self is the only thing that exists.
6. Transcendental phenomenology places considerable importance on the *époché* and the phenomenological researcher's ability to fully bracket the world. Existentialist consider this, at worst, a destruction of the relationship between being and the world and at best, impossible.

In essence, existential phenomenology consists of four main concepts that combine to constitute the deeper aspects of human existence. These concepts are 'the prereflective, lived structure, the life-world and intentionality' (Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 98). For the existential phenomenologist the pre-reflective level describes the level of awareness that is 'pre-languaged, foundational, bodily knowing' (Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 98) and in essence a felt sense that is prior to cognitive awareness. The emerging sense manifests itself in consciousness as meaning. The life-world describes the world in which we live and subjectively experience (Sokolowski, 2000). It is the world of immediacy of our experiences, immediately as we live it.

It is that which presents to us in our everyday tasks and enjoyments-reality as it engages us before being analysed by our theories and our science. The life-world is the world that we count on without necessarily paying it much attention, the world of the clouds overhead and the ground underfoot, of getting out of bed and preparing food and turning on the tap for water. Easily overlooked, this primordial world is always already there when we begin to philosophize. It is not a private but a collective dimension-the common field of our lives and other lives with which ours are entwined-and yet it is profoundly ambiguous and indeterminate, since our experience of this world is always relative to our situation within it (Abram, 1996, p. 40).

Lived structure defines the purpose of an empirical phenomenology in that phenomenology attempts to reduce a meaningful experience that has presented itself in awareness in order to describe the underlying factors (lived structure). Intentionality, for existential phenomenologists, extends the original Husserlian meaning and relates to the understanding that every human experience is world directed. In the words of Crotty (1996b), 'human being means being-in-the-world' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 40). Sokolowski (2000) considered intentionality to be at the core of phenomenological understanding where 'objects' are manifestations in the real-world and not just within our own minds.

For Heidegger (cited in Spinelli, 1989), the position is unique in that humans are the only being with the ability to be aware of its existence. Though this point may be contentious, this awareness corresponds to an inseparable link between existence and the world, an intersubjective awareness. One criticism of the existential phenomenological viewpoint is its tendency to be solipsistic in its pursuits. As such, whilst much of Sartre's work extended the understandings outlined by Heidegger he also attempted to counteract potential critics. Thus the three states of being were considered. A being-in-itself describes an unconscious object, one with a 'physical reality' such as a tree. A being-for-itself is able to think of itself as separate from other beings, to be conscious of both itself and others. The third category is perhaps the most unclear, being-for-others. This category seems to indicate a co-operative relationship between itself and others, where both are equally as important (Spinelli, 1989). The essence of being-for-others may even provide a glimpse of a possibility that unity exists that self/other is not divided, perhaps this allows for an effective focus for our beliefs and faiths.

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For Merleau-Ponty (1999) the human experience was necessarily entwined with embodiment. That is, being an experiencing human being is being as a human body (Macann, 1993). This is not to say that the place of the body was Merleau-Ponty's only focus or phenomenological conclusions merely that, as applied to this study, it is a significant development. Essentially, the personal body allows for the realisation of experiences and therefore the experiences of others (Abram, 1996). On the surface the importance of the body in experience would seem to be sensible, after all we are all manifest in physicality. A point outlined by Montaigne (de Botton, 2000) who realised that much of our experience is necessarily linked to our body. After all if our heart stops beating so do we. However, whilst many experiences may be physical, it may not be true to say that all experiences are physical (M. Daniels, 2002a). The implication that to have a body means that a being is consciousness would indicate an acceptance that animals are also conscious not just humans (Abram, 1996). It is also an indication that ignores many of the wisdom traditions that consider the place of an enlightened soul. Thus, there would seem to be little place for unity within Merleau-Ponty's world (Macann, 1993).

There are, however, potential pitfalls for those rigidly following transcendental phenomenology and, to a degree, existential phenomenology. First, the subjective experiences and meanings as lived at this moment potentially ignore sociocultural systems. That is, the focus tends to be on the individual's relationship to the object, which, in turn, limits the sharable aspect of the experience (Spinelli, 1989). Spinelli uses the example of a snowflake in that whilst all snowflakes are different they all concede to six basic rules. It is these rules that define the snowflake as a snowflake.

Concepts such as class, poverty and capitalism may be ignored or assumed as non-existent. Equally, processes such as evolution and adaptation might be dismissed (Harris, 1979). However, as Crotty (1996b) pointed out, culture and society are at once liberating and limiting. Boundaries are set and barriers created that can often come 'between us and our immediate experience of objects' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 5). The ultimate task of the phenomenological investigator is to be open to exploring the nature of the experience whilst shelving their own and the co-researchers meaning systems.

Laughlin et al. (1990) considered the importance of combining neurological information with phenomenological information. Jung (1964) wrote about the importance of subject symbolism based on cultural norms. This is not to indicate that phenomenology as a concept is flawed merely to point to the importance of ensuring the processes of gathering data that accounts for structural, behavioural aspects and expressions as well as experience. Further, it is also to note the importance of an experiential view and the place of the *époche* when investigating any phenomena. As an example of the importance of experience Laughlin et al. (1990) considered previously known ‘facts’ about oxygen and physiology. Essentially, physiological experiments on resting individuals concluded that a specific minimal resting oxygen quantity was required for survival. However, the experiments had ignored individuals skilled in yogic meditative trance. Only when science admitted the reality of these individuals’ experience was the ‘truth’ of oxygen requirements revised.

Equally, the study of phenomena should recognise the holistic nature of consciousness (Laughlin et al., 1990). It is also important to appreciate the relevance of introspection in the definition of the phenomenon. However, true introspection requires a state that Laughlin et al. (1990) termed mature contemplation, where concentration, tranquillity, inquiry and vigilance are exercised. This state mirrors the Buddhist meditation system; a traditional wisdom that also recognises that direct intuition is the route to obtaining knowledge about consciousness (Gyatso, 2001; Laughlin et al., 1990). Whilst it is ideal to reach this state of purity whilst exploring phenomena, the reality and practicality of maintaining an open condition, free of pre-suppositions is, perhaps, questionable. Perhaps we all bring with us past experiences and learning that influence our understanding of life in this world.

An effective understanding and introspection process, as related to this study, would need to accept the subjective reality of the transpersonal or transcendental experiences. Pure phenomenology may have made assumptions that are not equal to subjective experiences. For example in phenomenology as a philosophy, intuition is simply the presence of an object. Sokolowski (2000) uses the example of thinking about the potential of a baseball game as opposed to watching the game.

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Our watching of the game is our *intuition* of the game. This is all that intuition is in the phenomenological vocabulary. Intuition is not something mystical or magical; it is simply having a thing present to us as opposed to having it intended in its absence (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 34).

The traditional phenomenological understanding of a phenomenon may also prove limited in understanding the total picture. As I have indicated in Section 2, some aspects of the experience linked to the phenomenon in question may be outside of the awareness of the individual or outside our understanding of the human world. For example data gathering may depend on the verbal ability of co-researchers or the phenomena may be difficult to verbally describe. As Crotty (1996b) noted:

True enough, the ‘things themselves’ prove elusive. In describing what comes into view within immediate experience, we draw on language and therefore on culture. These are tools we have to employ. For that reason, we end not with a presuppositionless description of a phenomena, but with re-interpretation (Crotty, 1996b, p. 3).

The description of the phenomenon may well provide the greatest barrier to understanding the experience itself. Especially considering the depth of the experience as indicated in chapter XI.

Language and phenomenology

Nietzsche (cited in van Manen, 1990) considered language to be a metaphorical representation of a personal image, incapable of precision and certainty. Wittgenstein (1999) accepted that language has no direct association with experience. Rothberg (1986) presented an even stronger view whereby language was seen to falsify experience and create fictions from real experience. As such, it could be argued that language can only portray a diluted connection to a truth and error, a lifeworld ‘that may forever remain “beyond words”’ (Churchill, 2002, p. 85). As if to illustrate this point, Spinelli (1989) differentiates between the straightforward experience and the reflective experience. The straightforward experience is the experience as it occurs. However, once we start to describe the experience we enter into the reflective experience. Once we enter into the reflective experience the essential experience is changed.

Reflective experience requires some kind of system of communication, relies upon notions of time, and is therefore open to measurement. It is through reflec-

tive experience that we formulate meaning and construct the various hierarchies of significances contained within those meanings. In doing so, we eliminate from our interpretations of experience any number of variables that form our straightforward experience on the grounds that they are unimportant or unnecessary to communicate or are incommunicable simply because we are unaware of their existence or do not possess the language to describe them. Reflective experience allows us to communicate only a minute part of the sum of total of any experience (Spinelli, 1989, p. 24).

Some experiences may be outside of the language ability of the individual or for that matter outside of the ability of a culturally evolved language to define. For example the often used premise that the Inuits have a multitude of words to describe snow depending on its essential structure whereas in the English language snow is less well defined (Woodbury, 1991). Different snows are inadequately described with prefixes or through metaphor. Laughlin (1988) reports on the So of Northeastern Uganda who live in a land devoid of a water feature large enough for swimming. As such their language does not contain any reference to swimming. Gergen (1990) showed how whilst we may have developed specific language for certain things, such as different types of chair, we do not have specific language for 'speaking of ocean waves and candle flames' (Gergen, 1990, p. 41). His point being that human experience is more like ocean waves or candle flames. Equally, we can find examples in phenomenology itself, often the original German is used to describe concepts and the English translation added almost as an apology for its inadequacy (Bello, 2002; Burch, 1990).

Some experiences are considered beyond verbalisation, Rothberg (1986) distinguished between experiences about which one can speak and experiences that can only ever be shown. Other experiences are so experientially ingrained that they are almost a metaphor in themselves. An example of this is found in Lederman's (1988) recollection of her studies of shamans in Malay. At some point her co-researchers explained that 'angin' (an inner wind) was often experienced during the healing rituals. However, the only route to understanding 'angin' was to experience it first hand. Lederman was shown how to enter 'angin' and eventually understood the metaphor from her direct experience. Essentially 'angin' was respected as a metaphor for a real experience. However as Anderson (1998a) noted:

Eloquent metaphors and brilliant psychological conceptualization also can obscure, minimize, and trivialize the experience being examined. There is an

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inherent quality to human experience that is irreducible to words, descriptions, symbols, and metaphors, and so on. Although symbols and metaphors, for example, may come closer in aiding a person to understand the experience, they still are *not* the experience itself. As Maslow emphasized, descriptions, symbols, and metaphors are useful only if the individual has had the experience (or akin to it) already (Anderson, 1998a, p. 81).

Another argument posited by those who study the transpersonal aspects of human experience is that language, or what Husserl (cited in Di Pinto, 2002) reportedly accepted as verbal signs (especially Western written and spoken language), is a linear, left hemisphere structure (W. Braud, 1998). As such, we as researchers often assemble a vast array of words through our interviews and arrange them in a similar linear, filtered verbal prose. For Watts (1982) this is indicative of a limited abstract, conventional representational knowledge that bars us from other ways of knowing. Di Pinto (2002) observed that the verbal (written or spoken) aspects of language are perhaps only able to communicate 7% of the intended message. Thus, for Braud (1998) alternative ways of knowing such as tacit knowing, bodily knowing, incubation periods and artistic expression are recommended. For Wilshire (1997) the experiences that may lie outside of language such as silences and mystical experiences reveal, clarify and even amplify the world.

The essence of some experiences may be hidden from view by everyday meanings. That is the signs used to relate to experiences are already diluted by exterior and interior filters (Bourgeois, 2002). Elden and Levin (1991) recognised that 'those who supply the data have their own ideas, models, or frameworks for attributing meaning and explanations to the world they experience' (Elden & Levin, 1991, p. 131). For example, if you take time to consider, observe and stand before a tree, it appears to truly exist. The tree inhabits a different place or space than the space you inhabit; it seems to be a concrete and separate object. In your current meaning system this entity is 'a tree'. However, if for some reason 'tree' did not exist in your vocabulary and the term was deprived of meaning, what would you be observing? There would undoubtedly be something there but its meaning or definition would depend as much on your experiences and meaning systems as it would on the object itself.

The very act of asking questions alters the participants' state of awareness and therefore their views on reality (Sims, 1990). Further, it is perhaps questionable that individuals

can accurately recall details from past experiences (Henry, 1999; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Though, this may be linked to the construction of meaning from an experience as opposed to describing the experience itself. As Nisbett and Wilson (1977) observed ‘people can sometimes accurately report on the stimuli that influenced particular cognitive processes’ (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977, p. 253).

On the surface, language could provide an unbeatable challenge to phenomenology. Indeed as previously expressed for some phenomenology is limited in scope by language (Levering & van Manen, 2002) and some experiences arguably challenge the intent of the phenomenological description (Wilshire, 1997). However, despite these warnings and potential pitfalls, van Manen (1990) considered that perhaps this is the point of his hermeneutic phenomenology. That in fact, enquiry into the object of human experience is directly linked to language.

Phenomenological human science is a western research method which should not be confused either with certain “mystical” or eastern meditative techniques of achieving insights about the “meaning of life.” One important difference is that western human science aims at acquiring understandings about concrete lived experience by means of language, whereas eastern methods may practise other non-script-oriented reflective techniques (van Manen, 1990, p. 23).

However, these perceptions do not necessarily clarify the cultural limitations on language or the physical aspects of language as noted above. Still hermeneutic phenomenology is one branch of the phenomenological discipline that has considered the importance of language in the understanding of the human being.

As we have seen, the aim of phenomenology is to get back to the things themselves. However, we have also noted that language might restrict this process. Willis (2001) recognised this quandary and the realisation that human knowledge is constructed through ‘an active process of classification and naming’ (Willis, 2001, p. 1). For Willis (2001) this quandary was simply a matter of definition. The strength of phenomenology lies in the attitude of the investigator. That is a traditional viewpoint would base research on an hypothesis or theory whereas phenomenological research approaches a topic with an open, attentive, investigative attitude that focuses on what is presented. The phenomena should be allowed to speak for themselves and not be constrained by hypothesis (W. Braud & Anderson, 1998). Thus human experience is considered in all

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its glory and the potential for overlooking significant concepts is minimised. Equally this attitude and the active undertaking of bracketing recognise that the human tendency to distort raw experience is often a culturally determined prejudice. Phenomenology is about recognising these limitations whilst at the same time attempting to bypass or minimise the distortions to ‘get back to the things themselves’ (Willis, 2001). Still as a beginner to phenomenology it is advisable to heed the warning of the Spanish linguistic phenomenologist, Fernando Montero, that is we are Beings immersed in a reality that is not simply a product of consciousness, mental activity or language (cited in Conill, 2002). Thus, we are first human beings and only second ‘children of a particular language’ (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 271).

Hermeneutic phenomenology

Perhaps one of the most useful adaptations of phenomenology, as applied to this study, is hermeneutic phenomenology. Embree (2001) listed this particular phenomenological movement as beginning after World War II and coming to full strength by the 1960’s. Hermeneutic phenomenology accepts the ‘constructivist and interpretive view of human consciousness’ (Willis, 2001, p. 14) that developed from Heidegger’s views on interpretation (Lavery, 2003). As with the other phenomenological traditions the hermeneutic interpretations of phenomenology by scholars such as Ricoeur (e.g. 1966), Gadamer (e.g. 1977) and van Manen (1990; 1997b) have their own peculiarities.

For Ricoeur, hermeneutic phenomenology developed out of dissatisfaction with the structuralist position so popular in his day (Laughlin, 2001; Sweeney, 2002). Ricoeur determined that texts and the experiences of those influenced by or living the texts are required to truly comprehend the phenomenon under investigation. That is a dialogue between text and experience was required. However the essential focus is on the importance of interpretation. According to Jervolino (2002), Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology speaks of the ‘creative power of language’ (Jervolino, 2002, p. 394) and often took as its starting point the interpretation of symbols and myths, as perhaps most clearly explored in his volume on metaphor (Ricoeur, 1986). Central to the phenomenological exploration is the notion of text and in particular the fixing of discourse by writing. Still, language is seen as the ‘primary condition of all human experience’ (Jervolino, 2002, p. 396) and discourse the process of bringing experience

(Jervolino, 2002, p. 396) and discourse the process of bringing experience to language. However, understanding another's discourse is considered an imperfect translation.

According to Rossi (2002), Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutic philosophy was developed from his relationship with Heidegger, Husserl and Max Scheler. Essentially Gadamer focused on the interpretation of meaning through the use of language. His understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology was that the essence of the phenomenological quest, the things themselves, revealed themselves only through language and dialogue; experience is always linguistic (Aylesworth, 1991). In agreement with Heidegger he considered that 'human being in the world is primarily an activity of making sense' (Moran, 2000, p. 269). Central to his argument is that language enables full understanding.

Language does not just reflect human being but actually makes humans be, brings about human existence as communal understanding and self-understanding (Moran, 2000, p. 270).

Thus the indication is that language makes us human and also perhaps limits us as human beings. Perhaps language is our way of making sense of the world but then does that not also indicate a lack of neutrality, a dilution of 'reality', a value-laden system of communication? Also, as I have noted earlier, it is possible that some experiences are not language based and that language (at least English language) is not required to comprehend its meaning. As recognised by many of the traditional wisdoms some experiences are physical metaphors in themselves. Thus, as Willis (2001) noted some knowledge does not require language. However, Gadamer's (cited in Moran, 2000) view that any attempt to understand reality is already filtered by one's past education and experience, bears consideration. Perhaps Willis's (2001) succinct observation; 'the act of knowing stands in between the knower and "the things themselves"' (Willis, 2001, p. 5) best describes this point.

Nevertheless, Gadamer remained slightly vague in defining his concepts (Moran, 2000). For example, critics question the applicability of his processes for validating and distinguishing false from true interpretations. Others focus on the potential for dialogue to enforce a power-based knowledge. For me Gadamer's philosophy influenced my thoughts not so much as a way forward but as a warning of potential pitfalls. From Ri-

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coeur I must accept the reality of otherness and the imperfection of understanding implicit within his 'paradigm of translation' (Jervolino, 2002, p. 399).

One criticism directed at some versions of hermeneutic phenomenology is that over the last forty or so years some have practiced a style of interpretation that focuses on the history of phenomenology as opposed to its intended purpose (Embree, 2001); perhaps even falling into the realms of deconstructionism. Embree concluded that this tendency is possibly due to a lack of interest by researchers to look outwards to phenomenology as a whole. This brief map of phenomenology is in part an attempt to prepare effectively in the hope that I do not fall into this trap.

For van Manen (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology is the construction of an interpreted understanding of an aspect of the human lifeworld. A complete and final description of a phenomenological object is impossible as any object is more complex than 'any explication of meaning can reveal' (van Manen, 1990, p. 18). As Willis (2001) pointed out:

When speech, language and thought patterns generated from experiences in the world are used, they always involve an interpretive process: but the aim here is to try to disclose the most naïve and basic interpretation that is already there but as yet is unelaborated in the life world experience, a phenomenological hermeneutic (Willis, 2001, p. 7).

Essentially hermeneutic phenomenology becomes an interpretive phenomenology and the phenomenological researcher an interpreter of interpreters. The process of interpretation is explicitly creative and accepting of the implication that analysis of data sources may result in many interpretations (Klein & Westcott, 1990).

The hermeneutic phenomenologist openly makes use of various forms of text to understand the phenomenon (Willis, 2001). Poets, authors, artists, cinematographers may be explored in the desire to fully explicate understandings of our 'immediate common experience in order to conduct a structural analysis of what is common, most familiar, most-evident to us' (Willis, 2001, p. 19). However, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is still to seek and explicate universal meanings.

The relationship between text and experience as outlined by van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology is in the writing (van Manen, 2002b). The researcher is focused on the object of study with the explicit aim of showing, describing and interpreting its true nature. Thus phenomenology is indelibly linked to language. However, as has already been noted, some experiences may be outside of the ability of language.

So, as with the transcendental and existential phenomenologies, on the surface the definition of hermeneutic phenomenology seems to be dependent on the whims of the phenomenological explorer. However, on closer inspection the scientific nature of hermeneutic phenomenology differs only in its realisation and focus on the interpretation. For transcendental and existential phenomenology the aim is to describe the essence of an experience whether as a direct description of an object or the expression of a lived experience. For the hermeneutic phenomenologist the description contains a strong element of interpretation. Thus phenomenology becomes hermeneutic in the original sense of the word where it assigns the act of interpretation. The texts used in this interpretation process include historical as well as interview.

For some this distinction makes hermeneutic phenomenology a process that sits outside of the phenomenological tradition. However, for van Manen (1990) this distinction is not as extreme as it might at first seem. The aim is still to get back to the things themselves, though the realisation is that interpretation is required. In this instance interpretation is considered in terms of pointing out the meaning of something as well as pointing to something that is potentially concealed (van Manen, 1990). Willis (2001) noted two concerns that underlie this hermeneutic process:

The first is to cultivate an active suspicion of assumptions and prejudices that might tacitly influence and subvert honest inquiry. The second, which has been the theme of our recent project is the importance of understanding and developing expressive approaches to inquiry which can complement and underpin analytic or explanatory approaches (Willis, 2001, p. 14).

An effective description obtained through phenomenology is when the 'description is an adequate elucidation of some aspect of the lifeworld' (van Manen, 1990, p. 27). The description is not a journalistic account, biography or personal opinion. Neither is it an approximation that fails to elucidate the lived experience. In van Manen's (1990) terms

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the final elucidation should resonate with our own experiences or experiences we could have. Still it should be recognised that the ‘new phenomenology’ movement headed by Herman Schmitz refutes the traditional assumption that all facts are objective facts ‘that can be uttered by everybody who knows enough and is able to speak well enough’ (Schmitz, 2002, p. 492). It would seem that many so called objective facts are simply pale reflections of subjective facts.

Furthermore, not all experiences are those that can resonate as common experiences. Some experiences are exceptional human experiences that may require an equivalent exceptional human research method (R. White, 1993). Such experiences might be where transcendence is experienced and accepted even despite language or outside of common understanding. Hence the interpreter’s role becomes one of interpretation of experiences that are perhaps beyond the understanding of most. Yet still an essential part of the lived experience of the few.

It is at this point that I must question van Manen’s (1990) view that phenomenology is purely a Western science with little interest in the non-concrete, Wisdom or Eastern philosophical traditions. As Willis (2002) noted it is important to be appropriately attentive to all experiences. Indeed many parallels have been drawn between phenomenology and Oriental philosophies (Carter, 1992; Held, 1997; Mohanty, 1972, 1993). As such, it seems to me, by ignoring the Wisdom traditions we may be missing out on valid explorations of the experience and a better understanding of what it means to be human. Furthermore, as I claim later in the thesis, the extreme sport experience is cross-cultural; essentially a human experience, thus it would seem essential to explore the experience from a cross-cultural, human perspective. Equally, as Levinas (Sugarman, 2002) reportedly observed, by going beyond the ‘ontology of power’ (Sugarman, 2002, p. 423) epitomised by imperialistic western phenomenology, phenomenology is strengthened. After all, even Heidegger in his later years encouraged dialogue with such traditions as Taoism and Zen Buddhism (von Eckartsberg & Valle, 1981). In fact it would seem that a symposium recognising such links was held in honour of Heidegger’s 80th birthday (von Eckartsberg & Valle, 1981). The young Sartre was also heavily influenced by Japanese philosophy and was even introduced to the works of Heidegger and Husserl during his weekly discussions with the Japanese philosopher, Kuki Shuzo (Elwood,

1994). Even Husserl was said to have greatly admired Buddhist teachings (Hanna, 1993b).

Transpersonal phenomenology

A relatively new addition to the phenomenological tradition is transpersonal phenomenology or transpersonal-phenomenological psychology (Valle & Mohs, 1998). The phenomenologies so far described are appropriate for exploration into those experiences that can be articulated in everyday language and recognised by a reasonable number of people (Anderson et al., 1996). In the case of transpersonal phenomenology, phenomenology has been effectively used in transpersonal studies (or transpersonal psychology – the 4th Force) that aim to describe those experiences that are beyond common, but are still shared by the few. The central point here is that some experiences are of an exceptional nature, for example Lederman's (1988) experiences, already described under the section on language. Transpersonal viewpoints recognise the relevance and legitimate experiences of those who have had extraordinary experiences that are prior to the pre-reflective-reflective realm of existential phenomenology (Valle & Mohs, 1998). As such they are often beyond the traditional ego-conscious boundaries and potentially beyond the dualistic perceptions of self/not self (Laughlin, 1988; Schneider, 1996). For Grof (1979) such experiences are also beyond the traditional limits of time and space. These experiences might include out of body experiences, visions, near death experiences, mystical experiences, meditative experiences, ecstatic experiences, personal transformations, unitive experiences and even those relating to peak experiences, bliss, awe and wonder (Anderson, 1998a; Laughlin, 1988; West, 1998). It might be that the extreme sport experience has some of these qualities. Often these experiences are characterised by stillness and peace, love and contentment for all, absent sense of "I", a sense of pure being without the need for space, time standing still, bursts of insight, surrender of the need for control and extraordinary transformations (Valle & Mohs, 1998).

There is an acceptance of, and recognised parallels to, the Wisdom traditions such as indigenous spirituality, Taoism, Zen, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism as well as some of the mystical aspects from Judaism, Islam and Christianity (Hanna, 1993a; Mohanty, 1972; von Eckartsberg & Valle, 1981). As there is also an acceptance of the complexity of the human experience in other ways and therefore flexibility in methodological re-

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quirements (W. Braud & Anderson, 1998). Essentially transpersonal studies are concerned with ultimate human experiences and the study of human potential at its highest. Proponents of such a viewpoint have included psychologists and theorists such as William James (1971), Carl Jung (1964), Viktor Frankl (1966; 1984), Ludwig Binswanger (Sindoni, 2002), Rollo May (1983) and more recently John Rowan (2001) and Ken Wilber (1993; 2001).

Thus, any methodology that purports to study such experiences will need to allow for the richness and variety of human potentials. The researcher will need to honour the human experience in all its forms, unconditionally and with imagination (Anderson, 1998a). William James (1976) advocated for the study of the full range of human experiences under the guise of 'radical empiricism'. Essentially, this concept allows for the inclusion of any experience that enters the consciousness. As highlighted by Cytowic (1993; 1995) who realised that even a topic as statistically rare as synesthesia could shed light on consciousness and the nature of reality.

Methodologically, Hanna (1993b) argued that much of the practice of phenomenology is transpersonal in nature. For support he enlisted the words of Husserl's chief assistant between 1930 and 1937, Eugen Fink, who reportedly compared the phenomenological reduction to certain phases of the Buddhist self-discipline (Hanna, 1993b). Hanna (1993b) emphasised the importance of intuition and experience over method, intellect, rationalism or theory. The transcendental ego as observed by Husserl was considered in terms of a transpersonal self beyond the psychological ego, a self similar to the empty self reported in the Upanishads (cited Indian wisdom texts on self learning - (Sinha, 1997)) as *atman* (Hanna, 1993b). Thus it would seem that the phenomenologist, in Hanna's (1993b) reading of Heidegger and Husserl, reaches a stage of primitive observation of experience akin to the meditative notion of reaching a stage beyond intellect to a state of nothingness. The researcher interested in phenomenology is advised to explore Asian philosophies to obtain a better understanding of phenomenological issues (Hanna, 1993b).

Transpersonal phenomenology recognises that some experiences are outside of the traditional understanding of intentionality, that is, some experiences are without an object and therefore by default without a subject (Barnes, 2003). In other words previous understandings about consciousness were more about mind than consciousness

derstandings about consciousness were more about mind than consciousness (Valle & Mohs, 1998). As such, the transpersonal experience is an experience that is prior to the pre-reflective/reflective (Anderson et al., 1996). In their words:

The bridge between existential/humanistic and transpersonal/transcendent approaches in psychology, for it is here that one is called to recognize the radical distinction between the reflective/prereflective realm and pure consciousness, between rational/emotive processes and transcendent/spiritual awareness, between intentional knowing of the finite and being the infinite. It is, therefore, mind, not consciousness *per se*, that is characterized by intentionality, and it is our recognition of the transintentional nature of Being that calls us to investigate those experiences which clearly reflect or present these transpersonal dimensions in the explicit context of phenomenological research methods (Anderson et al., 1996, p. 27).

Transpersonal phenomenology recognises that consciousness is no longer consciousness of something, it is just consciousness. Perhaps epitomised by the following Sufi hymn on awareness:

Neither subject nor object, neither seer nor seen
Awareness is a flame which glows into itself

For those who have the eyes, for those who wish to see
It opens its heart and shows into itself

Neither here nor there, its home is nowhere
Like a wind it blows and blows into itself

Beginning with a drop in each moment of Creation
It soon becomes a river that flows into itself

To nothing does it submit, 'cause nothing's other than it
To itself it bows, as it bows to itself
(Ansari, 2000, p. 5).

However, considering our previous discussion on the phenomenological treatment of memory, it may be that by recalling the experiences one is no longer directly living the experience, as such consciousness of a prior experience becomes an intentional act once again. This of course would lead to further questions concerning the place of language and interpretation and as Barnes (2003) made clear the accuracy of the detail remembered. However, the point is that I, as the researcher, recognise and accept that some experiences may transcend traditional descriptions of intentionality. Thus, transpersonal

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phenomenology positions itself as a phenomenology that attempts to honour the totality of human experience, not just the concrete aspects of human experience. It is a phenomenology that is concerned with describing those spiritual, infinite, unitive, transformational experiences that are outside of the everyday experiences of humanity.

Researching transpersonal experiences requires openness on the part of the researcher and also the participant. Often though, this type of exceptional experience is ignored or feared and therefore not expressed or even explained away (R. White, 1998). Remaining in the phenomenological attitude may also be difficult as was noted by Barrett (1998) and Van Raalte (1998). It is easy to inadvertently belittle the experiences of others as mere delusion or listen to the stories through an inappropriate 'cognitive language' (Van Raalte, 1998, p. 163). Especially when considering observations such as those of Daniels (2002a) who accepted that the English language is relatively meagre and unsophisticated (as compared to languages such as Sanskrit and Egyptian) when describing such non-ordinary states. Thus, It may also be that as with hermeneutic phenomenology a multi-modal method of gathering data is required (Belanger, 1998).

Summary

This chapter has been concerned with the question of what phenomenology is. After all we have already noted that for phenomenology to be phenomenology it must have an essential commonality or core, it must follow its own rules. Spiegelberg (1982) admits to the difficulty of answering such a question whilst stating its inevitable personal nature. For Spiegelberg the answer is to be found in the steps of the phenomenological method, an argument that we will explore in the next chapter. However, before considering these steps I have revisited some of the conceptions outlined as a focus for explicating my understanding of phenomenology.

As with all human understanding we base our constructions of reality on our own experiences and perhaps the development of phenomenology is no different. Perhaps the religious and political convictions of philosophers such as Heidegger and Husserl or the agnostic position of Sartre (Spinelli, 1989) precisely mirror their understandings of philosophy and therefore their construction of their methodology. Perhaps phenomenology could be viewed as negating the 'natural' world (by this I mean the ecological world,

the world of flora and fauna) by inferring that the human being is the only being conscious of its surroundings. However, to focus on these factors would in some way be missing the point. The point in question being that phenomenology is at least an attempt to 'get back to the things themselves' whatever that may be and however each of us understands it. It is far more than a mere representation of our subjective worlds, it is an attempt to consider a 'real lived world' with equally 'real lived experiences.' For me, this is the essence of phenomenology.

Supporting this essence is a framework that guides those intending to explore the world of human experience. Rather as a map guides the intrepid mountaineer. However, a map must have some recognizable symbols for it to be of use. For me, the study of human experience must be recognised in all its glory hence it is important to remain open enough to accept the transpersonal experience. For even those experiences where subject and object are merged into one existence or non-existence and which, contentiously, therefore have no intentionality are human experiences (Miller & C'De Baca, 2001; Valle, 1989). This of course accepts the realisation that language is limited and limiting and that an exploration into an activity such as extreme sports may only ever be an interpretation of the interpretations of others. Equally this view necessitates the use of a multitude of data sources in an attempt to remain as true as possible to the explication of the experience.



III

Phenomenology and the Methodological Process

More than once when I
Sat alone, revolving in myself,
The mortal limit of the self was loosed,
And passed into the nameless as a cloud
Melts into heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange, not mine—an yet no shade of doubt
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self
The gain of such large life as matched with ours
Were sun to spark-unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world.

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson cited in Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 95)

In the previous chapter I considered what phenomenological philosophy is and how it relates to researching the human experience. I pointed out that whilst the underlying concepts of phenomenology have a core, the understandings and use of phenomenology depends on particular theoretical and individual perspectives. I also presented my understandings of some of the limitations in using phenomenology to explore the human experience. However, despite my perceptions on the existence of these limitations, I have argued that phenomenology is still the most appropriate perspective from which to view the essence of human experience. This chapter examines how phenomenology is used in the research process.

Scientific exploration involves 'the phenomenon to be observed, the technology and criteria for measurement, and the cognitive-perceptual organization of the observer' (Laughlin et al., 1990, p. 339). The guidelines that inform practitioners in this field of study provide the seed for understanding the lived worlds of others. However, the processes that are involved in undertaking a phenomenological study were not determined or

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documented by Husserl (Crotty, 1996b). An observation that could be made about many of the early phenomenologists:

A characteristic of the European approach to pedagogy was its almost total unconcern with questions of method. Those who engaged in interpretive phenomenological research in education (such as Langeveld, Beets, and Bollnow) often wrote sensitively reflective studies of the pedagogic lifeworld that parents and teachers share with their children and students. But questions of method or how to partake in such scholarship were simply not raised (van Manen, 1990, p. ix).

As such the techniques required to comprehend a phenomenon are often left up to those following the philosophy. For example phenomenological psychology has drawn on the philosophical understanding of phenomenology to consider those concepts that are 'typical or general for groups of people' (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 43). In this instance emphasis is placed on the experiences of others as opposed to, purely, the explorer's own self-reflections. The phenomenological method opposes the perception that adequate conclusions can be drawn from hypothetically or theoretically based examinations (Spinelli, 1989).

This chapter considers some of the models posited by more concurrent researchers and writers, the aim being to explicate a suitable model for the study of the extreme sport experience (J. A. Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). Devenish (2002) recognised that an appropriate method should effectively achieve the specific research goal. Thus, this chapter clarifies the decisions and learnings from understandings and procedures detailed by certain other, more experienced researchers. At the same time, this study presented certain unique requirements not wholly accounted for in my readings. As such, this chapter also outlines where I have had to expand on the work of others. Fortunately I found I was not alone in taking these steps; in the words of Devenish (2002):

In order to facilitate my research, I realized I was going to have to become very clear about the process of how to apply phenomenological explication as well as the theoretical aspects of phenomenological philosophy, and make the decision to feel my way towards a model suited to my research. I did so by beginning at the beginning, by borrowing what I felt was necessary from other scholars, and by trusting my own sense of what was needed (Devenish, 2002, p. 3).

On occasions aspects of models are presented without the encompassing critique, however throughout this chapter I have attempted to consider the nature of this study. Where appropriate I have brought in realisations from seemingly unrelated fields to illustrate questions about human research that influenced my adoption of phenomenology. Once again the seemingly concise phenomenological movement displays commonalities and differences in the processes for getting back to the things themselves. Essentially, the following paragraphs consider the advice of those that have paved the way or explicated an understanding of the processes required and relates that advice to my knowledge of my question and myself. As Spiegelberg (1982) noted many of the so-called common factors in phenomenological processes turn out to be only common to some. Further as Crotty (1996b) so clearly demonstrated claiming that one is 'doing' phenomenology does not necessarily mean that phenomenology has been 'done'. The end result of this dialogue is an explication of my phenomenological method and a definite comprehension of how it is phenomenology as proposed by those far more experienced than I.

First I would like to turn to Spinelli (1989) who succinctly and honestly outlined his understandings in a clear, uncluttered way. Spinelli dedicated a chapter to outlining how phenomenology is undertaken. Whilst he attributed his understandings to Husserl's original intentions he also noted discrepancies.

Though clearly of central importance to phenomenology in general, its primary value to phenomenological psychology differs slightly from the original function attributed to it by Husserl (Spinelli, 1989, p. 16).

Nevertheless, Spinelli outlined his account of the phenomenological method. The central criteria being that any exploration must be guided by the absence of any imposition of beliefs, biases, theories, hypothesis and explanations. Thus, an initial state of explorer naivety or un-knowing (Spinelli, 1997) supports a process of phenomenological reduction. Where the word reduction is not be confused with the meaning espoused by the natural sciences but is the gradual discovering of what constitutes the phenomenon in question (Depraz, 1999).

Spinelli (1989) posited three basic steps. The first step requires the researcher to bracket all previous understandings. For Spinelli this concept does not entail a bracketing that equates to that proposed by the transcendental phenomenologist. That is, the necessity

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to transcend any and all presuppositions or pretensions to scientific truth, natural truth or individual biases (Balaban, 2002; Lavery, 2003). For Spinelli (1989), what is required is an attempt to bracket biases 'as far as was possible for you' (Spinelli, 1989, p. 17) and to develop 'more of an open mind' (Spinelli, 1989, p. 17). The aim is to develop conclusions from the actual experience, rather than prior assumptions. In this way the researcher not only deliberately avoids a narrow, pre-determined focus but also avoids the danger of finding only what was expected (Aanstoos, 1986).

In a later volume, Spinelli (1997) encourages the phenomenological investigator to approach the subject with an attitude of naivety. Essentially Spinelli (1989) recognised the impossibility of transcendental bias in favour of an attempt to be open. For some instances Spinelli even seems to indicate that bracketing to this level is unrealistic. Howe (1991) observed that the intensity of leisure experiences might be one such example. In addition, even when bracketing is not likely or feasible 'the very recognition of bias lessens its impact upon our immediate experience' (Spinelli, 1989, p. 17). Lavery (2003) extends this view by encouraging the researcher to cultivate an attitude of doubt.

The second step outlined by Spinelli is the rule of description. That is, describe as opposed to explain. The intention is to differentiate between any attempt to immediately explain or question the findings. Thus the need for an hypothesis or theory to frame the findings is negated. However, Spinelli recognises that 'no description is altogether free of explanatory components' (Spinelli, 1989, p. 18). Still, the point to his understanding is that experiences should be described on their own merits and not as a function of some theory or hypothesis.

Spinelli considers the third and final step to be horizontalisation or equalisation. In this step the phenomenologist is encouraged to refrain from creating a hierarchy from the items we have described. Each item is to be viewed as, initially, having equal value or significance.

On the other hand, Moustakas (1994) dedicated eight chapters to the development of his transcendental research method. First though he effectively distances his phenomenological research method from other qualitative studies such as ethnography, grounded research, hermeneutics, heuristics and interestingly empirical phenomenological re-

search. For Moustakas phenomenological research necessarily requires attention to greater methodological detail and precise process steps.

The researcher following a transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgements regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the *Époche* process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies-to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

First he delineates between the preparation stage, the data collection stage and the data analysis stage. A researcher conducting research into the human experience has a responsibility to ensure the study meets appropriate standards or rigour and quality. To this end the topic should be 'rooted in autobiographical meanings and values' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103). The researcher should then conduct a comprehensive review of all related literature and set criteria to locate co-researchers. Next a comprehensive set of instructions and agreements should be developed that meets with ethical principles. Interestingly Moustakas also encourages the researcher to develop a set of questions to guide the research process before conducting a 'lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on the bracketed topic and question' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). Finally, the researcher is encouraged to develop textural and structural descriptions through organisation and analysis of the data. Whilst I intend to consider the processes detailed by Moustakas further, it is worth noting at this stage the views of Husserl who deliberately refrained from developing a structured system (Crotty, 1996b). Equally important is the view that precise research procedure does not ensure quality research substance (Ledford & Mohrman, 1993; Reason, 1993).

In the preparation stage Moustakas (1994) emphasises the importance of formulating the question. The question should have personal and social meaning and be precisely worded with every word defined, clarified and explained. As an illustration Moustakas presented a study on time to show how the initial researcher was totally absorbed in his own relationship with time. Only after this relationship was fully explored did the researcher formulate a question. Moustakas then showed how each key word was described and defined by the researcher.

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In selecting the co-researchers Moustakas presented few boundaries. Essentially co-researchers need to have experienced the phenomenon, are available and agree to the instructions and agreements as related to the ethical considerations. However, in his example there are considerations to pre-interview interviews and the co-researchers commitment to open-ended investigation of the phenomenon. Interviews seemed to be presented as the sole method for investigating the phenomenon. However, before gathering the data, Moustakas emphasised the importance of a complete review of literature. The rationale behind reviewing the literature after choosing the co-researchers was not explained.

According to Moustakas (1994) there are four kinds of literature review; integrative, theoretical, thematic and methodological. An integrative literature review draws conclusions, outlines methods, evaluates data, makes interpretations and presents findings from studies that are relevant to the topic. The methodological review focuses on the research methods used. Theoretical literature reviews focus on the theories related to the study. The thematic review organises and presents the core themes. All reviews should include technical and non-technical literature.

The next stage, data collection, is based on interviews that are informal and open-ended. The researcher's aim is to create an appropriate, comfortable atmosphere that allows for a full description of the phenomenon in question. Before starting the interview the researcher also needs to ensure that they have bracketed effectively and continue to do so throughout the interview process. Finally the data are organised and analysed in a similar way as described by Spinelli (1989). For Moustakas (1994) the process moves through a complete transcript to horizontalisation, then thematisation, then rechecking against the original transcripts. Individual textural descriptions are then completed with verbatim examples. A structural description is then constructed and the textural and structural descriptions are used to describe meanings and essences. Finally, the individual analyses are integrated to form a universal description and these descriptions are compared and contrasted to previous literature.

In summary, Moustakas (1994) perceives transcendental phenomenology as a pure and distinct form of phenomenology with a specific role of investigating consciousness.

Intuition akin to sophisticated yogic meditation is used to change the views held on a phenomenon until the real meaning is eventually uncovered (Laughlin et al., 1990).

Another major distinction is the emphasis on intuition, imagination, and universal structures in obtaining a picture of the dynamics that underlay the experience, account for, and provide an understanding of how it is that particular perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and sensual awareness are evoked in consciousness with reference to a specific experience such as jealousy, anger, or joy (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

This view has been transformed into a precise linear construction of processes and steps that have been designed specifically to explore similar concepts. Some of the recommendations such as precisely formulating the question and ensuring that the co-researchers have experienced the experience are worthy of note. However, as we have noted (Ledford & Mohrman, 1993; Reason, 1993) precise systems do not guarantee quality. Furthermore, it may be that the uniqueness of the extreme sport experience indicates the need for a different approach. Still further, despite the detailed descriptions and precision of writing I must confess to being no clearer about how one actually carries out a phenomenological research study. How does the eager, beginning researcher ensure that what is described is the phenomenon and not just a subjective perception of others' subjective perceptions or motivations? How exactly does one do *époche* or bracketing?

Crotty (1996b) started his description by critiquing thirty published papers that explicitly considered phenomenology. For the first few chapters he shows how they are in fact not phenomenology. For me this was a very useful way of understanding the practicalities of phenomenology. The main understanding being that it is so very easy to think one is "doing" phenomenology correctly whilst simultaneously missing the whole point. Crotty (1996b) considered that the main confusions were clustered around understanding the three terms "experience", "phenomenon" and "bracketing", accumulating and analysing the data and staying true to the subjective whilst still undertaking phenomenology.

For Crotty (1996b) the basic elements of the phenomenological method were outlined by, the often-quoted writer on phenomenology, Spiegelberg (1982). As I noted in the previous chapter Spiegelberg (1982) considered that the method of phenomenology is

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what makes phenomenology, phenomenology. As such he devotes the final chapter of his analysis of the phenomenological movement to discussing the steps of phenomenology as generally practiced. In this process Spiegelberg admits that for the beginning phenomenologist the journey is difficult to determine. However, despite these warnings he has outlined and detailed seven steps.

The first step, investigating particular phenomena, combines three subsets or operations. Phenomenological intuiting requires a total focus on the object in question without losing oneself in the process. In attempting to grasp the uniqueness of specific phenomena one must be open and sensitive, perhaps even determining similarities and differences to related phenomenon. This process takes into account not just the purely private subjectivity of the phenomenon but also the phenomenon itself. Phenomenological analysing concerns itself with the 'analysis of the phenomena themselves, not of the expressions that refer to them' (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 690). On the surface this might seem similar to Moustakas's (1994) view of analysis, however Spiegelberg (1982) continues by observing that this did not imply the need to dissect the phenomenon into parts.

It comprises the distinguishing of the constituents of the phenomena as well as the exploration of their relations to and connections with adjacent phenomena (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 691).

Phenomenological describing, according to Spiegelberg, has in one sense, been over emphasised, as there is a danger of describing before fully intuiting the phenomena. Thus it is important to know what is being described before writing the description. In contrast, van Manen (1990; 1997b) considers writing to be the paramount activity. Still, whichever view is accepted the purpose of the phenomenological description is to 'serve as a reliable guide to the listener's own potential experience of the phenomena' (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 694) and might entail metaphor, traditional terms, new terms or analogy.

The second step in Spiegelberg's process of phenomenological exploration is the investigation of general essences. The aim here is to move from the particular to the universal, through a clustering process. The third stage involves exploring relationships or connections between the essences. The researcher is encouraged to recognise that relationships develop within an essence and between essences. It is in this stage that the

phenomenological explorer attempts to vary aspects of the relationships in the imagination in order to test components of the relationships. However, as Anderson (1998b) observed it is important to switch from detailed examination to global examination, from intense study to rest and to ensure contradictions are also examined.

Spiegelberg's (1982) fourth step, watching modes of appearance, describes the systematic exploration of what appears and the way in which they appear. Here we must consider the aspect that is presented, potential deformities and clarity of appearance. Fifthly, Spiegelberg recommends exploring the constitution of phenomena in consciousness. This means exploring the way in which an object or phenomena takes shape in our consciousness. As an example Spiegelberg describes how a new city or person gradually takes shape in our mind. Often the beginnings are confused and based on first impression, however, a picture gradually emerges as more detail is added and we develop a more comprehensive appreciation.

The sixth step outlined by Spiegelberg (1982) is suspending belief in existence. Essentially this is the phenomenological reduction. This is the process of bracketing or suspending judgment about whether certain aspects of the content exist or not. The aim of this process is to free the explorer from previous restrictions and potential irrelevancies. Effective utilisation ensures that all aspects of the data are considered equally. Hence an unprejudiced consideration for the 'what' of the phenomenological search is ensured.

The seventh and final stage involves interpreting concealed meanings. Here Spiegelberg (1982) indicates his stance on the phenomenological movement. Spiegelberg reluctantly admits a brief sojourn away from the methods outlined by Husserl (as cited in Spiegelberg, 1982) and towards considerations from hermeneutic phenomenology. Thus he seems to indicate his preference for the traditional phenomenologies. The phenomenologies that could be likened to the model 'T' ford for cars. However, to extrapolate his point, the phenomenologist is concerned with 'going beyond what is directly given' (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 712). Essentially the understanding is that not all meanings are immediately accessible. The act of interpretation is an attempt to explore those meanings that are more vague.

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Spiegelberg's comprehensive account of what, in general, a phenomenologist does is essentially a set of elements that are not to be considered as an ordered process or a series or set of steps to follow (Crotty, 1996b). For a beginner in the field much of what he outlines could be considered in a multitude of ways. For example, should a phenomenologist consider other writers or other fields of thought in their attempt to return to the things themselves? In an attempt to answer some of these questions I turn now to Crotty's (1996b) own account of an existential phenomenological method.

From Crotty's (1996b) account of the phenomenological research methodology we find that the phenomenological process is 'an attempt to regain a childlike openness in our encounter with the world' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 158). This process has been outlined in a series of steps. First, determine precisely and accurately what the phenomenon in question is. Second, 'consider the phenomenon precisely as a phenomenon' (Crotty, 1996b, p. 158). To achieve this, the researcher should consider the phenomenon as if for the first time. All knowledge about origins and history, all pre-accepted associations and understandings should be disregarded. Every perception, judgement, idea or consideration to the phenomena should be shelved. Instead the researcher should open up to the phenomenon in all its guises.

The third step for Crotty (1996b) is the description of what presents itself to us in our immediate experience. Step four questions the descriptions outlined in step three. Here the researcher is concerned with confirming that what has been said about the phenomenon is genuinely from our experience. The researcher considers the possibility that the knowledge is from past experiences or knowledge, from previous theory, from associations or any other predetermined understanding that does not relate directly to the immediate experience. If it is not related to the direct experience, it is abandoned. Step five, for Crotty, determines what it is about the phenomenon that makes the phenomenon what it is. The researcher asks questions of the elements in the refined descriptions such as "would the phenomenon be the phenomenon if the elements were not there"?

Crotty (1996a) expands on his ideas in a number of ways. First he notes that step two is in two parts, the first deals with bracketing and the second opening ourselves to immediate experience. In this case, bracketing involves the disciplined and persistent setting aside of all previous knowledge, perceptions and understandings. Opening up to imme-

diate experience of the phenomenon entails surrender. That is, in opposition to general perception about science, the phenomenologist does not desire or attempt to control or manipulate matters. In this instance the researcher should be open to the experience, listen, meditate, let the experience speak for itself. A passive, contemplative attitude is required. Braud (1998) expands this concept even further by recommending that researchers merge with the object of study.

But a researcher can take an even bolder step, as well, in the direction of a truly transpersonal methodology. Such a step involves paying full attention to *what is known directly to the eye of the spirit*; this type of knowing seems to require a change or transformation in the investigators *being*. It requires that the investigator *become* what is being studied and to know it as *subject* rather than as object (Braud, 1998, p. 51).

As we have already argued, for certain experiences language could create a barrier to complete understanding. Crotty (1996b) considered that descriptions are inevitably limited by and embedded in the thought patterns and language of our cultures. As such it may be that the best that can be achieved is a minimisation of such limitations by ‘using’ language in describing the phenomenon. This of course presents complications as descriptions become confusing or over complicated, as words acquire new meanings or understandings. In effect language can only help allude to the essence of the phenomenon it cannot truly illuminate. Phenomenology necessarily becomes an hermeneutic science. The task of the phenomenologist is to unmask the experience by working through all those layers that hide the essential nature of the phenomenon.

Whilst accepting the inevitable limitations presented by language the phenomenologist still has the task of determining the essence of the experience, as far as possible. Crotty’s (1996b) step five challenges the phenomenologist to determine whether the phenomenon is really the precise phenomenon. The challenge in question is to determine whether the characteristics described are wholly and truly the essence of the phenomenon being explored. For example, could the description depict some other experience? Or does the description distinguish itself from all other experiences? Or can the experience exist without the elements described? The final telling point is when ‘the description fits’ (Crotty, 1996b, p. 169). Thus, what was previously implicit has become explicit as a direct result of deliberate and methodical explorations.

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So Crotty (1996b) succinctly defines the phenomenological process in a format that can be followed and that can be adhered to by the inexperienced researcher. Yet there are still questions that spring to mind. Does this process signify a solo exploration? What about using other people's material? Would not poetry or film help in the exploration process? For Crotty the answer to the first two questions seems to be straightforward. A phenomenologist can work closely with co-researchers (Rowan & Reason, 1990) and therefore become a principal researcher. However, on closer inspection we find that for a phenomenologist to work with an 'other', the other in question must also become a phenomenologist. Crotty (1996b) suggests that each person collaborating in the exploration of the phenomenon in question must be prepared to explore the nature of his or her own experience, perhaps with guidance or coaching, but still as a phenomenologist. That is, co-researchers are not only chosen for the fact that they have experienced the phenomenon, or that they are able to talk about the phenomenon but also that they are able to undertake (albeit guided) phenomenological reduction and exploration. This in itself raises further questions about the explication of experiences that are outside of the principal researchers experience and outside of the explicit interest of the co-researchers ability to apply a phenomenological method. Perhaps David Abram's (1996) phenomenological explication into ecology and the life world of the shaman would not have met these criteria. Perhaps then there is an alternative extension of the phenomenological method that we can explore. A process that allows for a deeper level of understanding, within the exploration of lived experience. Perhaps the answers can be found by exploring hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology.

One phenomenological researcher who explicitly describes his research into the human experience as an interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology is van Manen (2000). For van Manen hermeneutic phenomenology is more than just the realisation about the limitation of language, it expands the opportunities available for the phenomenological researcher. No longer is the researcher constrained by first person phenomenology or the direct interviews of other phenomenological co-researchers. In van Manen's (1990; 1997b) understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology, sources for data collection are extensive.

For van Manen (2000) hermeneutic phenomenology is a marriage between hermeneutics, phenomenology and semiotics. Where phenomenology defines a person's

orientation to lived experience, semiotics defines the linguistic approach to research and hermeneutics describes how a researcher ‘interprets the ‘texts’ of life’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 4). Research in the human sciences is a balance between accepting the need for an element of structure without alienating the spirit of humanity. Essentially hermeneutic phenomenology claims to have no method per se and researchers are advised to be vigilant against ‘the seductive illusion of technique’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 3). However, despite these warnings interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology does provide some guidelines. For van Manen (1990) the most important of which is the indelible link between writing and research. Though, of course, the end result may not always portray the struggles that precede the final draft.

As we have seen in the last chapter the essential nature of hermeneutic phenomenology is that experiences are necessarily interpreted. In the same vein undertaking hermeneutic phenomenology can be seen as an attempt to undertake the impossible. An attempt to balance an awareness that whilst life is complex and descriptions of experience unattainable, the explication of some aspect of life is still important to pursue. Essentially, the phenomenological reduction as described by Moustakas (1994) is deemed impossible. As Heidegger (1996) so eloquently pointed out, it is perhaps impossible to separate oneself from ones past experiences and understandings. Yet the attempt to get as close as possible to the things themselves is worthwhile. However, this is not an excuse for the researcher to avoid rigour or be side tracked; rather it serves as a reason to ensure extra rigour and focused orientation to the phenomenon in question.

It is to the interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenological research method that I now turn. Van Manen (1990) posits six dynamically interconnected activities. By presenting six distinct activities the intention is not to provide a detailed step-by-step procedure that a researcher should follow. In fact van Manen clearly advises against this strategy:

Although a certain order is implied in the methodological presentation this does not mean that one must proceed by executing and completing each “step” (van Manen, 1990, p. 34).

On the contrary it may be that some activities are undertaken simultaneously and others intermittently. The aim is to make clearer the hermeneutic understanding of the research process, which in itself helps to develop a dynamic emergent textual understanding

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(Churchill, 2002). In the end the actual method used may be particular to a specific researcher (J. A. Smith et al., 1999).

The first of the six activities involves the researcher being committed and interested in a specific phenomenon or in van Manen's (1990) words 'turning to the nature of lived experience' (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). Here the researcher sets out to explore and eventually describe some element of human experience. The realisation being that the experience can never be explored whilst being lived, it necessarily has to involve reflection on an experience that was past but presented again as present (Sokolowski, 2000). As such any verbalisation is always a reflection or interpretation of a past event (Edwards, 2001). The overall aim of this process is to textually model the essence of a lived experience. To start with an experience itself and end with a text that animates its very nature. As such any lived experience can be questioned. The challenge for the researcher is to orient towards an experience in such a way that the essential nature and meanings are recalled as potential explications of the experience. Thus the researcher should identify an experience that is of intense interest.

This identification process is followed by a formal development of a phenomenological question. However, invariably this question does not stand alone; an interest will often be part of the researcher's greater experience. The question then must clearly define the topic being explored. Once defined the researcher lives the question as if becoming the question. Van Manen (1990) suggests that posing the question in an outright and specific language lessens its force. It is perhaps most appropriate to pose the question in its broadest sense, to ask 'what is' or 'what is it like'. Of course to ask a question assumes the exploration of an answer. In hermeneutic phenomenology this is best defined as a journey towards describing the 'what-ness' (van Manen, 1990, p. 46) of the experience. Equally, as we have determined to ask a phenomenological question a researcher must consider prior knowledge. However, for van Manen (1990) any attempt to ignore or bury prior knowledge would inevitably result in that knowledge creeping into a researcher's reflection processes. As such it is better to acknowledge and come to terms with prior assumptions, beliefs and understandings and make them explicit. In this way a researcher is able to ensure, as best as is humanly possible, that the mystery, that is the phenomenon, is explored for itself.

However, this process inevitably involves the challenge of metaphor. Not the uncovering of the metaphor itself but beyond to the nature of the experience. To a point that is close enough to reveal the thing itself. As van Manen (1990) observed in his discussions on parenting, metaphor does not have to be a barrier.

If this were so, then all we would ever be able to do is uncover the latest metaphor about parenting and unmask its perspectivist nature. And perhaps, in some philosophical sense, this lack of ground is our predicament. But metaphor is not simply the bottomless ground, the empty core, the final destination of language. By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of metaphor toward the original region where language speaks through silence. This path of the metaphor is the speaking of thinking, of poetizing (van Manen, 1990, p. 49).

Thus we explore the meaning of a phenomenon through language, just as the experience displays itself through emotions or behaviours. This is not a postmodern attempt to focus on the story but an explication of the experience through stories (Churchill, 2002). Where the objective is to uncover what is lived and pre-language, the mystery that is the phenomenon, more fully into textual being. Though, as we have seen transpersonal phenomenology recognises the value of other ways of knowing. Perhaps as suggested by scientists such as Barbara McClintock, Jonas Salk and June Goldfield who would use imagery to become the object of study; 'If you want to really understand about a tumor, you've got to *be* a tumor' (Goldfield cited in W. Braud, 1998, p. 213)

The second activity associated with interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology involves investigating the lived experience as opposed to a theoretical presentation of the experience. For van Manen (1990) this entails a broad search for material that might help with revealing the nature of the experience. The understanding being that any material is already an interpretation of the lived experience itself (Lavery, 2003). Perhaps the first place to look for information is in personal descriptions of the experience. This of course assumes that one has experienced the experience under question. Whilst the original text would not be phenomenological the ensuing thoughts and reflections might begin the phenomenological process. The presupposition here is that personal experiences may reveal something about the experiences of others and of course *visa versa*.

It may be important to trace the words that describe the phenomenon back to their original meaning to understand what the words themselves have to say about the

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phenomenon. As it may also be useful to consider terms or phrases that relate to the mystery being questioned. However, some of the major sources of information are those texts that a researcher acquires from others. As Braud (1998) appreciated the voices and experiences of others should be honoured. Sometimes a researcher would ask for the experiences to be written, and sometimes interviews would be recorded. In the case of the interview the researcher would either be gathering information or discussing the meaning of the phenomenon. The important consideration being that the interview should focus on the phenomenological question at hand (Churchill, 2002). Whilst the exact process may depend to a large extent on relationships and abilities of the co-researcher, van Manen (1990) does make some suggestions on format. For example, the primary researcher might begin by asking a co-researcher to focus on an experience and describe what it was like. The essence being to ensure the process remains focused on revealing something about the nature of the phenomenon in question. Though as Kvale (1996) accurately cautioned the researcher should pay attention to not only the words but what is between the words.

The practice of hermeneutic phenomenology also encourages the use of close observation, literature, biography, diaries, journals and art (Lavery, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1989). In describing close observation van Manen (1990) distinguishes it from other observational methods by encouraging researchers to 'enter the lifeworld of the persons whose experiences are relevant study material' (van Manen, 1990, p. 69). Essentially the researcher rigorously gathers relevant anecdotes. The use of literature includes poetry and other sources that might help with the exploration. The important point here is that the story or poem should be significant to the study. Biographies often provide rich experiential descriptions that can be used for phenomenological exploration. Diaries and journals either concurrent or historical may also provide rich insights, as can art. In the case of art van Manen (1990) includes the use of cinematography, music, sculpture and painting. Here the researcher may have the task of interpreting a different type of language, a tactile or visual language. The focus though is on the meaning that language helps to uncover not the language itself (Churchill, 2002). Finally, for van Manen (1990), phenomenological literature can also be used to explore the phenomenon. Perhaps a question has been explored before or the literature may help clarify methodology or writing styles. For Rahilly (1993) the wisdom traditions are a potential source of exploratory information for some experiences.

The third activity involves the hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. Often this involves continually moving between parts of the experience to the whole experience to obtain greater depth (Lavery, 2003). The researcher uses the interpretation process to search for a deeper unity of meaning and continually tests interpretations against new textual chunks. This cyclical process is undertaken with creativity and acceptance of the certainty of presuppositions (Klein & Westcott, 1990). The focus is to arrive at a determination and explication of the phenomenon in question. The researcher conducts thematic analysis or the formulation of a thematic sense or meaning. The aim is to organise and order the research as distinct from following strict rules (van Manen, 1990). Themes might be developed from specific texts before being considered as a part of the whole (Smith et al., 1999).

As a summary, van Manen (1990; 1997b) indicates that themes have various purposes and structures. Themes are a focus of meaning; they are simplifications, descriptions of aspects of the phenomenon. Themes are a point along the journey to a full explication, a way of giving shape to the text. Essentially themes develop as a way of organising the text and as a result of 'insightful invention, discovery and disclosure' (Willis, 2001, p. 13) about an aspect of the information source. Where, the analysis process explores the experience referred to by a description, not the description itself (Churchill, 2002).

Themes can be isolated by considering the whole text and formulating a phrase that expresses the essence of the text. Themes can be isolated by considering the whole text and highlighting essential phrases. Or themes can be isolated on a sentence-by-sentence process. Themes are then compared across data sources to determine common recurrences. However, whichever way one wishes to undertake themes the analysis should be undertaken on texts that the researcher is intimate with, has read and re-read (Smith et al., 1999). Contrary to the writings of van Manen (1990), Smith et al. (1999) advocate a more precise and detailed thematic analysis. Whilst they recognise that the exact process might differ from researcher to researcher they advise a process of thematic funnelling from the broad to the narrow and finally comparison of themes. Still, whichever concept is accepted, in the final analysis the researcher 'composes linguistic transformations' (van Manen, 1990, p. 96) as a creative process of explicating the phenomenon.

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Van Manen (1990) continues his description of thematic analysis by showing how the hermeneutic (or meaning making) interview is a continual conversation, reflection and theme interpretation. An analysis such as this depends on collaborative discussions with co-researchers holding a phenomenological interest. Giorgi (1985), on the other hand, explains that a researcher can question textual descriptions to develop and synthesise meaning units, in a similar manner. In this instance it might be that a description is obtained from those who have experienced the phenomenon and the phenomenological researcher dialogues with the description. For Giorgi (1985) this method means that the phenomenological reduction and bracketing is most developed whilst analysing such descriptions.

When developing the thematic structure or meaning units van Manen (1990) recommends using the fundamentals of lived body, lived space, lived time and lived other. Though, as Barnes (2003) noted when considering the phenomenology of meditation, not all experiences fit within these structures. For Barnes such experiences are often about timelessness, emptiness and connectedness.

However, the process of thematic development does not necessarily result in an explication of the unique description of the phenomenon. It is therefore important to distinguish between the essential elements and incidental elements. For this the phenomenologist uses free imagination and as Crotty (1996b) noted themes are imaginatively changed or deleted to test their relevance. Anderson (1998b) recognised the place of meditation, dreams, imagery and bodily and emotional cues as a part of the theme development progression.

Activity four, the writing activity, for van Manen (1990) research and writing cannot be separated, as the whole aim is to create a phenomenological text.

Writing is not just externalizing internal knowledge, rather it is the very act of making contact with the things of our world. In this sense to do research is to write, and the insights achieved depend on the right words and phrases, on styles and traditions, on metaphor and figures of speech, on argument and poetic image. Even then writing can mean both insight and illusion. And these are values that cannot be decided, fixed or settled, since the one always implies, hints at, or complicates the other (van Manen, 2002a, p. 237).

Writing, in the phenomenological sense, is considered as two distinct levels, the practical and the reflective (van Manen, 2002b). The practical relates to the 'mundane issues of methods, techniques, form, and style' (van Manen, 2002b, p. i). The reflective level entails such issues as metaphysics, truth, limits of language, interpretation and the phenomenological meaning. The essence being that writing is a process that engulfs the phenomenological exploration from its inception.

However, for Smith et al. (1999) the write up would seem to be a distinct phase that one enters after analysis. Still, whichever tact one accepts writing is not just about expressing the words it is also about listening and silences. Silence, as literal silence, is apparent in the interview stage and in ensuring textual quality. Silence is also apparent in tacit knowing whereby we know more than we are able to put into words, where words become ineffective. It may be that what is beyond the linguistic skills of one person, can be put into words by another. For example it may be because a person has had an experience, such as the extreme sport experience, but not the linguistic desire to enter into an exploration or description. It may also be that words are just not able to describe an experience. Silence can also be ontological in the sense that it is often in those moments of silence that we hit upon the most profound insights or realise that we are in the presence of truth (Bollnow cited in van Manen, 1990).

The researcher/writer may use anecdotes or stories to enable the comprehension of a point that might be difficult to explain in any other way. Anecdotes may counteract the tendency to write in theoretical abstract or the dehumanising effects of alienating discourse. Anecdotes may serve to express what was not written or what could be 'generally acknowledged truths' (van Manen, 1990, p. 120). Essentially anecdotal narratives provide a power grounded in the concrete to support the power of philosophy. Willis (2002) extends this view of creativity even further by encouraging the use of poetic reflections. Allowing for the increase in academic risk and difficulty Willis (2002) considers the rewards worthwhile. Expressive texts, as poetic texts, provide an unusual and potentially intriguing view of the phenomenon in question. Descriptions become art in the sense that the aesthetic in research is recognised, though research remains the paramount focus. Willis draws on the example of Blake's famous words 'tiger tiger burning bright in the forest of the night' (cited in Willis, 2002, p. 8) to explore the rela-

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relationship between poetic writing and its ability ‘to call up feelings in the reader, similar to those possessed by the poet’ (Willis, 2002, p. 8).

The act of writing can also provide a distance between action and reflection. A powerful process that is vastly different from the traditional writing up of research reports. For van Manen (1990) the act or perhaps it should be the art of writing is paramount. It formalises thought, allows for a deeper reflection as if making public an understanding of ones own depth. Writing simultaneously distances and unites the writer with the life-world. It is both abstracting and concretising (van Manen, 1990). At its core, van Manen (1990) considers the process of writing and rewriting the most important skill possessed by the phenomenological researcher.

However, I must also recognise that this advice may well depend on an individual’s filtering system (Searle, 1999). That is, an individual who finds it easier to work in a visual manner may prefer more of a focus on visual representation before writing. So perhaps van Manen’s (1990; 1997b) encouragement to write might be better seen as an encouragement to work in language, even if it is a visual language. Writing may need to be an act of composition (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997). After all, the whole point of phenomenology is to examine the nature of an experience through text, not the text itself. In the same vein it may be that sense making is an experiential process where text is only involved when one wishes to transform or communicate the sense making to others. For, in the end, even van Manen (2002a) was impelled to accept that language is limited and that by naming some experiences we annihilate them. Still, it would seem that the eventual aim of phenomenological writing is the creation of a text that hopes to open up human understanding and evoke ‘a sense of questioning wonder’ (van Manen, 2002c, p. 5) in the reader.

The fifth activity outlined by van Manen (1990) in his description of the hermeneutic phenomenological research process is to maintain a strong and “oriented” relation. In contrast to other social sciences, such as ethnography, phenomenological writing exhibits a commitment and involvement in the lifeworld being studied. Abstraction is avoided in an attempt to remain connected to the phenomenon. In this sense the term “oriented” means that there is no attempt to separate life from theory. The notion of strength im-

plies the continued and exclusive focus on the phenomenon. The ensuing texts should be deep and rich.

For the sixth and last activity van Manen (1990) suggests that both the parts and the whole should be balanced. Here the researcher is advised to consider their ethical responsibilities both towards themselves and others who may be involved. For some phenomenon transformations may take place or a new learning that has come as a result of conversations may result in anger or anxiety. The researcher may require considerable creativity in developing the information-gathering processes. Less common experiences, such as the extreme sport experience, may be difficult to comprehend by those who have not lived the experience (van Manen, 2002b). In this case constraints with general validation and information gathering are obvious restrictions. The writer might organise writing to mirror the structure of the phenomenon or as subdivided texts that relate to the themes. The text might relay the journey taken or be expressed in a more analytical format. It may build up to reveal the phenomenon or start with the phenomenon and then fill in essential descriptions.

Equally a text might start with the concepts of lived time/space/body/relationships with others and create a dialogue from this starting point. A researcher could also use a combination or invent something new. As van Manen (1990) noted:

Human science research as writing is an original activity. There is no systematic argument, no sequence of propositions that we must follow in order to arrive at a conclusion, a generalization, or a truth statement, because that would be to see writing itself as a technical method (van Manen, 1990, p. 173).

Essentially, phenomenological approaches to studying the human experience would seem to be just as diverse as the fields of thought that support them. There is a process that I intend to adapt from those works reviewed as there are some commonalities, and I shall explore them later, however ultimately it would seem that the essence of the process is once again to be faithful to the question in hand, to attempt as far as possible to explicate the things themselves. In the words of Spiegelberg (1982):

One might describe the underlying unity of the phenomenological procedures as the unusually obstinate attempt to look at the phenomena and remain faithful to them before even thinking about them.

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Ultimately the originality of the phenomenological approach as a whole is based on the dominating influence of this motive. What distinguishes phenomenology from any other methods is not so much any particular step it develops or adds to them but the spirit of philosophical reverence as the first and foremost norm of the philosophical enterprise. The violation of this norm in an age of reductionism is the *raison d' être* for phenomenology at the time of its birth (Spiegelberg, 1982, p. 717).

What seems to distinguish the different approaches is the underlying belief about how this can be best done. For me though the words of Moore (cited in Willis, 2002) seem to ring true. Namely to be true to phenomenology and to the experience in question an open 'soulful' approach is required. That is, an approach that encourages one to be 'aesthetically awake and attentive to the texture and beauty of every kind of human experience' (Willis, 2002, p. 4); an approach that restores humility, awe, wonder, appreciation and delight (Anderson, 1998a).

In terms of studying the transpersonal human experience through phenomenology, Barnes (2003) reminds us that the concept of bracketing or *époché* maintains that all preconceptions and theories should be put aside. In the end, as noted in the previous chapter, this might also mean that the researcher should bracket previously determined phenomenological concepts, including intentionality. Also, an investigation into a phenomenon may relate to a raw sense but meaning is obtained through filtering via sight, sound, taste, touch, smell and feelings. It is this filtered data that is obtained through phenomenological investigation. Thus the next quandary, as also realised by Palmer (1998), how do I remain true to experiences (writing and analysing) that are potentially transpersonal?

Often the exceptional experience is difficult (or perhaps impossible) to put into words. In these instances Palmer (1998) recommended creative expression through metaphor, poetry and drawings to illustrate the non-verbal elements of an experience. A researcher may also have to pay more attention to symbolic or archetypal information or become more familiar with bodily, feeling or insightful language (W. Braud & Anderson, 1998). Ettling (1998) suggested a level of listening that honours different ways of knowing; a listening that involves emotional awareness and awareness of self. Shields (1998) presented a compelling argument for compiling results in a non-traditional format, as an example her methodology section, for her psychological thesis, was 'The story of my

research' (Shields, 1998, p. 197). Newton (1998) emphasised focusing on the spaces between actions and words.

Towards a phenomenological exploration of the extreme sport experience

It is not my aim to use this section as an opportunity to detail the precise processes that have been used in this study. The following chapter has been deliberately set-aside for this purpose. However, it is important that I explain how research is to serve this practical concern (Churchill, 2002); what I consider an appropriate model for the explication of the extreme sport experience. Essentially this model would have to be practical or to use the words of Devenish (2002) 'a project in applied phenomenology' (Devenish, 2002, p. 2). Any phenomenological approach used in a study such as this will also have to recognise the potential for transpersonal or extraordinary experiences. With this in mind the process to be used in this study are based on those of van Manen (1990; 1997b), who combines phenomenology and hermeneutics, with adaptations to meet the specific requirements of researching the extreme sport experience. The main reason for this is that van Manen accepts the reality of subjective interpretation and allows for the inclusion of a multitude of data gathering processes.

As the primary researcher in this study I must also acknowledge that I do not have the skills of a well-practiced yogi and, as such, must conclude that I will not be able to reach a pure state of transcendence. I must also recognise that perception and knowledge depend on my sensitivities and as such knowledge is dependent on my being and on my preparedness to accept certain realities (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Furthermore, often the precision called for in theoretical writings does not measure up when data gathering relies on a field process (Brymer, 2002), as such it may be that the data gathering process will need to adapt to the needs of co-researchers. However, there are some modifications that are needed in order to explore the extreme sport experience. As noted by Clements, Ettling, Jenett and Shields (1998) the process may well be organic, and the researcher akin to a gardener who first prepares the soil, then plants the seed. Only if the gardeners job is carried out effectively will healthy roots emerge, the tree grow and the fruit be harvested.

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So, armed with the philosophical background outlined in chapter II and the applications documented in this chapter, the following stages briefly outline the stages proposed for the study of the extreme sport experience.

Stage 1: Focusing on the question

In this stage I intend to support van Manen's (1990) perceptions by accepting advice from both Spinelli (1989) and Crotty (1996a; 1996b). Essentially the processes involved here will outline the question and determine how I intend to explore its nature.

Stage 2: Gathering information

In this stage I will be using all potential sources of information that may help with the explication of the question in hand. I will also be accepting the advice of Moustakas (1994) and extensively reviewing any scientific literature that may be available. Further, this review will also take into account advice given by Braud and Anderson (1998) and review literature that may not be explicitly about extreme sports but that may help explore the topic, such as the wisdom traditions, ancient thoughts and some explanatory theories about high-risk sports. However, the intention is to weave this into the story as an aid to exploring the question.

Stage 3: Exploring the phenomenon

Here I intend to explore the information gathered by developing themes. Whilst I intend to remain open and compassionate (Anderson, 1998b) in the process to ensure that the most appropriate method is used, I also intend to take advice from both Crotty (1996b) and Smith et al. (1999). Especially with regards to the detail involved and some questions to ask of the material.

Stage 4: van Manen's (1990) focus on writing

Whilst I tend to agree with van Manen's (1990) encouragement to intertwine the research and writing process, I must also recognise that writing is not my initial process of sense making. My strengths are in the experiencing and picturing aspects of language. As such it may be that I will need to actively involve the process of composing before writing (Smith et al., 1999; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997). Still, I shall heed the experiences of van Manen (2002a) and write, rewrite and rewrite again in the hope that the text ends up "just right" (van Manen, 2002a, p. 249). I shall take care to weigh my

words, clarify meanings, compose and measure the effects of my words on the imaginary reader. I shall, with all of my ability, endeavour to bracket my assumptions in order to stay true to the text.

Stage 5: Focus and orientation

Here I intend to follow van Manen's (1990) advice to the best of my ability and remain strongly oriented to the experience as experienced.

Stage 6: Writing

This section could prove to be the most difficult, as van Manen (1990) noted some experiences are difficult to express in words. Similarly as we have seen expressing certain experiences in terms of van Manen's (1990) suggestion of lived body, space, time and other may not be appropriate for all aspects of experience. Still I shall save the final chapter to explore the relevance of such categories in more depth.

Summary

This chapter has been concerned with describing and critiquing many of the methods used in phenomenological explorations. However, as Embree (2001) ably pointed out much phenomenology has been diluted as a result of not venturing into the roots of the discipline. Perhaps Braud (1998) succinctly defined the quandary in his recognition of the views of a twelfth century thinker Ibn Al Arabi (cited in Braud, 1998) who posited three forms of knowing; the first through information, the second through experience and the third through being. For example, the first form might be reading about extreme sports, the second form might be through a direct experience of the qualities of the extreme sport experience and the third form would be about being an extreme sport participant. For me the search to uncover the experience itself, the 'what' of the experience, has to attempt to effectively utilise all three forms. Essentially, the process involves a development experiential (direct encounters) and presentational knowledge (translation of tacit knowledge) as opposed to a focus on prepositional (theory based) or practical knowledge (skill based) (Reason & Heron, 1995). Still, such an attempt must also be tempered to avoid what Depraz (1999) termed 'methodolgism'. For, just as the phenomenological approach to the study of phenomena is not proposed as a single cor-

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rect method so to one must accept that the final description of the phenomena under study might not be an exhaustive description (Howe, 1991).



IV

Phenomenology and Extreme Sports

Three blind persons and a person with sight stood next to an elephant. Each of the three blind persons felt a part of the elephant – the trunk, a leg and the sides, and said it was a rope a pillar and a wall. The one who could see laughed. “Little do you know what you are touching..., this is an elephant. I know what an elephant is because I can see it. It is black and very big. Its skin is thick and its trunk long. It weighs more than half a ton. That is an elephant.” And he turned towards the elephant for confirmation.

(Sufi joke cited in Ansari, 2000, p. 52)

Before continuing the journey into the exploration itself it is perhaps appropriate to briefly review the last two chapters in such a way as to direct focus for the following chapter. In practice, phenomenology is concerned with phenomena and their systematic study. More precisely the exploration of human experience as lived quality (Varela, 1996). The researcher claiming to use phenomenology to study the appearance of things begins as a naïve observer free from the restrictions of presuppositions. The phenomena under study are various and imply a relationship between the thing in question and the person taking notice of the thing in question (Rinofner, 2002). On the surface the phenomenological analysis would seem to be a perfectly simple process. However, at this point I must openly confess an allegiance with Angela Bello (2002) from the Italian Phenomenology Center who wrote that ‘speaking of phenomenology was all together different from carrying out a phenomenological analysis’ (Bello, 2002, p. 211).

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Still I have openly claimed to have undertaken a phenomenological reduction of a sort and outlined the philosophy and theory behind my claim. Thus I believe it is now incumbent on me to detail the specific methodological processes used in this research project. As indicated in the previous chapter I have taken the works of van Manen (1990; 1997b; 2002b) as my guide and extended them where appropriate.

Anderson (1998b) succinctly outlines her view of a suitable topic for investigation. Essentially seven interacting pragmatic concerns should be adequately realised. A project should be manageable in the time allowed and should be clear and often expressed in one sentence. The topic should be simple, focused and concrete in its relationship. A researcher should be practically able to inquire into the topic. The topic should be inspiring to the researcher and trigger intellectual passion. Finally the topic should focus on something that is still unknown. However, beyond this the phenomenological researcher has a responsibility to ensure rigour, careful data collection, and disciplined analysis (Frick, 1990). It is my contention that these principles define this research project.

The phenomenon to be considered in this study is the extreme sport experience. As such the ultimate goal is to define the essence of the experience. Braud and Anderson (1998) considered research to be a more disciplined, attentive version of a general approach to life. The formal researcher is intentionally explicit and careful about observations, decisions, judgements and processes. The researcher should recognise that research is value laden and depends on personal and cultural views on soundness, trustworthiness and worth. Equally characteristics such as my background, training, worldview and skills could potentially influence all stages from defining the question to communicating the findings. However, as Braud (1994) accepted one should also recognise that those who participate - in extreme sports - are the experts in their field.

In the previous chapter I wrote about the potential for research to be organic in nature (Clements et al., 1998). As such the preparation stage took considerable time and effort. Not only was the extreme sport experience initially hard to define but writings claiming to uncover insights into the experience were often textualising widely different concepts. Thus, whilst on the surface this part of the process would seem straight forward, the crucial question took some time to develop. Equally, analysis proved challenging as

did presenting the findings in a manner that effectively portrayed the experience as experienced. For the approach to inquiry for this study has moved away from the metaphors of human behaviour as laboratory animal or machine and towards an understanding of persons as text. Gergen (1990) describes this concept well:

Beneath the human exterior lies a richly elaborated, subtle patterned, and fundamentally passionate set of impulses. The study of human action thus holds the promise of a fascinating odyssey into a foreign land, where surprises are possible at every turn and from whence one may return edified not only by the subject in question, but about oneself, if not the whole of humankind. If persons are texts, inquiry into human action becomes an honourable and intriguing quest into the unknown (Gergen, 1990, p. 29).

Thus, my aim for this chapter is not only to outline the processes undertaken and show how each stage fits in with the research timeline but also to explore my experiences in putting this research project together.

Stage 1: Focusing on the question

Perhaps as one would expect, stage 1 fits neatly at the beginning of the formal research timeline. That is once the project became a formal study it was incumbent on me to formally define the question. This of course required a proper (as related to this study) definition of what I was interested in studying; what exactly is an extreme sport? After all, unlike common experiences, defining this concept would be the only way of ensuring that I was studying the appropriate experience and would, of course, influence the rest of my research journey. Whilst I was sure I knew what an extreme sport was it quickly became clear that those I spoke to or who's work I read had differing opinions. Still if the boundaries were not defined accurately the study would collapse before it even began. Thus my search for definitions included formal and informal methods but based on previous studies.

Defining the boundaries

The phrase 'Extreme Sport' has developed into an all-encompassing umbrella term for those activities that are traditionally associated with 'adrenalin junkies' (Lambton, 2000). Skateboarding, street luge, snow sports, mountain sports, moto-cross and surfing have been presented as examples of such sports. Still it soon became clear in readings that many writers were using the same descriptor for different activities and different

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levels of the same activity. Furthermore even within the descriptor certain predetermined assumptions were being proffered; namely the relationship to risk. However, I shall return to this notion in a later chapter. For now it is important to understand what I have claimed as extreme and how one draws the line between what is extreme and what is not.

Essentially the argument presented for many of these so called 'extreme sports' is that such activities involve a high potential for injury. This can be differentiated from normal risk which is culturally accepted as related to skill and experience (Hunt, 1995a, 1995b). Such sports can be further defined as:

A variety of self-initiated activities that generally occur in natural-environment settings and that, due to their always uncertain and potentially harmful nature, provide opportunity for intense cognitive and affective involvement (Robinson, 1992, p. 90).

Still for me this definition seemed too broad and did not really encompass the experience I was interested in exploring. After all one can surf or ski without being extreme. Equally, one can undertake many such activities without understanding or a need for skill and expertise. I was interested in those activities that extended the boundaries, where participants had taken years to perfect skills and competencies. To be precise I was interested in the experiences of those who jump off cliffs armed with only a parachute; who surf waves as big as a house (or bigger); who ski sheer cliffs; who would willingly kayak over waterfalls for the experience itself. Thus 'extreme sports' live up to the intended definition as sports that truly are on the outer limits. The thread that seemed to tie all these activities together and opened the door to other activities was that a mismanaged mistake or accident would most likely result in death. I was to find support for my understandings from Hunt (1995a; 1996) who considered extreme to be where fatality is of ultimate concern.

Thus, the focus of this study is on those who participate at what could be naively perceived to be at the extreme end of the continuum. In this arena participants may require a deeper knowledge of a natural element and the development of specific technical and emotional skills (Ogilvie, 1974).

Narrowing the focus, broadening the horizons

Thus, armed with a new understanding of a method of delineation the study took on a new direction whereby previous understandings could be categorised as relevant or not relevant. I was able to narrow my focus on to specific activities which also resulted in a broadening of potential activities. I was, for example, able to differentiate between B.A.S.E. jumping, where participants jump off cliffs with only one parachute and no mechanical aids to remind them to pull the release cord and skydiving where two parachutes and mechanical aids are used and there is space all around. In climbing, the definition provided a clear line between those that climb at a high level with ropes and those that climb without ropes. However, for some activities, skiing for example, I relied on the knowledge of those participating to indicate if they would categorise their sport as extreme. At the same time other sports such as cave-diving, solo unsupported expeditions in extreme environments and certain mountaineering activities were added to the list.

Mountaineering provided a challenge in itself. At its best high altitude mountaineering is most definitely an extreme sport. However, tourists with enough money have also been dragged to the roof of the world. Thus I needed to be very narrow in my acceptance of mountaineering accounts. The inevitable downside of such a decision is the potential that certain rich accounts might have been missed. However, I felt that this was preferable to the contamination that would have occurred if such a decision had not been made.

Focusing the question

The underlying theme for this study is to determine what “the difference that makes the difference” is for those who choose to participate in such environments; where a mis-managed mistake or accident would most likely result in death. Thus, to fully explore this experience it is also important to comprehend the almost extreme sport experience. And as the reader will soon note on occasion I have made that point explicit when exploring thematic interpretations in the ensuing chapters. One question guided the process “what is the extreme sport experience?” Or to put it another way “how is the extreme sport experience perceived by participants?”

Stage 2: Gathering the information

Taking into account the definition presented earlier in the thesis and the suggestions outlined by van Manen (1990) and others material from a variety of sources has been utilised. Such sources included video, poems, biographies and autobiographies and, most importantly, focused conversations with extreme sport participants. In this study extreme sport participants were considered as the experts on the experience and as such were formally deemed to be co-researchers, where my role was as principal researcher. Co-researchers were chosen for their ability to assist the investigation in terms of having sufficient experience and their ability and desire to unravel the mysteries that make up the extreme sport experience. That is co-researchers were chosen for the sake of the phenomenon (Van Kaam, 1966) and for their ability to explore the experience. Co-researchers were not chosen for their knowledge of the phenomenological framework and no attempt was made to change co-researchers into phenomenological researchers.

Potential co-researchers were both approached by the principal researcher for their expertise and approached the principal researcher on finding out about the study. All actual co-researchers were contacted prior to the focused interview stage in order to explore the requirements for this study. That is, to ensure they had the required skills and were comfortable discussing their experiences. Each participant was provided with a consent form and an information letter. Ultimately, from the many potential co-researchers identified twelve interviews have been used, four from women, eight from men (four other women were identified but circumstances meant that we were not able to carry out effective interviews). The age range of co-researchers was from 30 to 68 years. Material from other sources (e.g. personal accounts and video) included both male and female accounts.

The interview

Gergen (1990) likened exploration into human action as an 'intriguing quest into the unknown' (Gergen, 1990, p. 29), and this is certainly my experience of the process. Not only in terms of what information would be explored but also in terms of the interview flow. With this in mind the following outlines the interview process and provides an exploration into the decisions taken. Fundamentally, discussions on the experience of co-researchers took the form of exploratory interviews. That is as co-researchers were not experienced with phenomenology I directed the process through exploratory ques-

tions and confirmations. As the interaction between interviewee and interviewer has a considerable effect (Rennie, 1999) and due to the hermeneutic nature of this study it was assumed that interviewee's would be 'self-interpreting when providing the text' (Rennie, 1999, p. 7). As such, the interview process followed what Howe (1991) termed 'a highly unstructured, open-ended format' (Howe, 1991, p. 55).

In this instance the primary researcher's role was to keep the interview focused on the question and develop depth in the co-researchers' responses. However, to develop depth my role was to aid in the process of verbalising, and therefore objectifying, what was previously only an act (Vermersch, 1999). The process of explication attempted to follow the advice of Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999) by guiding the co-researcher into a state of re-living the experience, developing the action based knowledge into representational knowledge and supporting the process of verbal clarification. Probe questions were posed in response to co-researcher replies and in an attempt to organise an understanding of an interviewee's perceptions of reality through postulating descriptive, structural and contrast questions where required (Bannister, 1990). I also heeded the recommendations of Iverson and Thelen (1999) and actively attended to the gestural elements of the discourse. Though in the end this element was hardest to take forward into the analysis and in reflection video taping the interviews would have been more appropriate. The whole process was underlined by a respect for those participants involved (W. Braud & Anderson, 1998); an acceptance for their realities and a fullness of attention in an attempt to minimise distortion or filtering, denial and projection (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Equally, I attempted to ensure that I listened reflectively and with integrity (Anderson, 1998b).

In practice, the interview process began with a time of unrecorded rapport building and discussion about the PhD process in general and specifically with regards to this study. Participants were given time to confirm their understandings and comfort with the process. Whilst there was some evolution in the specific method the focused element of the interview process invariable began with a request from the principal researcher for a brief history into each co-researcher's journey to initiating their chosen activity. The next stage of the interview process explored the structure of the experience itself through evoking images, sensations, sounds and the like (Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999).

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Interviews took place at the convenience of the co-researcher and in an environment of their choice. All interviews were taped.

In effect whilst I was armed with a certain level of knowledge about the phenomenological process and in particular the notion of initial bracketing (the phenomenological *époche*) I experienced, as has been reported by other researchers (Barrett, 1998; Rahilly, 1993), considerable difficulty maintaining a wholly bracketed state. That is, a state that was defined by my ability to restrain presuppositions, to refrain from judging or taking any defined stance whether personal or scholarly (Balaban, 2002; Hein & Austin, 2001). Essentially, the prior knowledge obtained from the first literature review and the intensity of listening required often interfered with my ability to suspend beliefs and remain focused and objective. Still I aimed to follow the advice of Depraz, Varela and Vermesch (1999) and follow the three components of *époche*; suspension of habitual thoughts, conversion of focus from the external to the internal and being receptive (perhaps as opposed to proactive searching – also described as ‘letting go’) to what reveals itself.

One area of major difficulty was related to the conflict between allowing the co-researcher to maintain a fluid description whilst at the same time attempting to take note of certain gestures, phrases or words that needed revisiting. For some this meant a revisit for a second interview in order to clarify certain terms and phrases otherwise missed. Thus the process involved a simultaneous broad and narrow focus on the experience. Sometimes exploring the experience as a whole and at other times exploring the meaning of specific words or phrases, but always with the intention of making sense of the experience as experienced. That is, as Conroy (2003) advised I was continually searching for understandings and meanings during the interviews; continually attempting to clarify co-researcher meanings.

Stage 3: Exploring the phenomenon

In the previous paragraphs I observed the difficulty I had in maintaining a full bracketed state whilst undertaking the interviews. However as Giorgi (1985) recommended great effort was placed on ensuring effective implementation of the second level of bracketing (the eidetic *époche*) during this exploration stage (Depraz, 1999; Hycner, 1985; Rahilly,

1993). That is my aim was to get beyond what Gergen (1990) considered as the ‘insignificant surface’ (Gergen, 1990, p. 31) to reach what would he defined as the ‘profound depth’ (Gergen, 1990, p. 31). Or in other terms a move to essences (Bullington & Karlson, 1984). In truth the phases outlined by Depraz et al. (1999) above were more appropriate for this stage of the *époche*. The following outlines the processes taken.

Exploring interviews

My first step followed the advice of Amlani (1998) and Ettling (1998) and listened to each tape immediately after undertaking the interview, whilst maintaining a relaxed a state as possible. This also provided space to relive the interview process and to recall the importance of gesture and silences. Each tape was listened to a number of times before and after the transcription was made to gain a sense of the whole (Hycner, 1985). My second step was to read, read and re-read each individual interview transcript in an attempt to gain what Aanstoos (1986) described as:

A sense of the whole, attuned not merely to the linguistic content, but to the intentional, or lived, experience of the subject as intentional, lived experience (Aanstoos, 1986, p. 85).

Each individual tape/transcript was listened to, read and thematically analysed as a separate entity though all transcripts were revisited as themes became more explicit. Initially the first couple of transcripts explored became a mass of notes and highlights which soon became a jumbled confusion. My next port of call was to use the excellent computer aided package NUDIST in vivo, which I had used successfully in another research project (Brymer, 2002). However, for this project I found that for my sense making processes staring at a computer screen with only a few lines at a time quickly became tiring and I was so engrossed in the grass beneath the trees that I could not see the wood.

Equally as Gergen (1990) so eloquently explored the process of interpretation involves more than just reading or exploring the raw text as if separated from the experience itself. For Anderson (2000) hermeneutical research is inevitably both rational and unconscious and therefore creative and rigorous. The same action can be interpreted in a vast number of ways depending on the interpreters (both primary researcher and co-researcher) and the information that surrounds the text. Gergen (1990) advised ensuring

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that text is considered within its 'emergent context' (Gergen, 1990, p. 33) or as part of a flowing interdependent process. Thus interpretation involves more than just developing two dimensional themes from written texts. Further still, as van Manen (1997a) stated 'there is no single method' (van Manen, 1997a, p. 346) for interpreting text. Yet, arguably, consistency and transparency rely on the methodical management of the research process (Hayllar, 2000). So through interpreting the readings of others and my own trial and error I accepted the advice of Smith et al. (1999) and adapted well documented processes to meet the needs of the extreme sport experience and my own interpretive processes.

Both formal and non-formal understandings of potential themes were continually questioned, challenged and assessed for relevancy as I moved through the transcripts and other material. Questions such as; 'what is beneath the text as presented?' 'am I interpreting this text from a position of interference from theory or personal bias?', 'what am I missing?' guided my intuiting process. Often this resulted in initial thematic understandings being rejected, changed or filed as variations (Barritt, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1983).

Towards the phenomenological description

Steinbock (1997) makes clear that phenomenological descriptions are not about reproducing 'mere matters of fact or inner feelings' (Steinbock, 1997, p. 127). On the surface a straight forward proposal, that seems to reflect the need to look beyond (bracketing) personal and theoretical understandings. Yet I found this process the hardest to carryout. How, exactly does one know that the description one ends up with is indeed phenomenological? As we have already observed the phenomenological approach is more than just following someone else's technique (Steinbock, 1997).

The first step for me was in understanding the nature of the phenomenological theme. Themes in a phenomenological sense are concerned with exploring meaning structures as opposed to repetitive concepts (Barnes, 2003; Hycner, 1985). Thus the process involves getting to know the phenomenon in question. The outcome though potentially considered in terms of the phenomenological traditions of structural, textural and creative descriptions should never-the-less not restrict the phenomenological researcher

from producing descriptions consistent with phenomenological or theoretical assumptions (Barnes, 2003).

Though I ended up having to start afresh, the initial reading and re-reading enabled an understanding of each co-researcher's experience beyond that gained from the interview process. In the second attempt at this process I was able to begin differentiating between those elements that might be interesting (e.g. some motivations for beginning to participate) but were definitely not part of the experience as experienced and those that were important elements (Barritt et al., 1983). Here I followed the process of free imaginative variation (Bullington & Karlson, 1984; Hein & Austin, 2001; Mohanty, 1989). That is I explored the themes by imaginatively changing or deleting themes to test for validity (van Manen, 1997b).

In practice, as Conroy (2003) suggested both verbal and non-verbal aspects of the interviews were attended to. Thus, I highlighted all phrases that were potentially of interest and noted any relevant non-verbal considerations and as Smith et al. (1999) detailed, made notes in one or other margin. These notes were reconsidered in terms of potential underlying thematic phrases or meaning units (DeMares, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

The next stage of the process was to consider all such emerging themes to determine any potential connections. Initially, following the advice of Barnes (2003) I extracted all relevant phrases and keywords and considered them in terms of emerging themes. However, whilst Smith et al. (1999) suggested writing such emerging themes in a linear fashion on a blank sheet, I found the process of Mind Mapping (Buzan, 2000) akin to the concept map of Smith (1999) far more productive. In this way certain initial thematic ideas were grouped and further defined. These second order themes were considered against the original transcripts to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations. This whole process was repeated again and again, testing the assumptions, until interpretations seemed to gain some solidity and form. At the same time notes on hunches and other thoughts were documented in a journal format (B. A. Smith, 1999). All data sources (transcript or other account) were considered on their own merit before attempting to synthesise accounts and formulate general themes. This synthesis was eventually written as the phenomenological description in the vein of DeMares and Krycka (1998).

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Other first hand accounts

As with the interview transcripts relevant first hand accounts were read or watched (cited in the case of visual material) in order to get a feel for the whole. Each account was considered on its own merit and notes eventually taken to document interpretations of meanings. In this instance, perhaps as the material was not specifically designed for a phenomenological research study maps of meanings were not always made. Often material from such sources was considered in the light of interpretations prepared from the co-researcher interviews.

As interpretational themes seemed to gain some solidity a brief outline was forwarded to all co-researchers in September 2003 for comments. In August 2004 a draft copy of the thesis including changes and clearly outlining my arguments for interpretations was forwarded to each co-researcher. As with many of the process in hermeneutic studies the transition from interview to non-interview data was not linear. Often I would be analysing non-interview material in between gathering further interviews or analysing a previous interview.

Stage 4: van Manen's (1990) focus on writing

My initial sojourn into the realms of writing was to take the traditional route of exploring the literature as a separate entity and chapter and then detail the research process and so on. Without totally understanding the reasons why until much later this initial process did create some barriers to affecting the phenomenological attitude. I had begun the research process with the desire to explore the structure of the experience but had not really comprehended the best route to take. That is I knew I wanted to develop an understanding of what the experience was but had not recognised phenomenology as the appropriate concept, let alone what branch of phenomenology. The point being that this initial focus on literature review and traditional thesis structure actually created temporary barriers to my exploration. The first barrier experienced was in the bracketing stage whilst attempting to explore transcripts and other material. The second created an inner struggle as to the most effective way to represent my interpretations of the experience.

After countless conversations about my struggles, formal and not-so-formal discussions about the issues and contemplations about presenting the material, the break through

came as if by accident on July 5th 2003. By this time I had already undertaken much of the analysis and had a rudimentary idea of the experiential structure. Thus without intending to labour the point I ended up realising that the thesis should be structured in three sections. The first in a similar manner to Abram (1996) would discuss the relevant elements of phenomenology (the theory and practice that frames the study), the second would discuss those typical perceptions that are assumed to be part of the experience but perhaps are not and the third would consider the experience itself (though not as a mature phenomenological description). The conclusion would bring together all elements as a phenomenological description. Thus I rejected the original literature review structure and began re-reading the original documents in order to effectively relate the story in the revised format. The new literature review became what Moustakas (1994) referred to as a thematic literature review combined with a methodological literature review.

That is, my reading of the literature relating to extreme sports became an hermeneutic process of thematic interpretation of both formal and non-formal manuscripts as part of the desire to explore the experience as experienced. The other element of the literature review became a process of developing an understanding of phenomenology and its application. In section 2 and section 3 then each chapter considers what has been written and discussed in both formal and non-formal contexts. The reviews were then assessed against the words of those participating in an attempt to expose what might be a more appropriate understanding of the extreme sport experience.

I must also make explicit my agreement with Smith et al. (1999) who found that the distinction between analysis and writing a false distinction. That is this write up stage also doubled as a revisit and deeper analysis of the extreme sport experience. Also as I wrote inevitably further examples and accounts of the extreme sport experience were presented to me, which of course required analysis on their own merit.

Stage 5: Holding the focus

Indeed I found that for most hours of most days I was absorbed by the process of explicating the essence of the extreme sport experience. Formally I followed a set of documented pathways, however, much of the thematic understandings were evoked in

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those quiet times whilst walking on the beach or in that semi-dream state before and after deep sleep. In truth, I have lost count of the times that my dreams would wake me with ideas or I would be prevented from falling asleep as concepts wormed around in my thoughts. Often it was as if the nature of an element of the study was given to me as a sudden impulse or intuition. A process I later found support for in the works of Conrad-Martius (Bello, 2002) amongst others (Hein & Austin, 2001). More than thinking on the experience, I lived and breathed the extreme sport experience for at least three years engrossed in the desire to reach beyond the naïve and explore the essence.

Stage 6: Writing up the research

As proposed by van Manen (1997a) as a researcher I moved away from the focus of writing up a research report and towards authoring a text. In a sense I accepted the challenge posed by van Manen (1997a) who outlined five textual features that might be observed in the mantic (how the text speaks) aspect of phenomenological text from common experiences. A phenomenological text most often includes ‘lived throughness, evocation, intensity, tone, epiphany’ (van Manen, 1997a, p. 350). This means that the final phenomenological text is concretely part of the lifeworld, is vivid and evocative and develops intensity and thickness in the descriptions and discussions. The researcher as author allows the text to speak in the ‘hope that the reader will be affected by it’ (van Manen, 1997a, p. 364) and attempts to evoke resonance and sensory awareness. But further still my aim in creating this textual description is also about the desire to gain connection or phenomenological intimacy with the extreme sport experience (van Manen, 2002a). In the final analysis as author my intention has been to ‘lead the reader to wonder’ (van Manen, 2002c, p. 5) to evoke and suggest (Tymieniecka, 1988) whilst at the same time attempting to follow Crotty’s (1996a) insistence that the final description not be tainted by attributes not determined from the immediate experience.

Anderson (2001) detailed some valuable clues on effectively portraying experiences that might reach into the transpersonal realm. A process of writing she termed ‘embodied writing’ (Anderson, 2001, p. 83). In her words:

Embodied writing seeks to reveal the lived experience of the body by portraying in words the finely textured experience of the body and evoking sympathetic

resonance in readers. Introduced into the research endeavour in an effort to describe human experience-and especially transpersonal experiences-more closely to how they are truly lived, embodied writing is itself an act of embodiment, entwining in words our senses with the sense of the world (Anderson, 2001, p. 83).

The researcher collects, analyses and reports with the intention of inviting the reader to become fully absorbed in the experience with their full sensory field. Anderson (2001) makes it clear that writing on lived experience requires more than distanced, Cartesian style reports. Drawing in examples from poetry, music and experiences with nature she extols the virtues of evoking resonance in others. Thus the researcher, it might be argued, breaks with tradition to take what Anderson (2001) considered as the hard road of embodied writing. For me a worthy challenge.

So to the process of how to undertake such a task, Anderson (2001) first recommended stepping out of the bustle of everyday life and slowing down as part of the attempt to explore just the right word or phrase. In her experience a paragraph written this way might take days. Still it is considered worth the effort. Following this recommendation Anderson points to seven principles to strive for. The first of which is the intent to invite resonance in the reader. The second is to include both internal and external perceptions on the experience in question. The third principle entices the writer to drop the objective stance whilst still maintaining a strong, concrete and specific stance. Principle four includes the use of multi-sensory descriptions with the text, often resulting in 'slowed down' descriptions from various sensory angles. The fifth principle is to accept that experience might include more than the physical senses and as far as possible to explore the full sensual matrix. Anderson's (2001) sixth principle considers personal narratives within the final text an essential aspect. The final principle requires the writer to value explicit lived experience.

Taking advice from Anderson (2001) I have grasped the opportunity to challenge my textural representation and attempted to explore the experience as close as possible to the notion of embodied writing. As Anderson (2001) observed if one takes time to slow down and listen to the world one is able to hear the subtle conversations that take place beyond the consideration of human vocal ability. For some experiences such a subtle listening and writing is required. Thus each chapter is structured as a discussion on cer-

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tain themes, the intent being to properly position the eventual phenomenological analysis.

Summary

Phenomenological exploration in practice emphasises the acceptance of certain attitudinal awareness over and above prescribed techniques. In fact it would seem that following technique too rigidly could even blind the researcher to the essence of the phenomenon in question. Thus the practical stages chosen and undertaken in this study have included advice from many sources with additional input designed to ensure that I effectively remain oriented to the phenomenon that is the extreme sport experience. For much of the time during this process I was carrying out many of the stages at the same time. I was at once gathering data, reviewing literature, trying to make sense of previously gathered data but always in the back of my mind questioning whether what I was doing was indeed at the appropriate phenomenological depth. Always unsure that the questions I was asking of the material were appropriately worded.

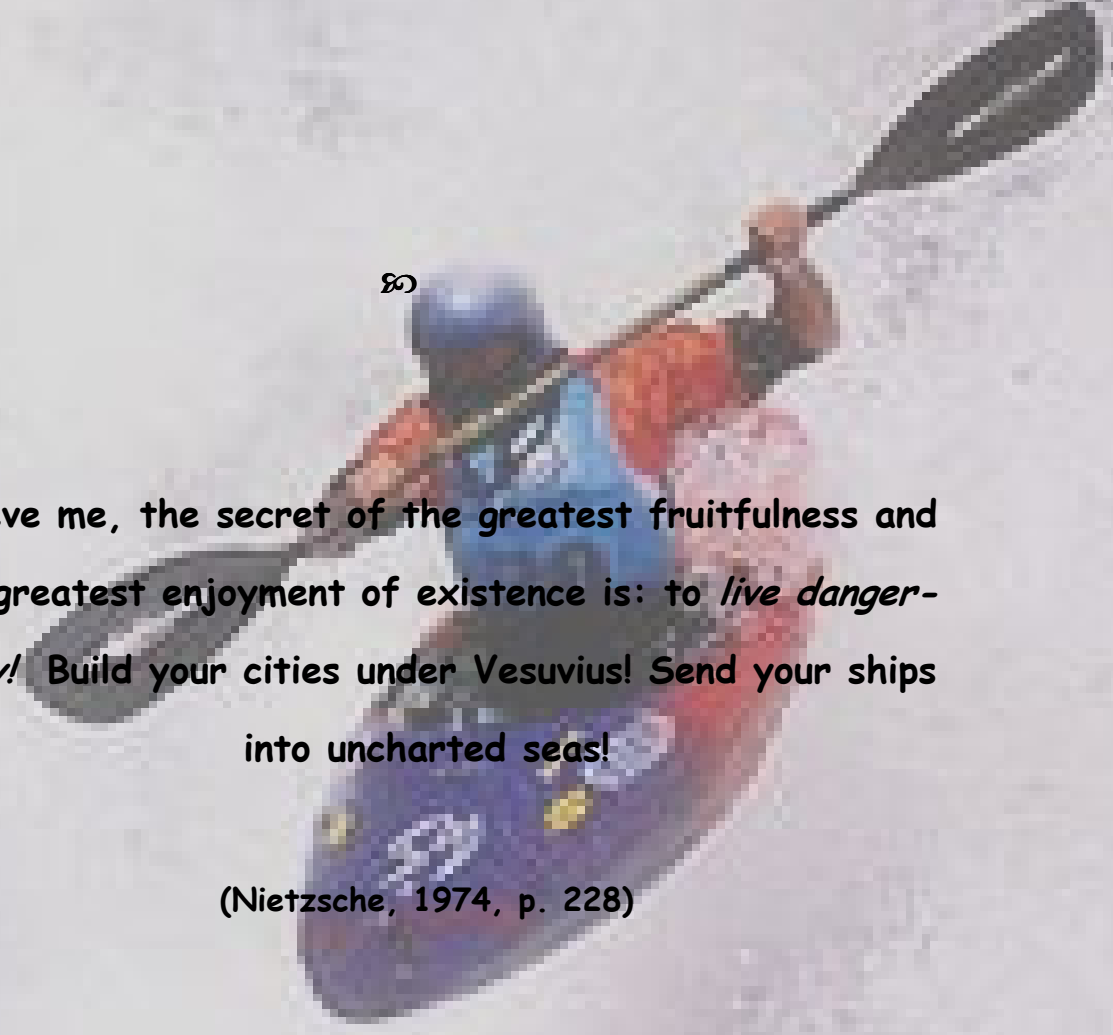
Still, in the end the reader must judge. Words cannot be the experience they can only replace the things that they name (van Manen, 2002a). As Laughlin (1988) observed like the finger pointing to the moon words can only point to an experience but by pointing one can hopefully glimpse the moon. Some events might actually challenge the phenomenological description (Wilshire, 1997).

Post-amble

This section has been involved with the mapping out and description of phenomenology as related to the study of the extreme sport experience. At times it has been necessary to adjust the path I actually took whilst arriving at my assumptions in order not to labour a point. That is, whilst it may have taken a plethora of related but non-specific readings to get to a certain point in my understanding of phenomenological philosophy, theory and praxis in my writings I have discarded what was on the edge of relevance for those that seemed most relevant.

The result has been the creation of three chapters designed to frame the exploration in such manner that the reader can hopefully follow my thoughts. Thus the naïve, pre-understandings are initially deconstructed as a necessary preliminary step towards the reconstruction of a more authentic understanding of the extreme sport experience. In other words, the following sections continue the journey by initially exploring what the experience is most probably not, despite the unbalanced emphasis, with the aim of exploring what the experience might be.

Section 2



Believe me, the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to *live dangerously!* Build your cities under Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas!

(Nietzsche, 1974, p. 228)

- On Risk, Death and Fear -

Preamble

As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, my exploration into the extreme sport experience included a great deal of pre-thesis preparation that pointed to pre-conceived ideas connecting extreme sports to risk, death or fear. As such the intention of this section is to consider the concept of extreme sports by exploring these typical notions from academic studies, media and other sources. It is not necessarily my intention to argue that these factors have not been part of some participants extreme sport experience, merely to position them in their proper place. After all it is perhaps these qualities that attracted media and marketing (R. P. Heath, 1997). However, for some participants the whole 'extreme' movement is no more than marketing hype 'cashing in on something very personal and ultimately very rewarding' (Gadd & Rubenstein, 2003, p. 25). As such, it is my hope that the reader will glimpse a different viewpoint on these areas and an acceptance of the importance of their appropriateness.

Perhaps risk-taking, death and fear are all part of the same identity; however, for ease of exploration I have separated them in my writings in an attempt to do justice to each category. As such, I have also had to make choices as to where to discuss certain studies. For example the notion of death anxiety is considered in the chapter on death. The chapters are organised as risk then death then fear as part of the journey closing in to the experience itself. That is, if separated, the relationship to risk would seem to be furthest away from the experience with the relationship to fear perhaps further along the journey to exploring the experience. Each chapter follows a slightly different format than the one preceding as a reflection of this point and the different type of prior literature and research. Hopefully the post-amble at the end of this section effectively brings all three perceptions back into one whole.

Part of the initial journey towards exploring the extreme sport experience led down a path that involved familiarising myself with those writings that have precisely and potentially involved extreme sport participation. In formal academic terms my readings covered a multitude of theoretical perspectives, from sensation-seeking to self-esteem, some qualitative and a majority quantitative. Equally I found that many academic studies had focused on a positivist paradigm without really delineating what the definition of the activity was. These chapters then could also be considered as a critique on the positivist/reductionist viewpoint where appropriate. Essentially, I have only included

those works that may help shed light on the experience and the relationship to risk, death and fear. As such, this section is also an exploration into other more informal and qualitative viewpoints.

The first chapter aims to place the experience within a framework of current understandings by reviewing relevant scientific, technical and informal work on risk-taking. The aim being to question the view that extreme sport participation is purely about the notion of risk (Groves, 1987). The review considers what has already been learned about the extreme sport experience and those who participate in extreme sports. As already mentioned this path was fraught with confusion so this review also takes into account any model or theory that may help to explain what others have presented for publication in scientific journals or other media. The intention is to show that weaknesses still exist and that just because we generally assume a direct connection to risk-taking, say, it does not mean one exists. Thus, chapter V considers the role of psychological and related knowledge to the understanding of the extreme sport experience. The review highlights a limited and often inconclusive understanding of high-risk sport and a perhaps false assumption that the extreme sport experience is just further along the same continuum. To support this argument I have interwoven the opinions of participants where appropriate.

Chapter VI follows a similar path but this time exploring the notion that the experience is all about the desire for death. As the reader will find, less academic studies have theorised an explicit relationship with death than risk, but an assumption is still there. On the other hand non-formal opinion has taken the thought on board. Once again this chapter considers the words of those who participate and other non-technical literature to support my arguments. Chapter VII follows a similar pattern as the other two but focusing on the notion of fear. Or to be precise, questions the thought that participants in extreme sports either have no fear or some other inappropriate understanding of fear. Where appropriate I have also drawn parallels with other descriptions.

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On Risk-Taking

To Love
is to risk not being loved
in return. To hope
is to risk disappointment
but risks must be taken because
the greatest risk
in life is to risk nothing.
The person
who risks nothing,
does nothing,
sees nothing, has nothing
and is nothing.
[§]He cannot learn,
feel, change, grow,
love and live.

(Author unknown cited in Exley, 1997, p. 48 [brackets mine])

Probably the most common explanation about extreme sports participation that has been voiced to me is the notion that participation is just a matter of some people's need to take unnecessary risks. I must admit that the connection between risk and extreme sports provided the most difficult quandary in my exploration as well. As I have noted in chapter IV what separates extreme sports from other sports is that there is no second chance, the most likely outcome of a mismanaged error or accident is death. Surely then there has to be a strong link to risk? and on the surface this connection would seem inevitable. To begin with I struggled to separate risk from the extreme sport participation and focused on refocusing the understandings into a positive form: i.e. that is risk is not pathological or negative. However, as I hope to explain in this chapter this explanation

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does not entirely fit. For example, there is undoubtedly risk involved when crossing the road or driving your car. Whilst for some who might like to play 'chicken' or test the upper limits of their car's speed on sharp corners, perhaps, the focus is risk. Equally as the quote at the beginning of this chapter alludes to, falling in love risks rejection, yet do we search for rejection? are we rejection-seekers? I would suggest that for a majority both activities are just part of a greater concern, there is still an element of risk involved but it is relegated to a secondary level. That is, a person crossing the road attempts to remove all potential risks before doing so, yet cross the road they do!

The aim of this chapter is to explore this notion and hopefully put risk in its place. It is not my intention to argue that risk is not the focus for everyone as for a small percentage of participants the focus may be on risk (Marino, 2001; Stranger, 1999), merely to refocus the issue in two ways. The first to explore the important positive aspects of risk as implicit within the extreme sport experience and the second to relegate risk from a position of power as defining the extreme sport experience to a secondary role. As such, this chapter reviews literature that somehow relates to the extreme sport experience. The literature reviewed shows that whilst a number of studies have considered high-risk sports, very few have attempted to understand the extreme sport experience. Further, those studies that have explicitly researched an extreme group have often shown limited differences to normal-risk and high-risk participants. There has also been little attempt to consider personal meanings for participation.

The flow of this chapter begins with a brief overview of the manifold ways that risk-taking has been explored. However, it is not my intention to provide a detailed picture of risk-taking behaviour as it is currently categorised and studied, merely to provide a lens through which the remainder of the chapter can be viewed. Those areas that have been used to theorise or test the extreme sport experience are then examined in more detail. Whilst numerous observations are made throughout the text, as one would expect, salient points are drawn and questions asked in the final paragraphs. All texts are reviewed with aim of explicating the experience and its relationship to risk-taking.

Risk-taking: An overview

Explanations for risk-taking are many and varied. Risk-taking has been explained as a function of an evolutionary relic (Llewellyn, 2003), a biologically predetermined force (Jones, 2000), a function of a specific gene (DRD4) (Ebstein & Belmaker, 1997), a personality trait (M. Zuckerman, 1984b) a pathological disease (Llewellyn, 2003), a cultural phenomenon (Lightfoot, 1997), a gender issue (Lois, 2001) and a search for aesthetics and transcendence (Stranger, 1999). The notion of risk has been classified in terms of antisocial risk, adventurous risk and pro-social risk (Cheron & Ritchie, 1982). Risk-taking has also been considered as a negative to positive continuum. Where delinquent behaviour is associated with negative risk-taking (Farley, 1991) and the positive side of risk-taking has been considered as ‘probably the most positive force in the human race: our creative side’ (Farley, 1991, p. 375). Interestingly, Farley also noted that those individuals deemed to be demonstrating negative risk behaviours can rechannel their behaviours towards more positive activities.

Farley (1991) hypothesised that countries such as USA and Australia consist of greater numbers of risk takers due to the number of immigrants (i.e. those that have taken considerable risks to move countries). As such these countries have the potential for enormous creativity as well as considerable potential for violence and destruction. Marshall (1968) also considered risk and its place in modern day civilisations:

We are what we are only because throughout the ages certain men have willingly accepted high incalculable risks. I cannot imagine civilization enduring, much less advancing, without that spirit being present (S. L. A. Marshall, 1968, p. 62).

Marshall’s view is that some individuals function more effectively in stressful environments. Situations that could be deemed as stressful from the view point of an outsider would be viewed as natural by such an individual.

In the past research into risk-taking in physical activity has been invariably interested in the negative aspects (Farley, 1991).

Stereotypes affect not only our perceptions of what we believe high-risk sportsmen to be like but also what we believe others believe them to be like. This affects our judgment regarding expectations of others, and consequently, iden-

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tity-formation assumes an aspect of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Farley, 1991, p. 47).

For example, Hunt (1995a) recognised only four main approaches to the study of risk in leisure activities. The first, psychoanalysis, argues that ‘unresolved oedipal conflicts’ (Hunt, 1995a, p. 440) determine risk-taking behaviour. The second, gender, considers that risk-taking is linked to ‘cultural constructions of masculinity’ (Hunt, 1995a, p. 440). The third, structural functionalism, relates risk-taking to ‘the achievement of athletic identity’ (Hunt, 1995a, p. 440). The fourth theory used to explain risk-taking, symbolic interaction, focuses on how participants ‘manage fear and maintain competent identity whilst engaged in activities that may be perceived as dangerous’ (Hunt, 1995a, p. 440). In symbolic interaction language, risk is rationalised using practices such as humour (Hunt, 1995a). Greenberg (1977) indicated that the need for risk-taking is a function of a modern, aggressive, competitive and class centred society where ‘blue collar’ workers are unable to find a channel for risk-taking at work so they are ‘forced’ to take risks in leisure. As such risk-taking activities are regionally dependent (e.g. snow based where it snows, water-based where there is water and so forth).

Risk-taking in sporting terms is ‘a very complex phenomenon’ (B. Rossi & Cereatti, 1993, p. 420) with two dimensions; physical danger and unforeseeability (Rossi & Cereatti, 1993). Risk-taking has objective elements and is dependent on subjective perceptions (Shoham, Rose, & Kahle, 2000), which involves an analytic (probabilities, formal logic risk assessment and so forth) system, an experiential (cited intuitive, fast, automatic and weakly accessible to the conscious awareness) system and emotions (Slovic, Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2002). Risk-taking may have different constructs depending on cultures, sub-cultures or individual differences. For example research into risk-sports includes a study on elite climbers by Robinson (1985). Participants were asked to rank themselves on their risk-taking behaviour, 85% confessed to being moderate risk-takers, 10% ranked themselves as low and 3% as high. Terms such as ochnophils (those that desire stability) and philobats (those that seek thrill) have even been used in an attempt to explain risk-taking tendencies (Marino, 2001).

What follows is an examination of those studies and theoretical explanations of the extreme sport experience. As already noted the point of these reviews is to consider what

has already been studied in the hope that some light will be shed on the experience. Throughout the text questions are raised that focus on particular arguments or studies, more general questions concerning how risk-taking relates to the extreme sport experience are raised at the end of this chapter.

The genetic connection

Recently studies exploring the genome have unearthed a gene presumed to be the cause of excitement seeking, novelty seeking, exploratory or risk-taking behaviour (Okuyama et al., 2000; Persson et al., 2000). The DRD4 (or sometimes D4DR) gene was discovered in experiments conducted in Israel and connected to such experiences as alcoholism (Bau, Roman, Almeida, & Hutz, 1999) and drug abuse (Ebstein & Belmaker, 1997). It is the long allele of this gene that has been associated with such so called risk-seeking behaviours (Persson et al., 2000). Whilst empirical studies have often failed to replicate the initial findings (Benjamin, Osher, Belmaker, & Ebstein, 1998; Paterson, Sunohara, & Kaennedy, 1999; Persson et al., 2000; Sullivan et al., 1998) and studies have not included extreme sports, or for that matter high-risk sport participation, some theorists have made such a leap (Baker, 2004; Dennison, 1995; M. Zuckerman, 2000). That is some theorists have associated extreme sports participation with the DRD4 long allele as the proof of a genetic predisposition. However, the genetic explanation would be hard pressed to explain the findings of Brannigan and McDougall (1983) who reported that participants deliberately search out specific activities in order to live out deeply held dreams. A point echoed by participants in this study. Especially considering the findings of Chen, Burton, Greenberger and Dmitrieva (1999) who showed that the DRD4 allele might be prevalent in all migratory societies. Still perhaps the experience can be defined through other inbuilt mechanisms.

The case for sensation seeking

Sensation seeking has been defined as a trait theory that explains the continual search for risky, complex or novel experiences as an inherent need in some individuals (B. Rossi & Cereatti, 1993; Schroth, 1995). Trimpop, Kerr and Kirkcaldy (1999) quoted Zuckerman's definition of sensation seeking as 'the seeking of varied, novel, complex and intense sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks for the sake of such experiences' (Trimpop et al., 1999, p. 238).

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Though a state connection has been indicated the general perception is that one is born with a desire for sensation seeking (M. Zuckerman, 1979). Essentially the theory postulates that sensation seekers require an arousal level that is higher than non-sensation seekers in order to maintain an optimal level of stimulation (M. Zuckerman, 1984b; M. Zuckerman, Bone, Neary, Mangelsdorff, & Brustman, 1972). The question is what, if anything at all, has sensation seeking got to do with the extreme sport experience?

Numerous studies have been conducted on sensation seeking and high-risk sports (e.g. Schrader & Wann, 1999; Zarevski, Marusic, Zolotic, Bunjevac, & Vukosav, 1998). A popular and evolving method for measuring this trait is termed the sensation seeking scale (Straub, 1982; M. Zuckerman, 1971, 1984a). The current sensation seeking scale (form VI) (M. Zuckerman, 1984b) measures experiences and intentions for five phenomena: A total score (TS or SSS), Experience Seeking (ES), Boredom Susceptibility (BS), Disinhibition (DIS) and Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS) (Schroth, 1995). ES relates to the seeking of sensations through the mind and senses and non-conformity. DIS measures the need for social stimulation and disinhibition. The BS scale considers a person's reaction to monotony and restlessness (M. Zuckerman, 1984a). TAS relates to an individual's desire to seek out risky and exciting sports or other activities. For Zuckerman (2000) this includes extreme sports. Those who score high on the scales are considered to live out their tendency to risky behaviours either positively (e.g. sports such as climbing) or negatively (e.g. crime) (Hansen & Breivik, 2001).

Straub (1982) used Zuckerman's sensation seeking scale (form V) to test differences between certain groups of activities that were classed as high-risk sports (automobile racers and hang gliders) and a control group of bowlers. The scale revealed a significant difference for general sensation seeking, boredom susceptibility and experience seeking. However, no significant difference was found for the thrill and adventure seeking or the disinhibition scales. It is also worth noting that Straub did not attempt to define what made a sport 'high-risk', neither was there any consideration to extreme sports.

Shoham et al. (2000) conducted a study with practitioners of sports that they considered risky (skydiving, rock and mountain climbing, deep-sea diving, and gliding) in Israel (males n=59, females n=13). The mean age of the group was 30.3 years. There was no

indication of the level at which each individual participated, however, in this study thrill and adventure seeking and the general sensation seeking scores were high.

Robinson (1985) also used Zuckerman's sensation seeking scale to test elite rock climbers ($n=30$, mean age 27.26 yrs) from the UK and Canada. The results were compared to American undergraduate norms for males ($n=377$, age 17-22). Essentially the t-test comparison showed a significant difference in general sensation seeking ($p<0.001$), TAS ($p<0.01$) and ES ($p<0.001$). A significant difference using MANOVA was also found, in a general sense, between expert rock climbers and college football and rugby players ($n=27$) though individual scores were not recorded. Expert rock climbers also expressed a preference for climbing at the limits of their ability and an interest in taking part in 'a variety of sporting, intellectual, and less conventional pursuits such as marijuana and hallucinogenic drug use' (Robinson, 1985, p. 401). There was no attempt to explicitly consider the extreme sport.

Rossi and Cereatti (1993) considered the case of free-climbing, alpinism, speleology and ski-jumping. They found that TAS, ES, DIS and total score were significantly different to controls. Also, alpinists, speleologists and ski jumpers scored significantly higher than climbers for TAS. Climbers scored significantly lower than alpinists and speleologists for ES but higher than ski jumpers. Risk levels were defined in terms of accident levels over the preceding three years. As such, sports were categorised such that alpinism and speleology were considered high-risk activities, ski jumping medium risk and climbing and physical education students (the control) low risk. It is worthy of note that the measure was related to how many mistakes as opposed to the consequences of mistakes. As Rossi and Cereatti explained in their discussion, it is important to evaluate risk objectively before exploring risk-taking sports. Further, they considered that to rationalise participation as purely a function of risk-taking would be limited. They also theorised two different attractions to novelty; information seeking (cognitive) and sensation seeking (emotional). There was no attempt to explicitly consider extreme sports.

Breivik (1996) also used Zuckerman's sensation seeking scale (form V) on Norwegian Everest climbers ($n=7$), with elite climbers ($n=26$), sports students ($n=43$) and military recruits ($n=26$) acting as reference groups. When Everest climbers were compared with elite climbers he found a positive significant difference (at 0.05 t-test significance) on

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the BS scale, only. Comparisons between Everest climbers and the sports and military group demonstrated positive significant differences for all but the disinhibition scale. Breivik indicated that the high TAS and ES scores may be indicative of environmental considerations:

One needs this curiosity and eagerness in order to get to high mountains and faraway places to endure hardships and pain but where one also gets emotionally <<high>> from the scenery, the height and the risks (Breivik, 1996, p. 317).

However this does not explain the lack of significance between Everest climbers and elite climbers for TAS, ES, DIS and SSS.

Breivik considered that the significant difference found for the BS scale was a direct indication that Everest climbers need to continually move on as a result of impulsivity and restlessness. Interestingly high altitude climbers invariably take great care to develop effective safety procedures and an advanced skill level. As such, to consider their behaviour as impulsive behaviour may not be appropriate. Breivik also noted that TAS and ES were positively correlated with various risk-taking behaviours.

Whilst the preceding studies may have included extreme sports I found the definitions unclear at best and non-existent at worst. Also, rather than answer questions about the extreme sport experience I found that this lack of clarity and consistency confused the issue. One study that effectively considered the extreme sport issue was a study by Slinger and Rudestam (1997). Slinger and Rudestam explicitly attempted to define the characteristics of an extreme sport and test these characteristics against other sport types. Essentially participants from rock climbing, skiing, piloting a small plane and white water kayaking were categorised into an extreme group and a high-risk group. As with the definition in this study the difference posed by Slinger and Rudestam was that for the extreme group the likely consequence of an error was death. A low risk-taking group from bowling, gyms and other sports competitors were matched for age and acted as the control group.

Slinger and Rudestam (1997) carried out a multi-faceted quantitative and qualitative study in an attempt to explain extreme and high physical risk-taking behaviour. Ten participants from each activity were categorised as extreme risk takers (n=5 per activity)

or high-risk takers (n=5 per activity). The lower risk control group consisted of 20 members. Subjects were administered standard questionnaires on sensation seeking, death anxiety, repression-sensitisation, generalized self-efficacy and physical self-efficacy. A 21 item structured interview that probed views on perceptions of motivation, risk, pain, disinhibition, death, mastery, control and self-efficacy was also conducted. Whilst many of these findings will be discussed elsewhere, in terms of sensation seeking the study found no significant difference between the extreme, high or low risk groups.

One explanation for these findings posed by the researchers was that the control group was a selected collection of 'highly trained athletes' (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 360) from a variety of sports that included but were not limited to bowling. As such all athletes may have been high sensation seekers. For example, many studies that have tested sensation seeking in other sports have found that athletes, in general, score higher than the average population. Furthermore, studies considering those who participate in contact sports have demonstrated scores that are higher still (Schroth, 1995). As an example, Jack and Ronan (1998) rated eight sports in terms of sensation seeking. The highest scores were found in sky-diving followed by mountaineering, swimming, hang-gliding, aerobics, automobile racing, golfers and marathon runners.

Another consideration posited by Slanger and Rudestam (1997) was that the sensation seeking scale was designed for the general population and may not be fine enough to measure extreme levels of sensation seeking as potentially experienced by those that participate in extreme sports (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997). Furthermore many of the questions (e.g. I would like to try parachute jumping) specifically relate to the activities being tested. As such it may be that answers relate to the questions as opposed to the potential for sensation seeking (Zarevski et al., 1998). For me though, this study questions the validity of relating sensation seeking to the extreme sport experience and perhaps even the relationship between risk and the extreme sport experience. A perception supported by Slanger and Rudestam (1997) and also by Breivik (cited in Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 369) who noted that sensation seeking was not sufficient to explain the motivations of climbers.

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In support of this argument is a study by Goma (1991) who investigated alpinist (n=27), mountaineering related sportsmen (n=72) and general sportsmen (n=271) and non-participating individuals (n=54). They considered that alpinists were extreme sportsmen (as related to the potential for death – 4 participants died whilst climbing on a concurrent expedition). In sensation seeking terms they found no significant difference between the mountaineers and alpinists. Interestingly there was also no significant difference found between alpinists and others sports people, though there was a difference between mountaineers and other sports people.

Perhaps then there is a limit to the level of risk that is accepted and therefore accountable through the concept of sensation seeking. Perhaps, sensation seeking may indicate a potential for involvement in high-risk sports but the trait may not necessarily predict involvement at an extreme level. It may also be that definitions of what constitutes high-risk and extreme have muddied the waters. For example some sports may be riskier than others (e.g. skating and scuba) (Schrader & Wann, 1999). It is also possible for one activity to have different degrees of risk (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997). However, it might also be possible that participation in extreme sports has nothing to do with sensation seeking and extreme sports are not just further down the risk continuum.

‘Type-T’ personality explanations

Another aspect of personality that has been associated with extreme sports is the ‘type-T’ personality (Groves, 1987). The ‘type-T’ personality trait was first determined by Farley (1991) to question the concept of risk-taking. The ‘T’ was coined to stand for the type of behaviour that epitomised the thrill seeker. ‘The *T* stands for “thrills,” and what I am referring to is risk-taking, thrill seeking, stimulation seeking, excitement seeking, and arousal seeking’ (Farley, 1991, p. 371). Farley recognised positive and negative aspects of risk-taking, however he considered that ‘risk taking is at the core of human creativity’ (Farley, 1991, p. 372). ‘Type-T’ personality is considered biologically based and relatively stable throughout life. The theory differentiates between ‘type-T’ (arousal seeking) and ‘type-t’ (arousal reducing/avoiding). As such each type falls at the opposite end of a continuum with conflicting motivational preferences (see table. 1).

Table 1. Motivating factors for Big-T and small-t individuals (adapted from Farley, 1991, p. 372).

<i>Big-T's prefer</i>	<i>small-t's prefer</i>
Uncertainty	Certainty
Unpredictability	Predictability
High risk	Low risk
Novelty	Familiarity
Much variety	Little variety
Complexity	Simplicity
Ambiguity	Clarity
Low structure	High structure
High intensity	Low intensity
High conflict	Low conflict

Other dimensions within this model include a negative/positive dimension and a mental/physical dimension. The 'type-T' physical personality may explain the 'thrill of participating in dangerous sports' (Farley, 1991, p. 378). A 'type-T' positive person accepts risk in a positive way as such those that require physical risk should be encouraged to participate in risk sports. 'Type-T' negative risk takers are those that participate in a negative way (e.g. delinquency and crime) (Groves, 1987). As such 'type-T' people require something more than baseball or long distance running (Groves, 1987). Once again the experience of participation in extreme sports has been related to the desire for risk though this time as a theoretical concept with no empirical support.

Reversal theory and extreme sports

Kerr (1991) considered arousal-seeking in risk sports. The concept of reversal theory was used to explain individual participation in certain high-risk sports for Australian, Dutch and British groups. Kerr (1993) refers to the reversal theory approach as a structural phenomenological approach. That is the study of motivation that includes both subjective experiences and the way in which such experiences are structured. Essentially reversal theory posits a trait dominance (predisposition) to arousal-seeking

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(paratelic dominance) or avoidance (telic dominance). The telic dominance scale is a trait oriented assessment tool, based on reversal theory. The scale measures individual differences in attempts to gain arousal because it is felt to be pleasant (telic state) or reduce arousal because it is felt as unpleasant (paratelic). Three trait sub-scales are measured, arousal avoidance, serious-mindedness and planning orientation. The measurement scale consists of the same three sub-scales (planning orientation, serious mindedness and arousal avoidance) and is scored such that a low total score indicates paratelic dominance (Kerr, 1993).

Kerr (1991) found a significantly lower level of arousal avoidance for surfers, sail-boarders, motor-cycle racers and parachutists. Kerr also found that marathon runners and weight trainers tended to be arousal avoiders. Shoham, et al. (2000) found a low mean score for arousal avoidance when participants from skydiving, rock and mountain climbing, deep-sea diving and gliding (n=72) were tested. Whilst these studies did not attempt to explicitly differentiate between extreme and high-risk sport participation they are worthy of note as the results indicate that some individuals may find high arousal enjoyable. However it is also important to note that this argument may be circular. That is participation in such sports may have supported a change in such factors. All one has to do is take the first step. This is certainly the experience of those co-researchers taking part in this study.

Edgeworks

One model that has attempted to account for voluntary risk-taking is termed Edgeworks (Lois, 2001). Edgeworks refers to an individual's desire to explore the edge or limits of their own control and in specific risk contexts. Some individuals may feel control over their own lives and 'experience intense highs' (Lois, 2001, p. 3) immediately after surviving occasions where psychological and physical limits are pushed. Individual differences mean that some people are more effective in situations that require higher risk. Lois carried out a longitudinal ethnographic study on a volunteer search and rescue group (ages 22 to 55). Essentially Lois determined that individuals pass through four stages during a serious rescue; preparation, performance, going over the edge and extending the edge. The study outlined the emotional context of rescue work. Each stage required a different mechanism for handling the stresses involved. She also found gen-

der differences in the interpretation and management of feelings. This study found that when members successfully completed serious rescues they spoke about the highs involved and how these highs lasted for extended periods. Perhaps this is akin to voluntarily participating in activities that happen to involve a high degree of risk. However, it should be recognised that whilst individual rescue team members may have also been participants of extreme sports there was no attempt to consider extreme sports per se.

It is perhaps also worth noting that as Celsi et al. (1993) found individuals participating in extreme sports may not consider that they are pushing the edge of their control. In fact Celsi et al. cited numerous examples of well respected extreme sport participants who considered that they participated within their comfort zone. For some, the preference was to leave participation for another day if they felt that the limits of their control were being extended. Groves (1987) noted that high-risk athletes deliberately become very familiar with all the variables including their equipment and the weather. Brannigan and McDougal (1983) established that hang-gliders tend to develop heightened perceptions through participating. However, this heightened perception may not be as a result of a homogenous desire or need for risk as opposed to an individual's desire to take personal control or responsibility.

So is it about drama?

Celsi et al. (1993) proposed an 'extended dramatic model' to explain participation in high-risk sports, in particular the sport of sky-diving. They posited environmental influences such as mass media, social specialization and technology, where participation was considered as a dramatic performance. For example in skydiving, essential equipment was likened to props, the skydiving building as a set and the skydivers as players. Interestingly these categories could also be placed on golf or cricket. There would seem to be limited reason to consider the dramatic metaphor as solely related to high-risk sports let alone extreme sports.

However part of the study included a phenomenological study of individual meanings. They reported individual feelings of time slowing down, relaxation and highs that lasted for days. Individuals were quoted as working only to skydive and continued skydiving

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was deemed to be a function of group camaraderie, creation of self identity and heightened experience. Interestingly they also found that motivations for participation changed over time, to begin with thrill, survival and normative influences were important. These developed into feelings of achievement, pleasure and group identity and finally to transcendent motivations of personal identity, flow and *communitas*/phatic communion, but more about these points later. Celsi et al. (1993) argued that the novice's motivation based on the thrill and excitement of the risk itself is akin to the non-participants view of skydiving. It is only when experience is gained that the transcendent motivations can be understood. Further, the contention was that B.A.S.E. jumping is considered as a graduation into extreme sports for some skydivers; as such this study should be seen as a study focusing on high-risk sports. The extreme sports experience was not explored.

Is it about danger?

Another study that focused on the risk aspect of participation considered the validity of an adventure recreation model (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989). The underlying perception is that participants positively value risk and danger. As such participation in risk sports is 'fundamentally different from other recreation experiences' (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989, p. 127). The model posits individual attributes, level of engagement and activity or setting attributes as underlying risk recreation. Individual attributes include frequency of participation (low to high), level of skill or experience (low to high) and locus of control (leader to individual). Activity attributes relate to the level of risk (low/perceived to high/real), social orientation (program/courses to peers/solo) and environmental orientation (developed to natural). Essentially the level of engagement reflects the scales inherent in the individual and activity attributes. The levels are introduction, development and commitment. Where, for example, the attribute of developed environment reflects introduction and natural environment reflects commitment.

Whilst this model seems to describe a predictable pattern of participation there is no attempt to differentiate between different activities or include extreme sports. Further, as Ewert and Hollenhorst (1989) demonstrated understanding meaning and intensity of involvement is vital to comprehending individual involvement. The model does little to clarify participation at a level where life is risked let alone understand the experience.

Participation frequency, skill and locus of control do not fully explain this phenomenon. As indicated by Schrader and Wann (1999) who found no relationship to locus of control and participation.

Psychoanalysis

Hunt (1996) used psychoanalytic theory to explain the phenomena of 'extreme-risk sports' (Hunt, 1996, p. 591). Whilst I shall discuss specific elements relating to death and fear later some elements are important to discuss here. She considered the case of a deep-water diver who had experienced 'injury' through decompression sickness. Interestingly, Hunt reported that the sub-culture of the group, to which the subject belonged, viewed injury as a function of incompetence. Often those who took extreme risks and made mistakes were socially sanctioned. A number of remarkable points were taken from this study.

Firstly, Hunt considered that part of the reason her subject was diving was to 'get something valuable that he felt he lacked from his father' (Hunt, 1996, p. 597). Hunt also noted 'preoedipally rooted castration concerns' (Hunt, 1996, p. 598), aggressive fantasies and compensation for a 'perceived lack of power' (Hunt, 1996, p. 598) and the use of the diving gear as 'masculine toys' (Hunt, 1996, p. 598). She also assumed that equipment lost by her subject was 'related to fantasies of other lost objects' (Hunt, 1996, p. 599), such as his father and his own masculinity, though Hunt admitted that her subject denied these assumptions. Notes were made with regards to her subjects 'masochistic conflicts' (Hunt, 1996, p. 603), ego deficiencies, bi-sexual conflicts, and hostility towards his mother and wife. Hunt concluded by stating that 'all extended-range divers' (Hunt, 1996, p. 613) had 'deficiencies in their relationships with their fathers' (Hunt, 1996, p. 613). She considered that physical abuse, verbal abuse, absence, passivity and sickness would have an influence on risk-taking behaviour. Further she theorised that 'the more risky and violent the sport, the more likely do issues of bisexuality, masculinity, aggression, and sadomasochism appear to influence an individual's sport participation' (Hunt, 1996, p. 620).

However, despite these descriptions and definitions Hunt (1996) concluded by accepting that individuals react differently to childhood patterns and that some men may be

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involved in extended-range diving as a result. On reading the published transcripts it is noteworthy that comments made by the subject such as ‘maybe I put up a challenge because I was frustrated. I don’t feel that I am doing something worthwhile at work. I should do more creative work’ (Hunt, 1996, p. 601) seemed to have been ignored. A point alluded to in Hunt’s concluding statements that point out the possibility that divers seek symbolic immortality, have rich intelligence and intellectual curiosity.

Also worthy of further exploration is that Hunt (1996) seems to suggest that involvement at an ‘extreme’ level is linked to father-son relationships. Yet women are also involved in extreme sports. Similarly Hunt suggests extreme sports are just further down the risk continuum. Yet as we have seen sensation seeking results seem in conflict with this assumption. Perhaps also, as Farley (1991) pointed out, there are negative and positive aspects to physical risk-taking, and in this case it may be that the risk-taking behaviour would have been acted out in some other way if Hunt’s (1996) subject had not been introduced to extended-diving. Perhaps as Farley (cited in Terwilliger, 1998) appreciated too much energy is spent trying to pathologies those that are not like us?

I sometimes think psychologists see too much pathology out there ... To the contrary, these are people who are pushing the envelope and that’s their life. They would not want the life of someone who never pushes the envelope. To them, that is an unlived life (Farley cited in Terwilliger, 1998, p. 4E).

Risk-taking and general personality

Perhaps studies exploring personality in general can shed light on the hypothesis that people who participate in extreme sports have some kind of pathological personality. Breivik (1996) used the Cattell 16PF Questionnaire with the 1985 Norwegian Everest expedition (n=7). He found very high scores on the ego strength (C+), dominance (E+), bohemian (M+), radicalism (Q1+), self-sufficiency (Q2+) and independence (Factor IV+) categories and very low scores on super-ego (G-), control (Q3-), ergic tension (Q4-) and anxiety (Factor I-) streams. However, no significant difference was found for any category when compared to other climbers. When compared with sports students significant differences were found for bohemian (M+), radicalism (Q1+), self-sufficiency (Q2+) and independence (factor IV+). When compared against military recruits additional significant differences were found for general intelligence (B+), ego strength (C+), paranoia (L-) and sophistication (N+).

However, a survey of other work using the Cattell 16PF only demonstrated comprehensive commonalities for the weak super ego (G-), high imagination and bohemia (M+), below medium social boldness (H-) and the uncontrolled and undisciplined (Q3-) factors. Magni, Rupolo, Simini, De Leo and Rampazzo (1985) found that K2 climbers (n=19 from a total group number of 22) tended to be less anxious (Q4-), cooler (A-) and to have weaker super-ego's (G-) when compared to a control group matched for sex, age, educational background and type of occupation.

Ogilvie (1974) gathered information from national and world class athletes using the Cattell 16PF, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the Edwards Personal Preference Scale personality tests. Tape recorded interviews were also obtained. The sports included race-car driving, football and parachuting where athletes were all active competitors. He found that men and women shared personality structures that included above average intelligence, above average desire for success and recognition, above average independence, a will to dominate, self-assertiveness and forthrightness.

Ogilvie (1974) also found that participants from the group defined as risk takers (except the football players) tended to be loners and emotionally detached from others with those that they trust being few and far between. Individuals tended to demonstrate disorganisation, nonconformity, rebellion against routine and a desire for varied and different experiences. Low levels of anxiety, a strong sense of reality and emotional control were also amongst participant attributes. Equally, participants demonstrated resourcefulness, energy, adaptability and self-responsibility. Perhaps not the typical personality characteristics of someone who would want to take irresponsible risks due to a pathological problem.

Breivik (1996) tested for willingness to take risks as a function of achievement, intellectual, economic, social, political/military and physical risk as well as a sum risk. The findings were correlated against sensation seeking scores. The comparisons were between Everest climbers, military recruits and sports students where Everest climbers were significantly more willing to take economic, political/military and physical risks. A number of positive correlations were found between risk and sensation seeking, most notably ($p < 0.001$) for TAS with intellectual, economic and physical and between ES

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and intellectual, economic and social. Further correlations ($p < 0.05$) were found for ES and political/military and physical, for DIS and political/military and BS with economic and physical. In Breivik's opinion these results indicate that Everest climbers have a lower appraisal of risk and view the world 'as less threatening or dangerous' (Breivik, 1996, p. 318).

Goma (1991) found that individuals who participated in so called 'risky sports' were considerably more stable than the control group. In this study elite alpinists scored the highest for the Eysenck Extraversion scale and lowest for Neuroticism. Furthermore, no significant difference was found between the control and experimental groups for susceptibility to reward or punishment. Though those that were involved in competition tended towards a higher susceptibility to reward and alpinists had the lowest score on the susceptibility to punishment scale.

Socialisation and risk-taking

A further study on deep sea diving (Hunt, 1995a) used information from unstructured interviews and fieldwork to explain how divers are socialised into expanding their risk-taking behaviour. The sample ($n=19$ women, $n=17$ men) chosen by Hunt consisted of those divers who identified themselves with the diving sub-culture above family and occupation. She found that the adoption of 'new technologies' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 445), 'informal competition' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 445), positive/negative sanctions and anxiety neutralisation were among the main phenomena that enhanced risk-taking behaviour. Other socialising considerations were linked to mastering of unplanned challenges (e.g. narcosis and shark attacks) and injury or death encounters. However, as Hunt noted not all divers who are exposed to the sub-culture succumb to these socialisation processes. Furthermore divers were also negatively sanctioned if they attempted excessive risks. Still such socialising potentials have been posited by others (Stark, 1997).

Bratton, Kinear and Koroluk (1979) carried out interviews and developed a questionnaire in order to determine why people climb. Members of the Calgary Alpine Club of Canada ($n=266$) completed the questionnaires. Participants were asked to circle a scale of 0-5 for statements that outlined a possible reason for climbing. The questionnaire asked that individuals pick the top two or three reasons from the list and if necessary

note any other reason that may not have appeared on the list. They categorised the results as a function of mean score and the number of times a phrase was highlighted by the respondents. Whilst many of the participants had been introduced to the activity by friends when these figures were further compared other considerations were found. They determined that hard rock climbers tended to be motivated for achievement and challenge where as hill-walkers tended to be motivated by exercise and relaxation.

Bratton et al. (1979) also indicated that younger climbers were more likely to climb as a relief from everyday routine. An escape from everyday boredom has also been presented as a reason for participation by other theorists (Greenberg, 1977; Ogilvie, 1974). Whilst Bratton et al.'s (1979) study is of interest it is worth noting that only two percent rated themselves as expert mountaineers and there was no attempt to differentiate between those that participate at the extreme levels and those that participate at high or average risk levels. Still there was also no mention of a desire to take risks.

The study conducted by Shoham et al. (2000) aimed to determine motivational implications for marketing and management. They established that continued participation was commensurate with evolving motivations. As part of their study they used open ended questions which revealed fun (n=26), life-long dreams (n=15), enjoyment of nature (n=14) or overcoming nature (n=8), efficacy (n=11), challenge (n=8), thrill (n=7), interest (n=6), adventure (n=5) and 'done with others' (n=4) as relevant motives. Though as we have already observed this study did not explicitly concern extreme sport participants, it is interesting that fun, life-long dreams and enjoyment of nature rate as the highest motivational factors.

So what have we learnt so far?

In summary, this review highlights a number of intriguing phenomena learned from studies that have considered those who participate in 'extreme' sports. First only a few studies have explicitly differentiated between high-risk sports and extreme sports (Hunt, 1995a; Slinger & Rudestam, 1997). Where extreme indicates a high potential for death as a result of error and high risk indicates a high potential for injury (Hunt, 1995a). Using this criterion it would seem that only six papers have potentially discussed aspects linked to extreme activities. The activities studied were deep sea diving (Hunt, 1995a,

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1995b, 1996), alpine climbing (Breivik, 1996; Goma, 1991; Magni et al., 1985) and skiing, climbing, kayaking and stunt flying (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997). However, it should be acknowledged that relative novices have participated in high altitude mountaineering when accompanied by experienced guides. From the studies that have potentially considered the extreme activities only three papers have attempted a comparison between high-risk sports and extreme sports (Breivik, 1996; Goma, 1991; Slanger & Rudestam, 1997), of which two have considered mountaineering (Breivik, 1996; Goma, 1991).

In sensation seeking terms it would seem that there is potentially no difference between those that participate in extreme or high-risk activities (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997), though Breivik (1996) did note a difference in the boredom scale. There was an indication that sensation seeking scores for extreme sports participants were equivalent to general sport participants (Goma, 1991; Slanger & Rudestam, 1997). Though there was a potential difference between high-risk participants and general sports participants (Goma, 1991). Yet as Slanger and Rudestam (1997) observed sensation seeking cannot explain how those that participate at an extreme level handle 'fear and the cognitive recognition that real danger exists' (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 356).

Literature explaining extreme participation using 'type-T' personality theory has indicated that individuals may be positively expressing a need to take physical risks. Though there was no record of empirical data or an attempt to differentiate between high-risk and extreme. Further some researchers have considered that individuals participate in extreme environments as a result of dysfunctional psychological perceptions (Hunt, 1995a; 1996), though Breivik (1996) indicated that extreme sport participants consider life to be less dangerous. It is also possible that participation motivations and learning develop over time and experience. Essentially research has focused on the high-risk aspect of participation and assumed a connection to extreme sports. It would seem that, as Slanger and Rudestam (1997) pointed out few studies have attempted to explicitly consider the extreme group.

In general personality terms, it would also seem that few studies have considered the extreme category (Breivik, 1996; Goma, 1991; Magni et al., 1985). Of those that have, there would seem to be consensus with regards to extreme individuals being generally

more relaxed and less governed by super-ego than the average population (Breivik, 1996; Magni et al., 1985). However, these differences may not differentiate between high-risk and extreme sport participants (Breivik, 1996).

As I wrote at the beginning of this chapter my argument is that the focus on risk-taking is, at best, a misplaced focus. Perhaps the reader has already started to question the relationship between extreme sports and risk-taking, though it could be argued that this contention is not completely clear. This is not only a function of the few studies that have considered the extreme sport experience but also in relation to the findings and the fact that the researchers who undertook the studies began with a risk-taking focus. However, even with a risk focus studies are beginning to determine that far from judgements on physical risk motivating behaviour it would seem that risk judgements are a reflection of behaviour (Halpern-Felsher et al., 2001). The connotation being, that those undertaking certain activities are better able to accurately judge the reality of risk. Furthermore, even Zuckerman (cited in Rossi & Cereatti, 1993) reportedly realised that people with high sensation seeking scores do not take risks for the sake of taking risks, for Zuckerman there had to be a reward. In Zuckerman's opinion the reward was a novel experience (Rossi & Cereatti, 1993).

Perhaps Zuckerman is right, yet it may also be that if a reward is essential then it may take a different form. After all, it could be argued that driving to work everyday involves great risk, but does it involve novelty? Equally if novelty was the reward one might expect extreme sport participants to willingly take physical risks in all walks of life. Yet as Celsi, et al. (1993) observed outside of their chosen activity participants are often careful and risk averse. Furthermore a participant in high level B.A.S.E., for example, may only jump a couple of times a year, from the same point. Not necessarily indicative of the desire for novelty.

A focus on the desire for risk would also be hard pushed to explain why a person chooses skiing or B.A.S.E. jumping above surfing or mountaineering. This choice is often made many years in advance of participation (Celsi et al., 1993). But more about that in section three. Equally explanations that posit a genetic inclination that creates a physiology and personality that is ripened by environmental stimuli would indicate a robotic existence and as Roberts (1994) concluded, perhaps that is too simple an expla-

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nation of the experience. That is, the experience is more than a simple robotic reaction to a ripened, predestined course of action. Perhaps then there is something else (Celsi et al., 1993)?

It may also be that the activities have an element of risk. Though if one accepts that risk is a function of consequence and likelihood (Llewellyn, 2003) then it is also possible that extreme sports are not risky let alone about risk. The negative consequence of a mismanaged accident or error may be devastating but the likelihood may be low. But then accepting this proposal could lead the argument that living is the riskiest activity of all. After all the consequences of living is death and death is most definitely a certainty. However, it may also be that neutral or positive consequences result (Cline, 2003). Still it should be recognised that the focus on certain activities being risk oriented may be more of a function of a modern morbid aversion to risk or obsessive desire to be 'liberated' from risk (Fairlie, 1989). One only has to consider the evolution of humanity to appreciate that this construct called risk has always been a part of life, it is only relatively recently that the lack of certainty and the need to control our surroundings has been boxed as a construct and labelled, let alone labelled as something deviant (Slovic et al., 2002). It may be that the essence of extreme sport participation is a function of other factors and that a participant accepts that certain risks (e.g. death, injury and so forth) are involved, just as the would be lover accepts the risk of rejection.

This point was echoed by Brannigan and McDougall (1983). Brannigan and McDougall undertook a participant observation study with 50 participants in New York State. They highlighted personal values such as beauty, special emotions, excitement, solitude, companionship, harmony with nature and self-reliance and that participants were living out previous impulses to fly. No mention of a desire to take risks or the rewards of a novel experience. There is also a potential that higher aesthetic motivations enhance continued involvement (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997). However, only Slanger and Rudestam's study explicitly considered the case of extreme sports, but more about these points later. For now, perhaps we should return to other writings on extreme sports to question the relationship to risk.

Michael Bane (1996) in his attempt to explore his own extreme sport experience was succinct and to the point:

Much of the early research on risk concentrates on a phrase I am coming to hate, thrill seeking. I am not sure what this means, and it doesn't seem to me that the researchers are that far ahead (Bane, 1996, p. 24).

Bane goes on to explore other relationships noting that: 'We continue to think of risk in terms of *rush*. As if adrenaline is the entire experience. And is such a cheap experience worth having?' (Bane, 1996, p. 25). Yet it would seem the experience that Bane attempted to replicate and explore was worth having as is demonstrated by the remainder of the book. Whilst we will inevitably revisit Bane's work, for the moment, I would like to explore other thoughts.

Houston (1968) found that mountain climbers considered that they climbed as a quest to find and test the self, an exploration into self-fulfilment. Perhaps best highlighted in the words of John Harlin:

I have used climbing as a medium for introspection into my own mind and have tried to understand my own reactions to stimuli, particularly between emotion and muscle coordination. Before training, the coordination of mind and body is not stable when one is on a two-thousand-foot ice wall with a tenuous belay. After training the personal understanding of oneself that occurs in the intricate alpine experience can be developed and used outside of this experience. In other words, it can be borrowed and projected. This ultimately leads to a physical and emotional control of one's self. I believe that this control is an important prerequisite to creativity (Harlin cited in Houston, 1968, p. 58).

Marilyn Olsen (2001), in her book exploring the lives of women who participate in so called risky sports, interviewed Lynn Hill a climber who had proved herself top of her field on numerous occasions. As with most participants who take their activity to a level where death would be the most likely outcome of a mismanaged error or accident she does not like the 'extreme' label due its perceived relationship to danger and risk.

Although she is often labelled an "extreme" athlete Lynn says she does not like that term. "Extreme to me means doing something that is dangerous and risky. And that was never my motivation as a climber. The reason I climb is more about learning about myself as well as the sense of partnership with my climbing partners within the natural environment. It has nothing to do with how dangerous it is" (Olsen, 2001, p. 59).

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As Olsen goes on to explain to climb at such a high level requires dedication and a great deal of training rather than a desire to conquer something, or prove something; 'It is much more about interacting with your environment' (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 59).

Furthermore, extreme sport participants know that the slightest mistake could mean death. There is no illusion as to the seriousness of the potential consequences. Celsi et al. (1993) suggested that any assumption that participants might take risks through overconfidence or overestimation of their abilities would be erroneous (Celsi et al., 1993).

It is one thing to risk overconfidence while making a \$2 lottery bet, where little is risked on the outcome, and quite another to trust your life to a potentially fatal and frightening behaviour without carefully weighing the outcomes (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 17).

Perhaps then as Storry (2003) recognised the tendency to focus on theories that search for labels involving 'risk' and/or 'thrills' is entirely missing the point.

Summary

Extreme sports participation, it would seem, is not about the search for risk or the need to take risks. To continue with our metaphor about crossing the road, I am reminded of a joke which enthralled me as a child. It goes something like this: why did the chicken cross the road – because it wanted to get to the other side. Perhaps for extreme sports participants like the chicken, the other side has something of value and the focus is not the process of risk-taking. This was certainly the perception of Slinger and Rudestam (1997) who agreed with the findings of an unpublished study by Breivik who noted that 'maximising risk is not the goal of their activities' (Breivik cited in Slinger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 369). Furthermore if risk-taking and novelty were the aim it is questionable that participants would take years preparing and ensuring safety before undertaking their chosen activity (Ogilvie, 1974), let alone fourteen years (Muir, 2003a). Furthermore a statistic noted by Soden (2003), that whilst 850 people died climbing in America between 1951 and 1984 only one of these was a free-solo climber seems to point to a high level of safety.

As the quote that introduced this chapter so succinctly indicates in order to experience the wonder of love one has to accept the potential for not being loved in return and, one would expect, the feelings of rejection or personal annihilation that might accompany such an acceptance. Equally to experience hope indicates that one has risked disappointment. Yet disappointment or rejection is not the aim. That is, risk-taking is not the experience. After all, just because an extreme sport participant does not back away from the risks involved in their chosen activity it does not mean that they are chasing the risks. In the same way that a person does not chase disappointment or rejection when searching for the wonders of hope or love. It is love and hope that are the experiences (Roberts, 1994). Perhaps, then, the experience lies elsewhere. That is rather than these activities being about the threat of losing something of value they are more about the opportunity to gain something of value. Perhaps the experience is so powerful that it is worth managing the potential risks along the way.

Yet is it not comforting to know that we do not fit the personality state or trait that is required to take risks (no matter what the potential outcome) for this way we do not have to be concerned with what is on the other side of the road. We can live in harmony with our lives and happily consider the other as deviant. And certainly, if it is not about risk-taking per se, but risk is an element of the journey, it still may be that the outcome searched for is not socially acceptable, for it may be about a deep-seated desire for death? Perhaps that is the outcome of value? It is to this question that I would now like to turn.

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VI

On Death

Die before you die.
Until you become rebirth
you won't know what life is.
It's the same with anything
You don't understand until you are
what you are trying to understand.
Become reason, and you will
know it perfectly.
Become love and you will
become a burning wick
at the centre of yourself.
Listen I would make this very plain
if someone were ready to hear what I have to tell.
Everybody in this world is dying.
Everybody is already in their death agony.
So listen to what anyone says
as though it were the last words
of a dying father to his son.
Listen with that much compassion and you'll
never feel jealousy or simple anger again.
People say
everything that's coming will come.
Understand this, it's all there right now.
In me, it's all been so woven into
The mesh of my trivial errands
that only now do I begin
to hear the mystery of dying everywhere.

(Jelaludin Rumi cited in Barks, 1995, p. 54)

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On the surface it would seem quite clear that extreme sport participation must also be related to death. After all, as I have noted, the potential of a mismanaged accident or mistake is death, not injury or embarrassment, not even financial ruin, but death. Further this relationship must be an unhealthy one, a secret, or perhaps not so secret, desire for death; a process of self annihilation without having to accept ones intentions. Or to put it in other terms an activity designed with the sole purpose of killing oneself without admitting it, perhaps akin to a clandestine suicide (Alvarez, 1972). Certainly, this perception has been voiced and research has been carried out which attempts to confirm this view.

However, there are other view points that posit an unhealthy link between extreme sports and death. For example, it may also be that participants focus on attempting to cheat death in a desire to alleviate anxiety about the potential of their own death. Still other theories consider the relationship to be one whereby participants are living out an experience based on a perception of immortality. Which ever understanding is voiced the relationship has to be negative. Otherwise why would a participant go to such lengths to disguise their activity by hiding it under the banner of sport?

The aim of this chapter is to question these views. Not just to show that participation is not about a desire for death or a desire to cheat death or even an experiential narrative on immortality, but also to explore how the relationship between extreme sports and death could be better described. We have seen in chapter V how extreme sport participants do not focus on risk and in fact consider the thought of taking risks as alien to them. Here we will see how the view that extreme sport participation is about an unhealthy connection to death could not be further from the truth. Once again research, theoretical understandings, biographical accounts will be explored to support this argument and provide a more appropriate focus.

Undoubtedly people do die as a result of undertaking extreme sports. Only recently (October 7th, 2003) newspapers were headlining the death of a B.A.S.E. jumper from my home town, Wollongong. The articles focused on the death as a tragic accident that resulted in a 160 km/hr collision with a bridge (Miranda, 2003; O'Keefe, 2003). Whilst in Canada earlier this year a local paper reported the death of an elite and respected mountaineer and climber (CanWest News Service, 2003). Then there are other highly

publicised deaths such as on Everest in 1996 where eight people died in one night (Dowling, Arias, Bane, Pierce, & Schauer, 2001).

Palmer (2000) very clearly focuses on the potential for some extreme sports to result in death. The focus for Palmer is the marketing and 'commodification of those high-risk, high-adrenalin activities known collectively as extreme-sports' (C. Palmer, 2003, p. 323) as tourist activities. In particular she uses as examples the deaths on Everest and the Interlaken raft disaster to question the desire for tourists to 'put their lives in the hands of people they've never met' (Palmer, 2000, p. 1) in order to undertake activities that involve a risk to life. For her though the focus is on the questionable motives of the operators who she considers are 'selling a disaster' (Palmer, 2000, p. 1). It may be that to trust your life to a tourist operator is tantamount to a death wish but, whilst Palmer's (2000; 2003) examples included bungee jumping, guided raft trips as well as mountaineering trips, it may also be that the activities are different and so the experiences are also different. Still to use our previous metaphor of crossing the road, people also die whilst crossing the road. The question is does this signify a death-wish or any other deliberate and unhealthy relationship with death?

Yet the significant factor defining an extreme sport, as presented in chapter IV, is that a mismanaged accident or error would most likely result in death. Further, this thesis is about those activities that involve participants who willingly develop skills in activities where death is a potential outcome. As such, given that normal people do everything possible to avoid such situations participants must be searching for a death-wish fulfilment (Roberts, 1994). Perhaps, though the focus is not death in itself but some other outcome, just as the focus for crossing the road is not death (even though death is a possibility) but some other outcome.

Whilst I was convinced that this subject had to be explored I must admit that I found it difficult to determine the best approach. Death has such negative connotations to an extent that we often avoid even serious contemplation of its existence, yet death is perhaps our only certainty (Kubler-Ross, 1975; S. Rinpoche, 2002). Still, to do justice to an exploration of the extreme sport experience and provide a counter argument for those who are determined that the experience is solely about a search for death, this discussion is important. As such I trust the approach I have taken will suffice.

The death wish: An introduction

According to Alvarez (1972) a paradox exists in the modern twentieth-century (and presumably extends to the twenty-first century) Christian world between the inevitability of death and 'the idea of death as an unmentionable, almost unnatural, subject' (Alvarez, 1972, p. 53). Death has become something to be feared. Perhaps as an extension to this fear certain activities have been negatively labelled. Yet as Alvarez (1972) suggested some people may desire death in order 'escape confusion, to clear their heads' (Alvarez, 1972, p. 130) and 'to break through the patterns of obsession and necessity which they have unwittingly imposed on their lives' (Alvarez, 1972, p. 131) through activities that stimulate this experience.

Consider a climber poised on minute holds on a steep cliff. The smallness of the holds, the steepness of the angle, all add to his pleasure, provided he is in complete control. He is a man playing chess with his body; he can read the sequence of moves far enough in advance so that his physical economy—the ratio between the effort he uses and his reserves of strength—is never totally disrupted. The more improbable the situation and the greater the demands made on him, the more sweetly the blood flows later in release from all that tension. The possibility of danger serves merely to sharpen his awareness and control. And perhaps this is the rationale of all risky sports: you deliberately raise the ante of effort and concentration in order, as it were, to clear your mind of trivialities. It's a small-scale model for living, but with a difference: unlike your routine life, where mistakes can usually be recouped and some kind of compromise patched up, your actions, for however brief a period, are deadly serious.

I think there may be some people who kill themselves like this: to achieve a calm and control they never find in life (Alvarez, 1972, p. 130).

Perhaps also as Alvarez (1972) theorised whilst extrapolating on the example of the climber, a depression, change of attitude and impatience with safety could all lead to the climber's death; a fatal accident that might not result from a conscious desire or 'impulse of despair' (Alvarez, 1972, p. 132). That is, the climber may want to die but in such a way that s/he does not have to accept responsibility for her/his actions (Alvarez, 1972).

Again this may reflect the actions of some but does it indicate that the extreme sport experience is all about the desire for death? Surely even for someone who has no conscious acceptance of their desire to die spending years of hard work and training to

become a B.A.S.E. jumper would signify that this is not the case. Yet as Alvarez (1972) argued death can be sought in subtle ways it is not necessary to consciously desire death. Alvarez included many quotes from unsuccessful suicides to illustrate this point. For me though something is missing from this simplistic view point, surely there would be easier ways of searching out death? Yet, at one time the explanation that participation was about an unconscious death wish was ‘the one most frequently offered’ (Ogilvie, 1974, p. 88) and extreme sports were considered ‘an attempt to gain temporary relief from a constantly nagging unconscious impulse to die’ (Ogilvie, 1974, p. 88). It would seem that this notion still exists (Kreyche, 2002).

As if by way of confirmation Bane (1996) tells of an encounter with a friend and psychologist at a party. As an introduction Bane (1996), a forty something self confessed couch potato, accidentally experienced something that he felt was worth repeating whilst windsurfing in winds of fifty-five mile an hour.

The exact moment comes an hour later, back on the beach, throwing up dirty saltwater and looking at the red raw blisters across my palm. I am calm and happy, and it all makes perfectly good sense to me. I sit down behind the car out of the wind, take a roll of silver grey duct tape, and tape my hands, double layers over the blisters. My elbows feel disconnected; my back a solid throb of pain. A muscle in my right knee twitches uncontrollably. Flexing my duct-taped hands, I reflect that I feel better than I have in ages (Bane, 1996, p. 4).

The experience was so intense that Bane developed a list of thirteen extreme activities in an attempt to recreate the experience. The encounter mentioned was sometime into his journey. Essentially the encounter culminated in both the friend and psychologist making the assumption, despite his denial, that Bane must have a deep seated death wish. Perhaps Bane’s (1996) words are best here:

“I am not saying I don’t want the rush,” I reply, “but I am saying the rush is only a tiny part of what’s there, the experience.”

Heads nod knowingly.

“I want you to meet a woman I’m dating,” a close friend of mine says one night, “she’s a shrink, and she’s fascinated by people with death wishes.”

“I do not,” I say emphatically, “have a death wish.”

“Have some more pizza he says.”

Later I am at a party at a friends advertising agency. I am cornered by a young woman in a basic black dress, long blonde hair hanging down her back. She steers me out of the flowing herd, into an eddy, sits me down on a desk chair,

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and pulls up a bench across from me. She leans forward on her elbows, and I notice her eyes are a muddy blue. *I am, I think, trapped in a Calvin Klein commercial.*

“Tell me what it’s like,” she says, stopping just short of licking her red lips, “when you think you are going to die.”

I can’t help myself. I break out laughing.

“I wouldn’t know,” I say.

She is clearly offended.

“Wouldn’t know or won’t say?”

I take her hands in mine. They are slightly sweaty.

“I am not crazy,” I say. “And I intend to live for ever.”

I stand up. She jots her number on a piece of paper.

“Call me when you’re ready to talk,” she says, tossing her hair. On the way out of the office, I toss the paper in the garbage (Bane, 1996, p. 66).

Perhaps the writings of someone with an undisclosed desire to die but perhaps once again we should consider the warning of Farley as quoted in chapter V:

I sometimes think psychologists see too much pathology out there ... To the contrary, these are people who are pushing the envelope and that’s their life. They would not want the life of someone who never pushes the envelope. To them, that is an un-lived life (Farley cited in Terwilliger, 1998, p. 4E).

Still the perception that participation in activities that may result in death as ‘unnecessary and uncontrollable’ (Celsi et al., 1993, p.19) is invariably voiced by non-participants. Perhaps though this is indicative of a lack of understanding by the outsider or maybe, as we have noted, participants are busy denying what non-participants know best?

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is one theoretical framework that views extreme sport participation as potentially indicative of an unconscious search for death. Despite the above warning by Farley and Groves’s (1987) contention that the scientific community no longer explains extreme sport participation as a function of ‘a Freudian death wish’ (Groves, 1987, p. 186), psychoanalytic theory still prevails (Llewellyn, 2003). Llewellyn noted that theorists inspired by Sigmund Freud were not able to come to terms with the notion that people would willingly choose activities that might result in death. In fact, the whole contention of psychoanalytic theory was not able to account for such behaviours (Llewellyn, 2003). Thus any activity that involved the potential for death was negatively

classified, either as suicidal tendencies or expressive of a death wish. In technical terms, a function of the thanatos factor (Kreyche, 2002). As such, participants of activities that might involve death were seen as pathological and illogical (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997).

Hunt (1995a; 1995b; 1996), a proponent of the psychoanalytic view point, explored the extreme sport of deep scuba diving. For Hunt (1995a) death in deep scuba diving can result from a number of happenings including decompression sickness, embolism, oxygen toxicity as well as accidentally breathing from oxygen supplies rather than air supplies. For her part Hunt (1995a) quoted a technical diver expressing a desire to play a game with death as a justification for participating at a level where death is a possible outcome. Interestingly though the diver quoted also noted that the ultimate aim was to complete the dive and that if prior preparations indicated that there was a chance of dying during the dive then the dive would not be undertaken.

Hunt (1996) documented her analysis of a deep diver's life and how it resulted in his desire to dive and eventuated in serious injury. She understood the diver's intentions as sometimes courting disaster and perhaps a function of some men's 'desire to master conflicts rooted in early experiences with absent or abusive fathers' (Hunt, 1996, p. 619). Yet she also noted that the same individual had rich intelligence and curiosity and had developed considerable technical and physical skills over an extended period of time. Perhaps there are easier, and quicker ways to kill oneself? Perhaps as Ogilvie (1974) noted these explanations are true some of the time but not enough to accurately represent the extreme sport experience. Equally, if death was the ultimate aim, whether consciously or sub-consciously determined, participants would not spend so much energy on ensuring safety (Zuckerman cited in Koerner, 1997). Still, on the surface the death wish is naively attractive, easy to explain and comfortable, however, it may be that a deeper understanding would refute this claim. A realisation shared by Tutko, a specialist in research on high-risk athletes, who noted 'when I first started out in this field, my original prejudice was the prevalent theory at the time - the death wish idea' (Tutko cited in Groves, 1987, p. 190). Essentially then perhaps as Zuckerman noted 'the "death wish" is a myth' (Zuckerman cited in Koerner, 1997, p. 3) made up by those 'who can't understand the rewards' (Zuckerman cited in Koerner, 1997, p. 3).

Death anxiety

Death anxiety is related to an awareness of the fundamental concept of death and non-existence. Essentially, the hypothesis is that human development has been facilitated by our intelligence and in particular our ability to think in abstract terms. With this enhanced ability comes an enhanced self consciousness and awareness. This awareness leads to the burden of being able to contemplate our own death (Becker, 1962). An hypothesised consequence of this focus is the desire to achieve control over our own mortality or in other terms 'to cheat death' (Schrader & Wann, 1999, p. 427).

Schrader and Wann (1999) noted that behaviours such as drug taking and unsafe sex have been documented as ways to cheat death. The hypothesis being that there is a logical extension from such activities to certain recreational pursuits, labelled 'high-risk recreation' (Schrader & Wann, 1999, p. 427). Amongst other tests, Schrader and Wann used the fifteen item Death Anxiety Scale developed by Templar (1970). The test group consisted of 87 male students and 82 female students who completed a questionnaire for risk recreation involvement adapted from a model developed by Ewert (1987).

It is worth noting at this point that from the list of thirty-two activities presented by Schrader and Wann (1999) only B.A.S.E. jumping definitely fits within the criteria set out for this study. However, many other activities might have complied but there was no way of defining the level of participation. For example white water kayaking is mentioned but the reader is not made aware of the degree of difficulty.

Results from this study indicated that death anxiety was not a good predictor of involvement. Explanations for this finding included the proposition that as the mean age of the test group was 21.8 years it was possible that young people suffer from denial when considering their own death. Another proposition was that the State in which the test was carried out (Kentucky, USA) was known to be highly religious, 'individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of religiosity' (Schrader & Wann, 1999, p. 434). This led the researchers to an assumption that individuals had increased hope for immortality and therefore less anxiety about death. Perhaps both explanations have a degree of relevance but perhaps also these activities are not about death and as such measuring death anxiety is a fruitless activity. However, as the activities tested were not explicitly considered in terms of extreme or high-risk, any explanation is hard to determine. It is also important

to recognise that athletes in general have demonstrated lower death anxiety (Kumar, Pathak, & Thakur, 1985).

Slanger and Rudestam (1997) also included the Templar Death Anxiety Scale in their multi-test research on extreme, high-risk and lower risk participants. As previously noted participants in the sports of rock climbing, kayaking, skiing and small plane piloting were tested as each activity can be separated into extreme participation and high-risk participation. In this instance, as with the aims of this thesis, the extreme group were those that participated to a level where a mismanaged error had a real potential to result in death. Essentially Slanger and Rudestam (1997) found no difference between the extreme, high-risk or lower risk groups for death anxiety. As such the study presented no evidence for assuming a relationship between death anxiety and extreme sports or that extreme sport participation could be a type of counter-phobic behaviour. Interestingly Slanger and Rudestam also conducted interviews, which tended to support this finding.

For me, these studies indicate that negatively relating extreme sport participation to a desire for death, or to cheat death is at best misguided and at worst pathological in itself. To use the metaphor for crossing the road once again, how much would we learn from testing road crossers for death anxiety? Yet, there is undoubtedly some relationship between the extreme sport experience and death. A relationship noted by Todhunter (2000) whilst processing the exploits of numerous athletes involved at the extreme end of sport. In one illustration Todhunter accompanied an expert climber and noted the influence of his own psychological perceptions and attitudes on his ability to climb. In an attempt to undertake a severe climb whilst maintaining 'a rapid, thoughtless pace' (Todhunter, 2000, p. 1) the climb became easier. The culmination of which was a feeling of unique elation.

In nearly twenty years of intermittent climbing, I have never felt such intense satisfaction in the mountains. For a few minutes, there on the ridge, I accept that it might be worth dying for (Todhunter, 2000, p. 16).

Here it can be argued is an example of an experience that is so intense that if death was the result it would be still be worthwhile. Yet as we have seen dying is not an intentional part of the extreme sport experience. Death is neither sought, part of an anxiety

nor about a perception of immortality but an acceptance that the experience would be worth dying for. Perhaps as Hunt (1998) theorised extreme sport participants are just 'playing and winning a game with death [which] provides them with a sense of accomplishment that may otherwise be absent from their lives' (Hunt, 1998, p. 1).

Death and the symbolic relationship

Le Breton (2000) considered extreme sports to be a medium for Western athletes to test their capacity to 'resist increasing personal suffering' (Le Breton, 2000, p. 1). Almost as a response to a crisis in society this individual contest provides an ideal outlet for testing ones courage and resources in obtaining personal demands. This expression is not against other athletes but lived out as a 'hand-to-hand fight with nature' (Le Breton, 2000, p. 2). For Le Breton, one theme is the transference of suffering to ecstasy. Participants make a symbolic deal with death using nature as the playing field and their body as currency. Individuals only superficially or metaphorically consider death. Extreme exhaustion from participation may trigger a temporary ecstasy 'that fuses the individual with the cosmos' (Le Breton, 2000, p. 7) and provides long lasting memories.

A second theme is the generation of meaning. Here, the extreme sport participant becomes the master of their activity and participates on a par with death in order to 'steal some of its power' (Le Breton, 2000, p. 7). Individuals have moments where the sacred is experienced and life is lived fully. Whilst rare in other domains of life these experiences are generally considered as part of the ascetic or spiritual domain.

For me, some of Le Breton's thesis was a little unclear. That is he seemed to equate marathon activities with extreme sport activities and he considered that participants often are 'people with no particular ability' (Le Breton, 2000, p. 1). Further his contention that participants are in a battle against nature did not fit with my experience, but more about that in a later chapter. However, I was fascinated by his contention that there could be more to this connection with death. That participation in the realm of death could actually be exceptionally positive and a way of experiencing what has, until now, only been accepted as part of mystical or religious experience. Or at the very least a process where life is lived to its fullest.

It may be that I have successfully fallen into the trap of denying the negative reality as expressed by psychoanalysis by articulating a more positive view. However, this view point seems to be shared by other researchers who have attempted to get to know extreme sports on a more intimate level. Ogilvie observed that ‘the idea that high-risk athletes are disturbed is simply a myth’ (Ogilvie cited in Groves, 1987, p. 190). Farley made the following comments on his impressions after meeting numerous extreme sports participants at a film conference:

There were sky divers, hang gliders, balloonists, mountain climbers, men who had sailed single-handedly around the world, even one man who was first to row a boat across the Atlantic Ocean. What I learned from talking to these people was that they wanted to live. They have a ‘life-wish.’ Because they have an exciting life they don’t want to end it (Farley cited in Groves, 1987, p. 190).

Perhaps, after all, participants do not have a death wish or any other unhealthy connection to death. As emphasised in Ogilvie’s (1974) study:

I didn’t get all this grey hair for nothing in 47 years, without being careful. It’s easy to die young if you want to. I have no ambitions to die young at all (Ken Miles cited in Ogilvie, 1974, p. 94).

A point echoed by an extreme climber ‘it’s the last think I want to do – is just die’ (Tim Wagner cited in Samet, 2002, p. 62).

Perhaps then these activities support a process where death is understood and accepted in a unique way or even that participants in extreme sports experience certain realisations about death that enables a more powerful experience. It may be possible that as Ogilvie (1974) found participants have a strong sense of reality and a willingness to take responsibility for their own actions, as such participants may be the best judges of the extreme sport experience. It might be that the observations made by Farley (cited in Groves, 1987) above are pointing to a deeper appreciation of the relationship between death and the extreme sport experience.

Conceivably participation in ‘extreme’ activities is about engaging life (Terwilliger, 1998). Or in other terms the assumption that extreme sport participation is unhealthily

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connected to death has completely missed the point; instead participants describe a very healthy connection to live life to its fullest, to celebrate life, a 'life-wish'.

We don't have a death wish, we have a life wish! A wish to live life to the fullest and if by chance we do die skydiving, then at least we died doing what we loved (wm 27, 1,000 jumps cited in Celsi et al., 1993, p. 19).

It might also be that participation is not about cheating death, as Celsi et al. (1993) noted in their study of skydiving participants, that the reality of death is invariably accepted as part of life. Whilst skydiving might be just outside of the set criteria for this study (i.e. a skydiver has technological support and extra parachutes) death does occur and is real. Celsi et al. found that death, of oneself or ones friends, was not hoped for but it was accepted.

I guess after a number of years experience and seeing other friends die. You come to see it as part of skydiving, you accept it. You know its going to happen. You hope it doesn't, especially to your friends, but its going to happen, its going to happen here again (wm 34, 1,038 jumps cited in Celsi et al., 1993, p. 19).

Further participants would seem to be very much aware that death is a real possibility. Participants do not seem to have any illusion about immortality. For example, Le Breton (2000) quoted an explorer who succinctly expressed his understanding of the reality of what he felt before attempting to fly a microlight across the Atlantic.

Two weeks before lift-off I was living as though I was expecting to die the next day. I was sure I would never come back from the crossing. When I hit the accelerator for lift-off I said farewell to life. It's an absolutely terrifying feeling that never leaves you. On arriving, it took me a week to get over the stress of the crossing. I still have memories of falling into air pockets and then climbing back 25 metres in 2 seconds. I saw Death a dozen times (Guy Delage cited in Le Breton, 2000, p. 4).

Yet, the explorer continued despite these feelings.

So what have we learnt so far?

So, it would seem that the contention that death is consciously or unconsciously sought or that death is in some way cheated through extreme sports is perhaps a misunderstanding of the experience. Equally it would seem that participants do not consider

themselves immortal. Yet as Todhunter (2000) noted extreme sport participation does have a close and powerful relationship to death.

So, for me the question has to be if participants express a desire to live life and note that the experience is about living life, then how is this related to participation in an activity that could result in death? This would seem to be a paradox, expose oneself to the potential of death in order to live a full life. In the following paragraphs I discuss this seemingly confused paradox by considering the descriptions of philosophers and philosophies. For, as Malpas and Solomon (1998) recognised philosophy is the medium through which death is explored. Death is a challenging topic ‘whether understanding it, reconciling oneself to it or preparing oneself for its inevitable arrival’ (Malpas & Solomon, 1998, p. 1). After all human life is determined by a limited span, our destiny is to die.

Certainly death or the experiences and feelings that cluster round the concept of death – experiences, for instance, of loss and sadness, of fear and foreboding, sometimes of release and thankfulness – seem to be at the heart of what it is to live a human life and of what it means to be human (Malpas & Solomon, 1998, p. 1).

Interestingly though, Malpas and Solomon also noted that discussions on the meaning of death have been seldom addressed in contemporary philosophical thought. Though, death, in philosophical terms, has been discussed in terms of its place in society, the afterlife, its function in religion and bioethics to name but a few (Malpas & Solomon, 1998). However, not all discussions enable a clearer picture of the afore-mentioned paradox. The following paragraphs consider only those philosophies and philosophers that in some way shed light on this paradox. Not by way of a theoretical explanation but more to explore other descriptions that might be portraying the same phenomenon.

A phenomenological perspective

One of the few philosophical frameworks that has considered death is existential phenomenology (Koestenbaum, 1978). Death has been approached from the view point of symbolism and reality, its relationship to human behaviours and emotions, its relationship to time and our reactions to our own death. As it relates to this study and our exploration of the extreme sport experience and death the essence is that death is ines-

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capable and by accepting ones own death one can live fully. By accepting death one discovers a new urgency in life and focus is switched to the essentials of life. Thus all threats to existence are removed and death loses its intimidating power. Thus one learns to live with meaning and vitality (Koestenbaum, 1978).

Heidegger's (1996) phenomenological exploration of being and time included his extensive writings on death which led to his consideration on being-toward-death. As it relates to this study death can be seen as the point at which life comes to an end (Macann, 1993). Heidegger recognised a complexity in understanding the human relationship to death. That is, death is generally experienced as belonging to others and not ourselves. Heidegger chose to question this state of being (Macann, 1993). Heidegger (1996) considered that 'no one can take the others dying away from him' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 223). As such, no one can take my dying away from me either. Essentially, death, in Heidegger's view, is a personal matter, that is, death belongs to each Dasein (Being). Or in other terms 'death is always essentially my own' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 223). Thus death is each person's own solitary journey, which cannot be experienced through others.

Heidegger (1996) further decreed that every human is old enough to die as soon as they are born. However, as death is the end of every human life we cannot directly experience our own death. Thus in no small way every Dasein lives with an aim towards its own death, how we live in recognition of this realisation, of this inevitability, is what makes the difference. In the words of Heidegger (1996):

Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Da-sein. Thus *death* reveals itself as the *ownmost nonrelational possibility not to be bypassed*. As such it is an *eminent* imminence. Its existential possibility is grounded in the fact that the Da-sein is essentially disclosed to itself, in the way of being-ahead-of-itself. This structural factor of care has its most primordial concretion in being-towards-death. Being-towards-the-end becomes phenomenally clearer as being toward the eminent possibility of Da-sein which we have characterised (Heidegger, 1996, p. 232; italics in text).

Thus in Heidegger's view, death can be categorised in three ways. First it is 'my' unavoidable end to life. Second it should be viewed as the possibility of 'me' no longer existing (ownmost possibility) and third no one can die for 'me' (non-relational). Thus,

death can only be confronted '*ahead of the event* in an attitude Heidegger calls being-towards-death' (Macann, 1993, p. 97). Yet we often do not consider our own deaths and perceive that we have an eternity to undertake what we desire (Heidegger, 1996). In fact as Heidegger pointed out 'even "thinking about death" is regarded publicly as cowardly fear, a sign of insecurity on the part of the Da-sein and a dark flight from the world' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 235).

However, Heidegger argued that death should be thought about, should be faced as an imminent inevitability as death sits squarely as a matter of life. That is:

In the broadest sense, death is a phenomenon of life. Life must be understood as a kind of being to which belongs a being in the world. It can only be defined in a private orientation to Da-sein (Heidegger, 1996, p. 229).

Thus, rather than evade or attempt to veil such a reality Heidegger encourages us to acknowledge and accept death and somehow 'make it our own' (Malpas & Solomon, 1996, p. 2). Focusing on one's own death enables a freedom from those dark clutches that create such anxious concerns. Facing death is individualising, that is facing ourselves as we really are. In Heidegger's view the aim would be to live life with the realisation that death is a distinct and imminent possibility (Heidegger, 1996). This assertion eloquently articulated by Heidegger should not be mistaken as a call for an obsessive focus on death (Higgins, 1996). Merely that as Higgins reminds us the framing of death in such a way opens up a potential 'to find rich significance in living' (Higgins, 1996, p. 48). Perhaps even providing encouragement to live life to its fullest, 'a tool for seizing the day, every day' (Higgins, 1996, p. 49).

Thus people take over their own life by focusing on its end in such a way that they are individualised. Accepting the reality of ones own death and its ever present potential changes the way life is lived and supports a process whereby each person moves towards authenticity. Yet for most this acceptance is rare and difficult, fear holds us back and life is inauthentically lived (Soll, 1996). Where a life lived inauthentically has conformed to the pressures of social norms and their tranquillizing rewards. Such a life is in flight from death; that may verbally affirm mortality but does not truly believe it (Young, 1996). A life lived authentically has genuinely accepted the reality of its own death and lives a life of autonomy and focus (Young, 1996). Authenticity then could be

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seen as coming from the true and genuine experience of death, an acceptance of one's own mortality, essential for living a full human life.

For Marshall (2002) the phenomenology of such an experience is described as a 'death-and-rebirth experience' (Marshall, 2002, p. 12). A concept that seems to abound in personal religious experiences and mythology (DeMares & Krycka, 1998). That is the response to the potentiality of death is that consciousness tends to withdraw to the deeper or core elements of being. Marshall (2002) provides examples of near death experiences that include a peek into the shaman rituals that require initiates to undergo an experience near to death in order to connect to something deep within. In such cases people seem to touch another reality that enhances life in a profound and wonderful way (Marshall, 2001). Campbell (1973) found a similar experience throughout the world's mythological history. He concluded that whether mystic, schizophrenic, shaman and perhaps one can now say extreme sport participant, the outcome of such a journey is that 'life is then richer, stronger, and more joyous' (Campbell, 1973, p. 230) A point, I am sure you will agree worthy of elaboration and I shall do so, later. For now, this discussion will continue exploring the relationship between death and extreme sports by accepting the recommendations of Marshall (2002) to step out of the Western oriented paradigm into a more inclusive paradigm.

Thoughts from the wisdom traditions

Buddhist philosophy encompasses over 2,500 years of thought on the human condition. This philosophy has extended throughout the world and includes such philosophical specialities as Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism (a merge of Chinese Taoism and Indian Buddhism) (Bapat, 1956; Watts, 1982). A central view of Buddhist philosophy is the impermanence of life (Parkes, 1996). That is, all life including human life suffers from birth and death. Death therefore is an integral part of life and by extension life is an integral part of death (Parkes, 1996). Buddhist philosophy succinctly reminds us that whilst we may not know when, where or how we will die, death is an ever-present reality (Humphreys, 1993). Contemplating this inevitability in such a way that one becomes experientially aware of the ever-present-potential of our own death each day, liberates us from deception and laziness in living our lives (Gyatso, 2001).

Since I shall soon have to depart from this world, there is no sense in my becoming attached to the things of life. Instead I will take to heart the real essence of my human life by sincerely engaging in spiritual practice (Gyatso, 2001, p. 43).

In this instance engaging in spiritual practice is about transformation by ‘overcoming delusions and negative actions and cultivating constructive thoughts and actions’ (Gyatso, 2001, p. 43). I shall have more to say about this in section 3.

One Buddhist text on death, ‘The Tibetan Book of the Dead’ explores death as a continual process not just an end to life (G. Rinpoche, 1975). For Wicks (1996) the texts are a reminder to live life.

Our habitual patterns of expectation and reaction to circumstances often produce a deathlike stagnation and unanimated redundancy within our experience. As a release from this benighted condition, there remains the permanent possibility of experiencing a liberating transformation of character and a ‘rebirth’ of personality (Wicks, 1996, p. 71).

Thus death is seen as a continual cycle of personality transformations. Rinpoche (2002) extended the relationship between death and life by noting that accepting death also means that we should learn how to live well. Contemplating our own death introduces us to the essence of our own mind. If the reality of death is ignored then life will remain unfulfilled. In other terms it is perhaps only by recognizing how fragile life is that we come to know how precious it is, thus everything we do in life counts (Rinpoche, 2002).

For Parkes (1996) Zen Buddhist philosophy also indicates that death or at least the facing of death provides a direct path to understanding the true nature of self. He quotes Hakuin Ekaku an 18th Century Zen master:

If you are not a hero who has truly seen into his own nature, don’t think that [non-ego] is something that can be known so easily ... you must be prepared to let go your hold when hanging from a sheer precipice, to die and return again to life ... Supposing a man should find himself in some desolate area where no one has ever walked before. Below him are the perpendicular walls of a bottomless chasm. His feet rest precariously on a patch of slippery moss, and there is no spot of earth on which he can steady himself. He can neither advance nor retreat; he faces only death (Ekaku cited in Parkes, 1996, p. 92).

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Thus one is brought back to life with new vigour. Further, it would seem that transformation has taken place, but more about that later. Essentially, death should be learned in an experiential way as opposed to an objective or abstract way. That is, to understand death (and therefore experience life to the fullest) one should enter into 'its way of being' (Parkes, 1996, p. 93). Parkes again calls on the words of a Zen master, Suzuki Shosan:

This is what Shosan means by exhorting his readers to 'learn death': we can learn from death by entering into its way of being, its falling away at every moment, and thereby come to 'live having let go of life' (Parkes, 1996, p. 93).

Though of course we can never truly experience our own death, we can only hope to get as close as possible to the experience. Thus as Humphreys (1993) observed 'only the man who gives up his life shall learn to live' (Humphreys, 1993, p. 72). Hindu philosophy perhaps takes this further showing that not only is the conquering of death essential to living a full life but also that to ignore this experiential reality is to live life as a living death (Chaudhuri, 1990).

The Taoist philosophies placed human beings solidly as part of nature (Malpas & Solomon, 1996). As such death was neither revered nor cherished, neither celebrated nor feared. Death was just that – death. According to Ames (1996) the Taoist view on death is one of tolerance for its place in human existence. Without death life would be 'static, transparent, predictable and tedious' (Ames, 1996, p. 60). Thus, death is seen as a positive presence that enables life 'making it more intense and poignant' (Ames, 1996, p. 60).

Further discourses on death

As is becoming apparent philosophy, both Western and Eastern, has considered death in terms of its ultimate relationship to life (Parkes, 1996). As well as those already discussed Eastern philosophers that follow Taoist views (Ames, 1996) and Western philosophers such as Montaigne and Nietzsche (Parkes, 1996) have considered death as an existential conception. Whilst it must be accepted that viewpoints are often culturally and historically embedded there would seem to be a striking similarity from such apparently disparate philosophies. According to Parkes (1996) 'philosophers are said to be

‘saying the same things about the same things’ (Parkes, 1996, p. 84). Often writings and recommendations posit a view that becoming somehow detached from life seems to reverse the process and enables a re-entering into life with a:

... heightened vitality – as in the Zen master’s exhortation to ‘live having let go of life’. The ability to live ‘having let go of life’ (to live, rather than merely exist) turns out to depend on an understanding of the radically momentary nature of human existence (Parkes, 1996, p. 83).

Montaigne understood human life as a ‘flux of discontinuous moments or instants’ (Montaigne cited in Parkes, 1996, p. 85). Thus, Montaigne encourages us to practice death.

To begin depriving death of its greatest advantage over us, let us adopt a way clean contrary to that common one; let us deprive death of its strangeness, let us frequent it, let us get used to it; let us have nothing more often in our mind than death ... We do not know where death awaits us: so let us wait for it everywhere. To practice death is to practice freedom. A man who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave (Montaigne, 1995, p. 95).

Parkes noted that in Montaigne’s essay, ‘That to philosophize is to die,’ nature is conjured up to inform the reader that life and death are a condition of being; a perception echoed by Nietzsche (Parkes, 1996). The intended message being, that if people refrained from ‘avoiding the thought of death they would find that their lives provide far more food for thought than they ever imagined’ (Parkes, 1996, p. 89). Nietzsche took this one step further in his view that ‘the certain prospect of death could infuse every life with a delicious and fragrant drop of lightheartedness’ (Nietzsche cited in Parkes, 1996, p. 89). In his classic writings ‘Zarathustra’s Discourse’ Nietzsche (1995) even recommended that ‘one should learn to die’ (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 77). For both Nietzsche and Montaigne life is best understood from a viewpoint that is distant or departed from itself. Thus any process that enables a viewpoint outside of one’s life also provides a more complete picture of one’s life and a return to a fuller life and freedom from superficiality (Parkes, 1996).

Perhaps then as Malpas and Solomon (1996) considered ‘might the absurdity of life in the face of death itself provide a source of meaning?’ (Malpas & Solomon, 1996, p. 2). Psychiatric specialists such as Kubler-Ross (1969; 1975; 1982) and Rowe (1987) cer-

tainly seemed to express that view. Rowe (2002) succinctly expressed the view that whether we consider death the 'end of identity or the doorway to another life, we fix the purpose of our life' (Rowe, 2002, p. 17). Kubler-Ross (1975) considered that only by accepting death as part of life can we hope to fully appreciate what it means to live with meaning.

Horwitz (1996) determined that his experience of dying did more than just provide meaning it also provided a concrete time frame in which life was to be lived. An acceptance that life really does end, that our existence is limited:

What is the time frame in which we measure our lives? How do we account for time? The answer is slightly different for all of us. But death adds a potency and focus to this question. Our relationship and perceived proximity to death adjusts our clocks. It is the clock we watch to find out when the exam is over, when the workday comes to an end. 'Lay down your pencils!' Lay down your lives. Grab your lunch box. Hold on for dear life (Horwitz, 1996, p. 9).

Death changed Horwitz, there was freedom from the future, freedom from the illusion of personality and vanity and a glimpse of eternity. Life, even the worst bits, became live entertainment. Death provided a route to clarity, a pathway to a different view on life:

The presence of death is an eraser that clears off much that is filling the blackboard. When life gets too cluttered and confused, when you have somehow strayed from the path, consult with death. Thoughts of death clarify and clear the blackboard on unimportant material (Horwitz, 1996, p. 13).

These philosophical perspectives seem to be presenting a view that insists that to live is also to die; one cannot exist without the other. The trick is to learn how to live whilst one moves towards death, for death is a certainty. This trick would seem to be best performed when death is genuinely accepted as an ever-present possibility in one's own human existence. Accepting this reality requires that each of us face up to our own limited existence, only then is life truly, authentically lived. This acceptance does not imply that death is the point of existence or that death is in anyway celebrated as an end in itself merely that accepting death as real removes its power and opens up possibilities that are precious and infinitely exciting (Rowe, 1987).

Perhaps then the extreme sport experience can be seen as one route toward experiencing one's own death as a real and imminent potential and thereby affirming life. Perhaps extreme sports are an experiential process that brings one directly face to face with one's own death in a real and genuine way. Perhaps this is the relationship to death, an understanding that leads to an ability to live life to the fullest extent. After all when sitting in the eddy preparing to shoot a waterfall or standing on the cliff readying oneself to jump one has to accept that death is a real possibility. In the words of one extreme participant:

For me, my sports are a direct tap into what I call the "life force." I don't want to die, and I especially don't want to die a slow death of desperation, without adventure. We'll all be a 911 call sooner or later, but I'd prefer mine to happen in the midst of an open-eyed life experience (in Gadd & Rubenstein, 2003, p. 25).

Perhaps this is the point that William James was posing when he noted 'it is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all' (James cited in Koerner, 1997, p. 2). A realisation also accepted by those studying near death experiences (Fox, 2003) and mythology (Campbell, 1973, 1993). That is to say accepting and experiencing the reality of our own personal death may well be the door to something more, something special (Alvarez, 1972). That might even result in 'a form of enhanced consciousness' (Fox, 2003, p. 56).

Summary

Though, of course this might be scant comfort to those of us who lie awake concerned for our loved ones it would seem that extreme sport participation is not about the death wish or a desire to cheat death. Perhaps the experience is more positive. That is by approaching death one comes to accept death, which in turn enables life to be lived more fully. As the poem introducing this chapter implores 'die before you die until you become rebirth you will not know what life is'. Perhaps this is what happens when one participates in an extreme sport. This would certainly fit with the voiced perception that participants have a life wish and desire to live life to its fullest.

Yet this cannot be the phenomenological experience but an element that might lead to the experience. Equally if it was that straight forward would we not all be lining up to partake of our chosen activity? Perhaps as Ames (1996) noted our relationship to death is but one element of the issue. For the closer we get to the annihilation of our person

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the more we seem to want to turn back. Something within us warns us of our impending doom. Yet if we would just move past that warning, as extreme sports participants seem to do, something special might await. Still we are compelled to restrain our enthusiasm, for an exploration into this phenomenon we must turn to fear.



VII

On Fear

You gain strength, courage,
and confidence by every
experience in which you really
stop to look fear in the face.
You are able to say to yourself,
“I lived with this horror.
I can take the next thing
that comes along.”...
You must do the thing you
cannot do.

(Eleanor Roosevelt cited in Exley, 1997, p. 16)

Fear, or perhaps more precisely ‘no fear’ or fearlessness like risk-taking and death has inevitably been associated with participation in extreme sports. One only has to carry out an internet search using the phrase ‘extreme sports’ to appreciate the strength of the perceived relationship. Pages of marketing material depicting posters or clothes with the ‘No Fear’ slogan or some other relationship to fearlessness fill the screen. Though it is not always clear exactly what one is supposed to have ‘No Fear’ or demonstrate fearlessness of. I have often found myself wondering whether it is the environment implicit with a specific activity (e.g. water) or some other possibility inherent within a specific activity (e.g. falling or heights) or perhaps it is a ‘No Fear’ attitude to the potential pain or perhaps even towards the potential for death. Still this aspect of extreme sports seems to have a strong appeal to marketers and advertisers alike (Stark, 1997).

The notion of fearlessness seems to make total sense. After all, just imagine sitting above a waterfall approaching the size of Niagara Falls waiting to drive your kayak into the current and over the top, or standing with your toes dangling over the edge of a

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bridge or cliff waiting to leap into thin air, such thoughts would scare most of us. Participants must be fearless after all one only has to reflect on the feelings of fear whilst hurtling around a roller coaster ride where there is no inherent environmental concern, where pain or death are not real potentials to appreciate the inevitable feelings that would be apparent in extreme sports (Rause, 1998). Thus anybody willing to voluntarily partake in an activity that might hold such fears, for leisure, would have to be fearless otherwise they would surely just freeze or panic. And of course extreme sports participants have often been described as fearless and crazy (Koerner, 1997; Richardson, 2001a).

Furthermore, participants keep going back for more. Greenberg (1977) reports numerous cases of injury from sports such as hanggliding and motocross where participants are left in hospital for months after surviving 60 kph nose-first crashes into the ground. Despite being carried from the scene on stretchers, being considered lucky to be alive and receiving numerous broken bones, the consensus as reported by Greenberg (1977) was to continue with their chosen activity. Some were even reported to 'chuckle' (Greenberg, 1977, p. 18) about their near death experiences, surely this is evidence of fearlessness?

The aim of this chapter, like the chapters on risk-taking and death, is to question this viewpoint. However, it is not just marketing and general opinion that has considered extreme sport participation as indicative of an inappropriate relationship to fear; academic research has also expressed a similar opinion (McMillan & Rachman, 1988; Rachman, 1983). Yet extreme sport activities have also been considered as the undertakings of those who actively search for (and perhaps are addicted to) the effects of adrenaline, otherwise known as adrenaline junkies (Lambton, 2000), and as we shall see adrenaline is a response to fear.

This of course presents a quandary and potentially questions the relationship to 'No Fear'. Perhaps there is an unhealthy addiction to the effects of fear? Thus this chapter will consider what has been written about the relationship to fear and extreme sports in order to explore where the 'truth' might lie. However, to begin the process it is important to understand what is meant by fear or fearlessness and how they might relate to

this study. As such, the following section explores fear for itself and in order to determine what fearlessness might entail.

Fear: An overview

Rowe (2002) observed that fear like death is one of those unmentionable elements of human experience. In society, fear is somehow pretended away and reactions to intense danger transformed into bravery. Fear (and its related manifestations) is generally perceived to be an unwanted state 'imposed by a cruel environment-by our corrupt fellows, by a harsh natural world, and by a devilish internal legacy of our formative years' (Klausner, 1968, p. v).

Yet as individuals we experience fear in many ways (Rowe, 2002). Research on fear has explored the notion as an innate biological component of humanness and a learned behaviour. Biological understandings include the role of inheritance and the structure of the brain and nervous system (Panksepp, 1998). Learning has considered the place of socio-cultural and psychological mechanisms and the adoption of effective utilisation systems (Panksepp, 1998). Gray (1987) considered fear in terms of the psychological and motivational make up of human beings. For Gray fear is '*a hypothetical state of the brain, or neuro-endocrine system, arising under certain conditions and eventuating in certain forms of behaviour*' (Gray, 1987, p. 9; italics Gray).

Fear as proposed by those following the behavioural tradition, such as Watson (cited in Gray, 1987) is a function of innate reactions to loud noise, sudden loss of support and pain. Fearful reactions to any other stimuli were necessarily a function of classical conditioning. However, as Panksepp (1998) recognised whilst pain may be effective for generating or creating fear it does not 'constitute fear itself' (Panksepp, 1998, p. 208). For example, whilst fear may trigger an analgesic influence over pain (e.g. injuries), fear can often be felt without a relationship to pain. Needless to say these original posited explanations on fear were too simple (Gray, 1987). For example, Gray noted that human beings seem to also have an innate fear of snakes but that it does not manifest itself until the age of two. For Gray this was evidence of either a maturation process or learning.

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The maturation process is when innate fears develop after a few months, that is, some innate fears do not manifest until later in a child's life. Gray (1987) extended this maturation of innate fears to include the development of fears such as the fear of strangers, the dark, animals and dead or mutilated bodies which all seem to develop in early infancy. Panksepp (1998) noted that a child under two years exhibits a fear of sudden loud noises, strange objects, loss of support and pain and only later develops a fear of animals, strangers, drowning, death and the dark. For Greenfield (2001) the explanation is to be found in a combination of genetic information that triggers neuronal networks.

Gray (1987) extended Watson's simplified understanding of fear to include the four principles of novelty (e.g. strangers, unfamiliarity), intensity (e.g. light, sounds and other pain inducing stimuli), stimuli arising from social interactions (e.g. threatening behaviours) and evolutionary dangers (e.g. darkness, dead or mutilated bodies, situations that may cause death). For humans the 'novelty' and 'intensity' fears may reduce within a few years from birth due to a familiarisation process often called habituation (Gray, 1987). Such fears are evolutionarily determined but, as previously noted, may not mature for some time after birth. Greenfield (2001) noted that the earlier fears were more abstracted whereas the fears that developed later in life were more specific. Any fear that does not fit within these categories was considered either learnt or an augmented disposition towards a fearful stimuli (Gray, 1987).

Rowe (2002; 1987) described a number of such learnt fears. For example, the fear of the annihilation of the self is according to Rowe our greatest fear; even greater than the fear of physical death. Often fear is caused by the struggle between fitting in with the group and remaining an individual or the balance between freedom and security. Where freedom is required to explore and determine who we are and is characterised by uncertainty and great danger. Security is characterised by certainty and hopelessness 'for hope can only exist where there is no certainty' (Rowe, 2002, p. 11). Freedom is essentially very scary as such Rowe noted the need to balance choice or no choice. But we are jumping ahead of ourselves and will return to the discussion on freedom in section 3.

Fear, in human terms, has been described as an emotional response to a stimulus that the human species strives to terminate, avoid or escape from. The most likely responses to a

source of fear are flight, fight or freeze (Gray, 1987). According to Panksepp (1998) this capacity to experience fear and the behavioural arousal that correlates with it emerge from a 'FEAR circuit' (Panksepp, 1998, p. 206) in the brain and its relationship to a multitude of neurological, chemical, hormonal and other physiological mechanisms. A fearful event is accompanied by an excretion of adrenaline from the adrenal glands and the neurones in the brain (Rowe, 2002).

The experiential and physiological responses of fear include the startle response, trembling, increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, cold sweats, apprehensive worry, nervousness, tension, a feeling that safety is threatened, excessive vigilance and fidgeting, gastrointestinal disturbances, increased defecation and increased and shallow respiration (Panksepp, 1998). The precise mechanisms depend on the level and intensity of the fear felt and the ensuing flight, fight or freeze characteristics. For example intense fear is most often characterised by flight and low or mild levels of fear by freezing (Panksepp, 1998). Equally intense levels of fear impair cognitive ability. It is adrenaline that causes the increase in heart rate, blood pressure and blood sugar levels that ready the body for flight or fight. When neither outcome is possible the effects are often associated with feelings of shakiness, cold sweats, headaches, dizziness and nausea (Rowe, 2002).

Fear is closely related, or sometimes considered inseparable from terror, anxiety, panic and guilt. Rowe (2002) observed that:

Fear comes to us in many guises. It can come as a shivering in the delight of anticipation: or as the drenching, overwhelming, annihilating terror known by the inadequate names of existential anxiety or dread. It can come suddenly, life-savingly in situations of danger, when it is known purely as fear; or it can gnaw away endlessly with little apparent cause, and we call it anxiety; or it can come with a sense of having the eyes of the world upon us when we are naked and alone, and we call it shame; or it can loom darkly, threatening punishment, and we call it guilt (Rowe, 2002, p. 3).

For example, Panksepp (1998) showed that both anxiety and terror emerge from the 'FEAR circuit' (Panksepp, 1998, p. 207) which can be activated by external and internal stimuli. For Elliot (2002) the difference between fear and anxiety is that 'we fear what we can see and hear. But we are anxious about what is hidden' (Elliot, 2002, p. 4).

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Anxieties might include such constructs as the fear of heights or pain. Terror is considered to be the more sudden intense form of fear and general anxiety a more continual and consistent form of fear that tends to gnaw away, destroying any sense of security (Panksepp, 1998). Guilt has been described as the fear of being found out or punished for having done something considered to be wrong (Rowe, 2002). Panic can be considered an extreme and groundless fear that manifests as flight (Quarantelli, 2001).

Response patterns are also continually modulated through direct emotional or cognitive learning. As such, learning can aid the effective channelling of fears to ensure 'environmentally appropriate responses' (Panksepp, 1998, p. 215). However, fearful events can trigger long term responses such as avoidance of similar situations, intense dreams of terror that seem to re-enact the event or even taking of drugs to drown out the fear (Rowe, 2002). For example, chronic fearful anxiety may eventually be accompanied by such conditions as post-traumatic stress disorder or obsessive-compulsive behaviours and rituals (Panksepp, 1998). Equally the onset of fear responses without apparent reasons can trigger fear responses 'and so start on the sickening cycle of fearing fear itself' (Rowe, 2002, p. 7).

However, fear in some of its manifestations should not be considered innately negative. Smith and Mackie (2000) point out that a low level of anxiety can actually be motivating. For example an anxiety about the need to protect oneself could lead to an action that effectively provides protection. However, as Smith and Mackie observed the motivation effect works best when a person also has the required skills and abilities to reduce the anxiety in question.

Still my intention for this section was to explore fear in a manner that might lead to an understanding of fearlessness. Fear then is both innate and learned and defined in terms of degrees and responses. Some fears such as the fear of death or pain are manifest at birth and possibly augmented through learning. Anxiety, terror, panic, guilt and fear itself are all potential manifestations triggered by similar internal or external stimuli. Thus as Llewellyn (2003) succinctly points out with all this potential negative, physiological and emotional influence why would one undertake an extreme sport? Perhaps Llewellyn's words on the possible reactions to a parachute experience are best here:

The ground seems so ridiculously far away. As your brain's amygdala recognises the clear and present danger your heart begins to beat wildly (up to three times faster), your blood pressure increases, your mouth becomes uncomfortably dry and you have an almost irresistible urge to avoid what is about to happen. You experience the universal emotion of fear, and the perception of risk has sent your system into top gear producing a massive surge of adrenaline, noradrenalin and growth hormone. In milliseconds the brain's hypothalamus begins to give out corticotrophin-releasing hormone (CRH), which triggers the brain's pituitary gland to pump out adrenocorticotropin (ACTH), which in turn persuades the adrenal glands near your kidneys to start producing cortisol. You are breathing much faster now and blood surges around your body, draining away from the unimportant areas like your stomach into your muscles, and giving you 'butterflies'. After all there is little point in diverting precious energy to digest your breakfast when you may need every ounce of energy just to survive! Adrenalin, noradrenalin, growth hormone and cortisol continue to be released into your blood as your pupils dilate allowing you to perceive movement around you more clearly, and see into the shadows and darkness (which may conceal further threat). Your immune system gears up to deal with any potential injuries, and emergency reserves of the energy source glucose are released in order to prepare for intense bursts of muscular activity. In the blink of an eye your mind and body have geared up to act in response to the perceived risk, the so-called 'fight or flight' response. Whether or not you decide to jump out of the aeroplane and go parachuting depends upon you overcoming the natural fear of falling to your death, but why bother? (Llewellyn, 2003, p. 1).

Perhaps the answer is that despite these words participants do not actually feel this way. Perhaps after all, participants of extreme sports are fearless. To be fearless in any situation one would expect that participants would report fearlessness and the associated physiological and emotional responses to fear (e.g. heart rate increases) would not be evident. Thus in the case of the extreme sport participants, who face a real possibility of dying every time they participate, one would expect that the claim of fearlessness would indicate a lack of a physiological or experiential relationship to fear, or at least a much reduced physiological and experiential relationship. Certainly for some the evidence is clear, to participate in extreme sports must involve a much reduced or inappropriate sense of fear. Still, as we shall see perhaps there are also other view points that provide a more succinct understanding of the relationship to fear and participation in extreme sports.

Psychoanalysis

Followers of the Freudian tradition of psychoanalysis have taken the innate connection to fear and made connections to the sexual significance of the trait. For example a

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common fear in humanity is the fear of snakes, for Freudian theorists this is a symbolic manifestation of the fear of the penis (Gray, 1987). However, as Gray (1987) observed apes also fear snakes, thus either apes are also able to manifest sexual fears or there is some other relationship. Still as we have seen in the previous chapters, followers of psychoanalysis have usually considered the extreme sport experience as evidencing a diseased mind. Essentially, psychoanalytic studies on extreme sports 'focus on how unconscious fantasies rooted in childhood, mediate ongoing risk activities' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 440).

Hunt (1996) explored a deep sea diver's participation and recognised her findings as a series of fear related manifestations. Hunt explored preoedipal, oedipal, sadomasochistic attachments and bisexual conflicts to understand one specific deep sea diver's motivations. According to Hunt (1996) at one point in the diver's career he desired recognition and that this desire was as a result of feelings of deprivation resulting from his father's inattention. Hunt further explained that this anxiety 'may reflect preoedipally rooted castration concerns' (Hunt, 1996, p. 598) which were later strengthened through 'oedipal conflicts and related aggressive fantasies' (Hunt, 1996, p. 598). Hunt further considered that the diver's relationship with his father may have resulted in a 'sadomasochistic paternal attachment' (Hunt, 1996, p. 599) which initiated problems in negotiating later oedipal conflicts.

Later Hunt also noted that the diver had a fear of aggression which meant that he was unsuccessful in other sports. The diver was also said to need paternal protection as a result of suffering from preoedipal fantasies about phallic women. Apparently the diver associated the ocean and ocean creatures with women and feared 'deep-sea sirens' (Hunt, 1996, p. 607) and oedipal victory. At the same time the diver was said to have had castration fears.

Essentially Hunt (1996) considered that the diver in question often lacked 'an appropriate sense of fear' (Hunt, 1996, p. 610) and had an inappropriate love of pain. Participation in the extreme sport of deep diving was considered, amongst other sex related struggles, a reflection of the struggle 'for power over frightening phallic women' (Hunt, 1996, p. 611). Furthermore, Hunt considered that these findings could be shared by all participants of the extreme sport of deep-sea diving. That is deep-sea divers in

general may demonstrate 'somasochistic attachments and fear of women' (Hunt, 1996, p. 617). This of course indicates a masculine focus and the lack of involvement of women in deep-sea diving.

Perhaps Hunt's (1996) diver demonstrates a clear indication that extreme sport participants do have an inappropriate sense of fear, love of pain or desire to transfer other more intense fears into leisure activities. Perhaps also though as in life, a small percentage of participants may have similar experiences. Still as Hunt (1996) noted people are different and to explain the extreme sport experience in such terms may be an over simplification. Furthermore, Hunt also concluded by recognising that deep diving is most often conflict and injury free and an immensely creative endeavour. Still Hunt's (1996) propositions would indicate that extreme sports participants in general would not demonstrate a normal response to fear. The activity would most likely not induce fear or any of its related manifestations.

Symbolic interaction

Using the same activity of deep-sea diving Hunt (Hunt, 1995a) explored fear through the theory of Symbolic Interaction. Essentially she considered that those who understand experiences through the medium of Symbolic Interaction are interested in how 'subjects themselves manage fear and maintain competent identity while engaged in activities that may be perceived as dangerous' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 440). The focus seems to be on how participants rationalize risks based on culturally defined norms. In the case of those activities considered as 'extreme risk' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 440) (e.g. mountaineering, test pilots, sky-diving) the risk of death may be considered a positive and exciting challenge that can be effectively managed.

Hunt reported numerous occasions when dives did not go as planned (e.g. shark encounters and oxygen narcosis) and anxiety, fear and panic were experienced as a result. However, she did not seem to consider that deep-sea divers experience fear in 'normal' situations (Hunt, 1995a). For Hunt deep-sea divers experienced mastery through a socialisation process that challenges both physical and mental capabilities. These challenges provide experiences that enable divers to manage disasters and ward off the potential of panic. Hunt (1995a) also reported that divers who did not undertake certain

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dives hid their shame and fear through excuses. Humour was also explored as a mechanism for inhibiting fears. One diver was reported as expressing doubts about his motives for diving as he felt that diving to test levels of fear and anxiety meant that he was becoming a daredevil, which was tantamount to being excessively risky.

However, Hunt (1995a) noted the case of another diver who was reported to be excessively risky. The perception was that this diver was fearless which was seen as a negative character trait as it disadvantaged the diver and potentially negated the diver's ability to avoid dangers (Hunt, 1995a). Only after injury did this diver develop a sense of fear. Essentially Hunt (1993; 1995a) considered that diver's 'employ neutralizing techniques to manage anxiety and maintain competent identity' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 457). This according to Hunt (1995a) has the potential to compromise welfare by dismissing fear and 'facilitating engagement in activities which violate accepted standards of safety' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 3). The indication being that extreme sport participation is culturally abnormal and in need of rational justification. In much the same way that scientists researching high risk activities 'may flirt with physical injury which they justify with reference to scientific pursuits' (Hunt, 1995a, p. 458).

Still the indication from the research carried out by Hunt (1995a; 1996) and explored under the theoretical issues of both psychoanalysis and symbolic interaction is that fear is definitely part of the experience. Perhaps as Hunt (1996) concluded there is an inappropriate sense of fear, however, Hunt (1995a) also reported that those who dive a line outside of what is culturally considered appropriate are considered deviant by others within the group. It is also worth noting that both studies were focusing on the participants vulnerability to injury, as such the experience may be one of injury in extreme sports rather than extreme sport per se.

Still the questions remain: Is the extreme sport experience about some negative manifestation or connection to fear? Is fear detrimentally neutralized or lived out? It is interesting that Hunt (1998) has expanded her research into exploring how some sports might aid learning about how to master the negative influence of fear. Thus for me the explanations posited are too simple, as even Hunt (1995a) noted that participants report feelings of fear. A point reiterated by Todhunter (2000) who recalled an experience with a climber who reported continually feeling fear when climbing without ropes.

Yet as in the previous chapter it may also be that I have fallen into the researcher trap as outlined by Hunt (1995a), who noted that researchers involved in action settings:

May be socialized into the subjects construction of normal risk and begin to take it for granted. This is most likely to occur when the researcher loses his or her ability to see him or herself as an object of study and begins to share subjects' neutralization techniques. It is also possible that researchers who choose to explore high-risk subcultures may have a special vulnerability to risk socialization which results in partial blindness to the subject (Hunt, 1995a, p. 20).

Hunt further warned that researchers:

May share with subjects a fascination with and attraction to danger about which they are not fully aware. The researcher then utilizes accounts to deny anxiety derived from internal and external sources. For example, the researcher may invoke a claim to 'higher loyalties' to justify participation in high risk acts. Only through his or her involvement with danger can he or she gain access to the backstage regions of the subject's world. Under these circumstances, the research process itself may represent, in part, an enactment of unconscious fantasies (Hunt, 1995a, p. 21).

Essentially Hunt warned that researchers are also subject to feelings and fantasies based on their life history which can blind the researcher and has the potential to result in inaccurate assumptions about participant experiences. Still as solace I would also like to draw on the words of Stoller:

When I confronted first-hand the powers of Dunguri [a sorceress] in Wanzerbe and acted like a Songhay sorcerer, all my assumptions about the world were uprooted from their foundation in Western metaphysics ... Once I crossed the threshold into the Songhay world of sorcery and felt the texture of fear and the exaltation of repelling the force of a sorcerer, my view of Songhay culture could no longer be one of a structuralist, a symbolist, or a Marxist (Stoller cited in Arnould, Price, & Otnes, 1999, p. 33).

And from a B.A.S.E. jumper:

The depth of fear that I've felt in my life, the intensity – it's miserable, it really is. The whole idea of 'no fear' – it's rubbish! Fear in adventure is a miserable, gut-wrenching, terrible experience. It is it's awful. People who say they love the fear, that's bullshit! ... the fear part of it is an awful, sickening feeling – nobody's there for that ... Some people don't get past it, they walk away. Some

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people do push past it and jump but the fear's so great and it's so miserable it subtracts from the pleasure (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

McCairen (1998) in her book exploring her solo descent through the Grand Canyon described the terror she often felt as deadening and crippling as she accepted the seeming reality of her own death.

Stress-seeking

For some the emotional response to stress has been considered an element of fear (Rowe, 2002), that is stress induces fear or anxiety (Ewert, 1986). As such, rather than actively seeking an external construct called risk, certain people socially considered deviant types may be seeking the internal construct of stress through those sports culturally considered risk sports (Klausner, 1968). Thus, in contrast to the perception that participants must be fearless or not have an effective appreciation of fear; fear is definitely experienced and a constant companion. As Houston (1968) the leader of many Himalayan expeditions noted climbers are continually psychologically burdened by the fear of falling, which Houston considered to be 'one of man's basic phobias' (Houston, 1968, p. 53). Thus, the indication is that the climber actively searches for experiences designed to create fear.

However, as we have noted in the introduction to this chapter, fear is one of the great unmentionable aspects to being human. Adults are supposed to control their intense emotions, fear is supposed to be curtailed at the very least (Elias & Dunning, 1986). Whilst children are permitted an element of uncensored emotion a similar exposition of reactions in the face of fear by adult men and women is at the very least a matter of embarrassment and demonstration of non-normal behaviour. Specifically, Elias and Dunning (1986) believed that curtailing fear is no longer a conscious decision but an automatic personality structure. Fear is not something to be felt, yet should this be so? Perhaps as the late president Roosevelt noted paraphrasing the French philosopher Montaigne 'all we have to fear is fear itself'² (S. L. A. Marshall, 1968, p. 65).

² Versions of this quote have also been variously attributed Seneca (circa A.D. 50), Epictetus (circa A.D. 100), Montaigne (1580), Bacon (1623), Thoreau (1851) and Roosevelt (1936).

Elias and Dunning (1986) considered excitement as an essential element of humanity and the role of leisure or play an essential medium to achieve this state. That is contrary to those theorists that pose a release from work tensions or the desire to attain something not achieved in work (Greenberg, 1977) leisure and play are not considered as relief from the tensions of everyday life or as the antecedent of work but essential for human well-being (Elias & Dunning, 1986).

Their function is not simply, as is often believed, a liberation from tensions but the restoration of that measure of tension which is an essential ingredient of mental health (Elias & Dunning, 1986, p. 89).

For Elias and Dunning (1986) the loss of fear is to be mourned and perhaps a better description of play in dangerous environments is a search for the intensity that belongs with fear. In this guise fear becomes excitement, an expression that does not require intense reflection, foresight and knowledge.

In a society in which the propensities of the serious and threatening type of excitement have diminished, the compensatory function of play-excitement has increased. With the help of this type of excitement, the mimetic sphere offers again and again the chance, as it were, for a new 'refreshment of the soul' in the otherwise even tenor in the ordinary social life (Elias & Dunning, 1986, p. 72).

Still, for Elias and Dunning (1986) the focus is on those play pursuits that mimic or imitate dangerous activities, not necessarily on those that have an actual relationship to loss of life 'mimetic excitement is socially and personally without danger' (Elias & Dunning, 1986, p. 80). Whereas those activities that are non-mimetic could lead to the very real possibility of threat and loss of life (Elias & Dunning, 1986). As such in contrast to the view attributed to Aristotle (Elias & Dunning, 1986) extreme sports are not imitating any real situations that might trigger a sympathetic response called fear but as we have seen allowing participants to truly feel fear itself. Furthermore extreme sports often require extensive knowledge and foresight.

Participants do not seem to search for tension that mimics fear, as theories of play might suggest (Elias & Dunning, 1986), in an attempt to arouse emotions normally avoided. On the contrary it would seem that fear and in particular the fear of impending danger, is desired, an essential element to the extreme sport experience. In Elias and Dunning's

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(1986) terms, extreme sports are most definitely non-mimetic. Still the thesis as outlined by Elias and Dunning does touch on one very interesting component; that is the raising of tensions and the feelings that are associated with fear or excitement are essential for mental health. Perhaps then we should not fear fear but embrace fear as part of being human and perhaps this is a better description of the relationship between fear and extreme sports.

Still, Marshall (1968) warns that whilst fear may be part of life in one way or another it may be also be that experienced participants do not feel the tension of fear or anxiety. It may be that continued exposure to 'extraordinary stress' (Marshall, 1968, p. 65) becomes a routine element of ones life. The activity becomes normal and only those who cannot understand the 'nature of another person or imagine himself being comfortable in the role' (Marshall, 1968, p. 65) consider it to be stress seeking. This, of course indicates two different perceptions. The first that participants are not searching for fear and the second that fear dies away as one gets used to the experience. Reflecting back on the conditions of fear the thought that fear subsides makes sense. After all, the experience of fear immobilizes emotional, mental and physical abilities (Marshall, 1968).

Anxiety

Research on anxiety in extreme sports may help shed some light on the relationship to fear and extreme sports. Ogilvie (1974) noted that those who participated in parachuting and race car driving were exceptionally low in anxiety. Robinson (1985) tested elite climbers for trait anxiety using the Trait Anxiety Inventory. He found a general low-anxiety for elite climbers in life and climbing. However, approximately 33% reported a degree of anxiety whilst climbing. Indicating that whilst in general life anxiety might be low, that is not much influences their fear mood state; the thought of climbing does have an effect for one third of the participants. However, the report does not indicate whether the climb being thought of was considered easy or difficult.

Breivik (1996) carried out a multi personality test on Himalayan climbers and found them to be less tense than the general population. Breivik compared his results to those of McMillan and Rachman (1988), who found that Everest climbers were fearless, and stated that the participants in his study were more courageous on a continuum spanning

fearlessness, courage and overconfidence. Where, those that modelled high sensation seeking behaviour and who demonstrated mastery, positive feelings and little fear in high-risk situations were seen as fearless. Courageous people were more apprehensive and worried but still undertook the risk and feel better as a result. Overconfident people felt little worry before a high-risk situation but had greater feelings of fear preceding further similar risk. It has also been posited that feelings of disharmony motivate an individual to reduce the level of risk (Cheron & Ritchie, 1982).

Magni et al. (1985) also noted that climbers on the K2 expedition still experienced anxiety but were skilled at coping with psychologically stressful situations. Breivik, Roth and Jorgensen (1998) carried out a battery of tests on parachute athletes which included physiological, perceived arousal and personality comparisons. They found that increases in heart rate and arousal for experienced parachutists were only slightly lower than novices, though experienced parachutists were better informed about their arousal states. Also, and perhaps contrary to the expectations of psychoanalysis, they found no evidence for inhibition.

Essentially then the indication from these studies is that whilst extreme sport participants may feel generally less anxious, they do feel heightened anxiety or fear whilst participating (Robinson, 1985). For Schultheis this experience was as if 'possessed by something between panic and euphoria, dread and ecstasy' (Schultheis, 1996, p. 7). In the words of one B.A.S.E. jumper:

You can't even begin to try to make somebody who hasn't done it understand how frightening, how exciting, how peaceful and beautiful that sensation is (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

However, participants are still able to function effectively, thus the debilitating effects of fear do not seem to take hold (Holleman, 1996; Robinson, 1985). In fact the extreme sport participant seems to be able to transform fear into a more productive state. For Slinger and Rudestam (1997) this ability indicated a high level of confidence and self-efficacy, which suggested that:

... when people judge themselves capable of handling an activity, they perform with assurance, approach threatening tasks nonanxiously, experience little in the

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way of stress, and are able to direct all effort to the task in hand (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 366).

Slanger and Rudestam (1997) noted that self-efficacy was the only distinguishing factor between those they labelled as high-risk and those they labelled as extreme. Still as we will see far from approaching the task nonanxiously and without stress participants feel extreme levels of stress or fear – they are just able to overcome it. A point well considered by the great waterfall kayaker Corran Addison (Addison, 2003).

So what have we learnt so far?

Research in psychoanalysis and symbolic interaction showed that the extreme sport experience may well be one where fear is either inhibited, not appropriately felt or somehow explained away. However, research in stress-seeking seemed to counteract this view. The indication being that participation in activities where death is the most likely outcome of a mismanaged mistake or accident involves the experience of fear, but more than that fear is actively pursued. Though critics of this view point out that this may more accurately reflect the feelings of non-participants and that experience develops an immunity to fear. However, the experiences of participants are that fear is a constant companion that requires great psychological skill to overcome (Addison, 2003; Meyer, 2000).

Research on anxiety seems to support this view indicating that whilst participants may be generally less fearful, participation does result in experiences of fear. However, contrary to the indications of the generally considered reaction to fear participants are not immobilised. Far from assuming the typical notion of flight, fight or freeze associated with the rush of adrenalin it would seem that participants are somehow able to remain calm and focused on their performance. It would also seem that for those dedicated to extreme sports the adrenaline junky is considered detrimental to their chosen activity. Perhaps succinctly expressed by a B.A.S.E. jumper:

The trouble with B.A.S.E. as it gets more well known is it starts to attract extremists, people who want that edge thing, that sort of high risk adrenalin are coming across and they're dying (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

Furthermore, to freeze in the face of fear would be to invite injury or worse as poetically described by Corran Addison as he recalled preparing, and eventually succeeding to kayak over an extreme thirty metre waterfall in France.

So there I stood in France that day, my bladder ready to explode, It's not like I really needed to go – after all I had just been to the bathroom only minutes before, but somehow nature had come up with a little extra, and for some unknown reason, there was some urgency in the matter. But there I was, the pillar of strength, feeling rather embarrassed about the fact that for the third time in as many minutes I needed to take a piss. Not exactly what you would expect to be the great deliberation in my mind at that time, what with the task of surviving a 30m waterfall at hand, but the biggest debate seemed to be whether to once again unzip my fly, thus delivering the testimonial to those about that I was paralysed with fear.

Which brings us to the bit about being paralysed. Now it is one thing to be paralysed with fear, but the unfortunate result of such a condition is the very real possibility of permanent paralysis following a botched line because the fear within was too great. It takes a very special mind to be able to put that fear aside (Addison, 2003, p. 2).

Perhaps the most appropriate way of summing up what we have learnt so far is through these words from a B.A.S.E. jumper:

All these clichés you hear, the classic saying like fear not death, it is your destiny, unless you're living on the edge you're taking up too much space-that's all ridiculous. If you go up to the edge and you've got a parachute on your back and you're getting ready to jump and you're feeling fear and somebody says to you; if you're not living on the edge you're taking up too much space – or wearing a no fear T-shirt, you just look at them and think whoever came up with those things has absolutely no bloody idea! They must have never felt fear in their life, it is such a stupid thing to say.

The most logical thing, the only natural thing, the most normal thing to be saying at a time like that is I'm scared, I hope I don't wet my pants!

Oh God! Oh please, let me do this. They're the things we say. If you want the truth, if you want a true slogan for these kinds of sports it is Oh please-don't let me die! That's a normal response. The other slogans are for when you're sitting at home with a beer trying to act cool when really you've got no idea what it really feels like (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

Yet the same B.A.S.E. jumper goes on to explain that a decision to jump is made by balancing the natural state of fear with knowledge based on personal capabilities and technical expertise. Then the magic that Schultheis (1996) alluded to begins, but we are jumping ahead of ourselves again and will return to this discussion in the next section.

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So it would seem that fear is definitely part of the experience. Participants are very clear about the intense feelings that are experienced during the preparation and pre-activity stage. In fact it would seem that participants consider those who do not feel fear a danger to themselves and others (Terwilliger, 1998). As one would expect the body prepares for the typical responses to fear, to run, fight or hide. However, the response is not one of flight, fight or freeze, it would seem that at some point an extreme sport participant recognises the fear but is able to move through the fear and as such gain the experience that is the extreme sport experience. Thus it would also seem that it is not even the presumed desire for the adrenalin rush but more the ability to keep the effects of adrenalin from destroying the moment.

It is not that extreme sport experiences become less fear inducing as one becomes more experienced but that the extreme sport participant overcomes the fear barrier; 'a barrier that most people dare not cross' (Blue Skies, 1996); to perform successfully despite the natural desire to react to fear as flight, fight or freeze. It is the ability to move through the fear that enables the extreme sport experience (Addison, 2003). Further still, the experience is not brought about outside of one's control but deliberately approached as if fear is the doorway to something more. By passing through this doorway the experience that is the extreme sport experience is gained.

A phenomenological perspective

For Heidegger (1996) fear is considered in terms of what is to be feared, the act of fearing and why it is that we are afraid. For Heidegger the fearsome object to be feared is the thing which threatens us or has the potential of causing harm. The nearness of that threat determines its intensity. But the question arises for extreme sports what is that thing which is fearsome? The immediate response may be that it is death yet the experience does not possess a definite relationship to death. Death is not a certainty, it is a potential and as we noted in chapter VI, therefore something to be accepted, but death is not certain. The outcome of such an experience is uncertain, it is only by experiencing that the outcome can be known. Still the aim of this chapter was to show that fear is a part of the extreme sport experience and that without fear the extreme sport experience would not be the same experience (Gadd & Rubenstein, 2003). As such considering what, specifically, fear in extreme sports is would be a pleasant but perhaps unimportant

diversion. For this thesis it is more important to recognise that fear is part of the extreme sport experience and to properly consider its place.

For those following the traditional approach to phenomenology anxiety or more correctly termed angst may help shed light on this quandary (Heidegger, 1996). Especially when directed to the uncertainty linked to death (May, 1983). Still May does differentiate between fear and angst in that angst is an ontological inevitability whereas fear is more intense and situational. Angst is not to be confused with anxiety about certain events but considered in terms of a direct link to death. Thus as May (1983) noted angst is not anxiety as typically defined in English but a more powerful word that may be closer to dread (May, 1983). For May the essential understanding of angst is that:

It is an experience of threat which carries both anguish and dread, indeed the most painful and basic threat which any being can suffer, for it is the threat of loss of being itself (May, 1983, p. 111).

Yet whilst this angst falls at the edge of non-being it also falls at the edge of fulfilment. Thus angst occurs:

Where some emerging potentiality or possibility faces the individual, some possibility of fulfilling his existence; but this very possibility involves the destroying of present security, which thereupon gives rise to the tendency to deny the new potentiality (May, 1983, p. 111).

Perhaps this is the experience as related to fear the approach of the potential of non-being and the potential for life-fulfilment. For Heidegger (1996) the greatest edge is the threat of physical death. By approaching this threat and moving through the accompanying fear a person moves towards authenticity (Heidegger, 1996). Yet as we have seen the outcome of an extreme sport experience is not definitely death, but a potential that death may occur. Perhaps then fear is fear of the potential for death, fear of an unknown ending where life or death may result.

Thoughts from the wisdom traditions

In Buddhism fear is not necessarily considered a troublesome emotion. In his conversations with the Dalai Lama, Goleman (2003) described three kinds of fear, virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral. A virtuous fear was exemplified by the fear of evil; an example of

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the non-virtuous might be a shrinking aversion to an internal or external stimuli. The Dalai Lama considered that fear was one of the emotions that needed to be effectively surmounted on the journey to enlightenment (Goleman, 2003).

Epstein (1998) in his book that considered the Buddhist perspective on the Western mind noted that the ability to let go of the need to control is the essence of mental health. Fear is related to the need to control uncertainties. Corran Addison (2003) a world renowned extreme white-water kayaker seems to agree with the concept of fear of the unknown but also indicates that fear of death and injury are part of the equation. 'I had overcome the fear of injury, death and more likely the unknown factor. I had proven it technically possible' (Addison, 2003, p. 2). A point also recognised by Luisa Megale (2003) a B.A.S.E. jumper in her late forties who was quoted, in an American Express advert, as using B.A.S.E. jumping to overcome her fear of letting go (Megale, 2003).

For Buddhism the only way to deal with uncertainty is to accept that uncertainty is a part of life (Rowe, 2002) and to unlearn that which has been learnt perhaps even that which has been learnt through evolutionary tendencies (Goleman, 2003). Thus a person is asked to surrender to uncertainty. In the extreme sport experience the outcome is uncertain, death may result, so might injury, but then so might other experiences. The participant balances ability, technical knowledge and knowledge of themselves and chooses. From this point the outcome is uncertain but to make that step one must also move through an intense fear perhaps based on the uncertainty of the outcome.

Further discourses on fear

For Rowe (2002) the major component of fear states whether anxiety, terror or fear itself, is also uncertainty. That is, uncertainty instigates helplessness and a feeling of being manipulated by forces that we cannot control when in contrast we want to be in control and therefore secure. This is certainly the perception of Arnould et al. (1999) who noted that white-water rafting was 'accompanied by ambivalence traceable to simultaneous experience of both wonder and fear of the unknown' (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 45). The irony is that there is little we can control (Rowe, 2002). As noted, fear is connected to internal or external realities. Rowe (2002) considered that for some the greatest reality is the internal reality and the greatest fear is an external chaos. For these

people the unknown, uncontrollable external forces provide the greatest influence. For others the greatest reality is the external reality and the greatest fear an internal state of abandonment or rejection. Being left alone with personal internal forces provides the greatest influence. Extreme sport participation, it could be argued, involve both internal and external forces.

Fear has been interpreted as positive contribution to personal growth and the development of authenticity (Arnould & Price, 1993). For example, Arnould and Price (1993) noted that participants on a white water raft trip experienced fear which helped to cement a sense of self.

Their concerns carry an undercurrent of fear of rafting-that this is something they might die doing. Such fears contribute to [a] perception of the experience as extraordinary and set the stage for a rise of intensification that extends and renews the self (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 29, [brackets mine]).

The relationship between fear and self-improvement has also been noted by others (Ewert, 1986; Robinson, 1992). Ewert (1986) wrote that historically fear was related to survival and those who were 'too fearful to face the do-or-die world outside' (Marino, 2001, p. 1) probably starved. For Ewert (1986) a successful society is one which tends to 'insulate itself from both environmental (e.g. cold, dark, hunger) and societal/psychological (e.g. confrontation, alien cultures) fear' (Ewert, 1986, p. 45). Thus, contemporary society experiences more of a constant fear better known as anxiety. Paradoxically, Ewert (1986) noted that by facing and overcoming fear a person can gain valuable self-knowledge and personal growth.

As noted, a fearful situation produces a physiological response and subject interpretations of fear that result in a person attempting to rectify the situation. For Ewert (1986) rectification includes the freeze, flight, fight response (though he also includes another response- feigning death). Whilst Ewert (1986) was writing on ethical requirements for outdoor instructors creating a level of fear that was not too intense, perhaps by voluntarily approaching intense fears an extreme sport participant gains an equivalently intense understanding. Perhaps reiterated by the following quote from the B.A.S.E. jumper quoted previously:

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The basic drives behind these kinds of sports are based on fear and life-it's these philosophies that often get misinterpreted. If you can face your fears you get a new dimension on life, new possibilities. The second is that life's sweet, explore it and treasure it (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

Furthermore, it may be that these experiences help to manage fears in other aspects of life. This is certainly the experience of one woman extreme white-water expedition kayaker and medical doctor, Jessie Stone (Stone, 2003a, 2003b).

Summary

In summary it would seem that the extreme sport experience does involve an intense fear. However, rather than let the influence of fear take control of the situation the extreme sport participant continues to undertake their chosen sport. That is extreme sport participants face these intense fears, accept that control of the future is not always possible and move through these fears to undertake an action. It would seem that by taking this action despite the intense fears a person moves towards a greater understanding of self. Furthermore, the indications are that a participant who makes that choice, who participates despite the fear experiences something magical.

Considering this point further, Stipech (2003) a mountain biker and researcher who also recognised such a magical connection in his own experiences wrote about it in terms of transcendence. That is by facing our greatest 'true' fears whether they be death, uncertainty or something else and taking action despite these fears we transcend. Or to put it another way by not answering this call to adventure, to experience such intense fears, we perhaps experience life as meaningless and fearful (Campbell, 1993). But I will be returning to these points in section 3.

Post-amble

So as this second part of our journey draws to a close it seems appropriate to briefly review some of the most important points from what we have learnt about the extreme sport experience. It would seem that there is an experience that is potentially magical. However, just as the experience of love is love but to experience love one has to accept certain risks and potential downsides; in the extreme sport experience risk is not the focus but a potential gateway. The relationship to death and fear might also be considered as a type of gateway to this magical experience called 'the extreme sport experience'. For the relationship to death we have seen how other fields of thought seem to be describing similar happenings. The more able one is to experientially come to terms with the reality of ones own death the more able one is to live ones own unique life. One can eventually say that one is truly living. With fear a similar happening takes place accompanied by the potential for an extraordinary experience perhaps even beyond that experienced in any other aspect of life. However, the relationship to fear and death are also connected in that the fear extreme sport participants experience and move through is for all intents and purposes a fear that signifies the potential of death.

Still if these arguments are to be accepted then extreme sport participants should be describing something extraordinary and something life changing. Perhaps the reader has already observed that throughout these three chapters the quotes from participants have invariably hinted at something more, something wonderful, but then again perhaps not.

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Section 3

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Think how it is to have a conversation with an embryo.
You might say, "The world outside is vast and intricate.
There are wheatfields and mountain passes,
and orchards in bloom.

At night there are millions of galaxies, and in sunlight the
beauty of friends dancing at a wedding."

You ask the embryo why he, or she, stays cooped up
in the dark.

Listen to the answer.

There is no "other world."

I only know what I've experienced.

You must be hallucinating.

(Wean Yourself by Jelaludin Rumi cited in Barks, 1995, p. 70)

∞

- Being, Becoming, Freedom and the Ineffable -

Preamble

The previous section discussed those perceptions about the extreme sport experience that are most often associated with participation. Perhaps even to the extent that the extreme sport experience is often effectively synonymous with the negative connotations of risk-taking, death or fear. And perhaps those who follow those arguments are correct some of the time, but as I have proposed the nature of the extreme sport experience might be very different. Still section 2 has been an important exploration and a lead into the next stage of our journey. If section 2 explored the pathway and key to the extreme sport experience, then my aim in this section is to explore the structure of the experience itself.

This of course presents a quandary as the assumption may be that the extreme sport experience is a moment in a linear concept of time. Yet without the experience of fear and the potential of death the extreme sport experience may not even exist. Perhaps then the experience would be better considered as a temporal journey or a stretched moment in time. Thus this section explores more than just a brief interlude but the experience as experienced and expressed as meaningful. Still the aim is to explore the essence of the extreme sport experience and as such the section is organized into four chapters.

Once again it may be that all four chapters are as interwoven as string in a rope and by attempting to unravel the mystery we just end up with the rope reduced to three lengths of string. Equally it may be that another examination of the experience would result in a different set of exploratory, phenomenological reductions. Still it is my contention that an effective understanding of the extreme sport experience requires such a split. Thus, as in the previous section the post-amble at the end of this section provides an opportunity to re-construct the themes explored in chapters VIII, IX, X and XI.

Chapter VIII considers the changes experienced by a participant and asks the question what happens to me? As I will show the connection between the extreme sport experience and a participants self-understanding has been recognized by researchers, marketers and other writers. It may be that as Gadd and Rubinstein (2003) noted the naïve understanding of the experience as just about being 'EXTREME DUDE' (Gadd & Rubinstein, 2003, p. 25) has some merit. Extreme sports are just about presenting a su-

perfidious face to the world and creating an image of deviancy. However, does this help understand the experience of participating to a level where death is a real potential? Furthermore many participants deliberately avoid the limelight keeping their participation to themselves or a few close friends (Samet, 2002). Samet (2002) also realised that extreme sport participants are not generally more talented, skilled or genetically endowed, when compared with their non-extreme counterparts.

It may be that the 'typical' perceptions about the 'extreme dude' identity are no more than a creation by non-participants or marketing hype (Gadd & Rubinstein, 2003). Never-the-less, it may also be that non-participants and 'marketeers' have focused accurately on the essence of being an extreme sport participant. Chapter IX recognizes this possibility and reviews those perceptions previously explored in terms of an external relationship to a creation of identity or the identification with a certain group. However, as we will see a more internal understanding of self has also been posited, though not without consideration to a reflection of outside influences. Thus the aim of chapter IX is to extend those immediate or typical notions and show that the extreme sports participant describes a sense of self-understanding that involves other dynamics. As Gadd and Rubinstein (2003) mused, to be in an environment where gravity is explored on its own terms is personal and rewarding and triggers a feeling of truly being alive, excited and happy.

The thesis of this chapter is inevitably complex touching on identity and self and the relationship between both and between both and the extreme sport experience. Thus from all the themes discussed in this section I found this the hardest to succinctly explore. However, for me the beauty of this theme is also in its complexity, as such the structure of this chapter focuses not only on those perceptions that might in some way shed light on the extreme sport experience but also critiques those writings previously mentioned. Partly I will be extending understandings developed from section two and partly drawing in new information to explore the relationship. Still we will return to these notions later, for now though it is important to keep in mind that something happens to a participant's sense of who they are as a direct response to participation in extreme sports.

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Chapter X considers how the experience enables, empowers and liberates a participant and as such follows a theme of freedom. The argument being that freedom extends the typical notions of 'freedom-from' or 'freedom-to' and adds a third dimension, perhaps best described as freedom as letting go. Such a freedom is perhaps about transcending abilities and limitations. As in the previous chapters the structure introduces relevant theoretical perceptions and discusses them against the perceptions of those who participate. Chapter XI explores the ineffable theme.

Throughout these chapters I will also be turning to theoretical and philosophical concepts that seem to be describing similar notions. As in Section 2, each chapter follows its own path as a function of the topic being explored and the work previously undertaken. Writings from the Wisdom traditions as well as Western fields of thought have been explored in an attempt to ensure a rounded and appropriately deep perspective on the issues highlighted. For, as Heidegger (cited in von Eckartsberg & Valle, 1981) reportedly confirmed, phenomenology might learn a great deal from those who espouse Eastern philosophical understandings. Heidegger was even supposed to have accepted that Zen philosophy was indicative of what he had been attempting to explore in all his writings (Barrett, 1998; Hanna, 1993b).



VIII

Being Transformed

How much more there is now to living! Instead of our drab slogging forth and back to the fishing boats, there's a reason to life! We can lift ourselves out of ignorance, we can find ourselves as creatures of excellence and intelligence and skill. We can be free! We can learn to fly!

(Jonathon Livingston Seagull after his first break through and brush with death, Bach, 1970, p. 27)

How we interact with our sense of self and our world has been considered in numerous ways from those positing pro-dominant social attributes to those considering deviant attributes to those positing spiritual conviction. An in-depth approach to such a concept could entail a thesis on its own. Yet the subject is important in our exploration of the extreme sport experience. As Welser (1997) found, participants invariably relate their chosen extreme sport activity to their lived life. That is participation in such sports seems to be associated with general lifestyle choices (Lambton, 2000). Thus there seems to be something about the experience that is long lasting and, according to those who participate, transformational. As Jonathon Seagull in the quote above realised once he extended the boundary of what was supposed to be normal, life instantly changed for the better.

Almost without exception those writing about their own experiences in extreme sports or participating as co-researchers in this study revealed that an essential element of the experience is the transformation that it triggers. Still the experience as transformation

was perhaps the most difficult to define. Firstly due to the definition of the ‘what’ of the transformation as the reader will come to appreciate. Secondly, some activities (e.g. surfing) are activities that are often entered into at an early age and gradually improved on. In these activities the personal changes experienced are not easily associated with the extreme experience. Still it is important to appreciate that only one interview participant, a 51 year old surfer, was unsure whether the personal changes he experienced resulted from surfing or just correlated with surfing. Others who surf distinctly related a sense of transformation to the extreme surfing experience. Yet the question remains is the experience an experience that creates transformation or is the experience an experience of transformation? In part this chapter is about exploring the particular relationship, though in part chapter IX also explores this notion.

As one would expect this relationship has been recognized by those applying research and theory to the extreme sport experience, though often the effect of the change is hard to differentiate from the cause of the change. Still that is the focus of this chapter. Equally, as with the perceptions on ‘No Fear’ the potential for a relationship between extreme sport participation and a person’s attributes has been recognized by those in marketing. There are even companies that specialize in helping organizations, not otherwise related to extreme sports, exploit and even create specific company images that reflect a perception of glamour and other attributes portrayed by undertaking an extreme sport (Pollay, 2001; Welser, 1997).

The question is of course what do these portrayals have in common with the actual extreme sport experience? And in part this chapter also aims to explore this question. Perhaps there is some truth in these claims, perhaps the extreme sport experience is about creating certain ‘idealised’ identity attributes and the marketing experts have just hit upon the essence of the experience. As I will show there are certainly researchers and theorists that posit extreme sports as an activity that instigates the formation of specific identity characteristics. However, I will argue that the essence of this relationship is more complex. Certainly as the heading of this chapter indicates I will posit a relationship between the extreme sport experience and ideas of the ‘what’ of personal transformation, but perhaps not quite as indicated by first or vulgar impressions.

As indicated by the title of this chapter the focus is on the lived experience of being transformed. As such the relationship between the extreme sport experience and a participant's lived experience is the issue under exploration. That is this chapter is about the transformation to new attributes as opposed to what has instigated the changes. The reader will have to wait until chapter IX for an exploration into that phenomenon. Of course this distinction is perhaps artificial as the trigger that changes perhaps defines the resultant change.

The structure of this chapter begins by considering those who have recognized a relationship to certain attributes and the extreme sport experience and applied theory or research to explore these attributes. In other words the chapter begins by examining what experts have considered the attributes of someone participating in extreme sports 'should' be. This critical assessment of previous work is set against the words and viewpoints of those who participate, in an attempt to explore the experienced experience. From here reflections from participants are mapped out and understandings drawn from the literature in order to explore the transformation further.

Epitomizing the ideal western male

One of the most common theories posited about the extreme sport experience and the attributes of personal identity is that participation demonstrates ideal modern Western male characteristics. Or in other words the implicit message is if you undertake an extreme sport you will automatically transform to an ideal version of Western male adulthood, presumably as a butterfly does from a caterpillar.

Such a relationship has been acknowledged and exploited by those marketing extreme sport products, products on the periphery of extreme sports and also products with no distinct extreme sport connection (Bane, 1996). Those that specialize in an aspect of extreme sports (specialist clothing, equipment and so on) would, it could be argued, be expected to relate their product in some way to the extreme sport experience. The group on the periphery, for example four wheel drive motor vehicles, might also be expected to associate their product to certain characteristics associated with extreme sports. However, a third group which would seem to have no discernable relationship at all to extreme sports has projected an image through a perception of attributes associated with

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the extreme sport experience. Most often these are either tobacco or alcohol products (Pollay, 2001).

Pollay (2001) specifically noted the campaign headed by RJ Reynolds-Macdonald in their bid to enhance sales of the Canadian cigarette brand, Export 'A'. According to Pollay (2001) as brand loyalty in cigarettes is very high the marketing aim is to attract starters, or in other words the younger smoker. RJ Reynolds-Macdonald has targeted such a group by sponsoring extreme sport events under the logo 'Go your own way' (Pollay, 2001, p. 71). Thus close up images of solo extreme sport participants wearing mirrored sunglasses doing glamorous and exciting activities have been developed to associate the product with 'positive' masculine attributes (Pollay, 2001). For Pollay this campaign presents young men in particular with an image that they (the young men) should be portraying.

The association is often one of acceptable rebellion, peer position, masculinity, adventurousness and natural leadership where women are relegated to being attracted by 'their youthful virility, independence and spirit of adventure' (Pollay, 2001, p. 72). Thus, it would seem, the tobacco industry has projected an image of idealized western masculinity on to the extreme sport experience in order to exploit a particular market. Marketing campaigns such as these work, therefore, as a reflection of ideal adulthood portrayed to adolescents, within the extreme sport image.

The industry has long known that the most pressing psychological need of adolescents is their need for independence, autonomy, self reliance – as they seek an adult identity independent of the family cocoon. The brands most successful with teenagers are those that offer adult imagery rich with connotations of independence, freedom from authority, and self reliance (Pollay, 2001, p. 72).

The Export 'A' campaign was designed to exploit an identity or desired view of self that is independent by focusing on individual sports and not team sports. The image of a nicotine addicted smoker is overshadowed by the desire to create a perceived identity linked to positive lifestyles, social acceptability and the young man as a healthy 'independent and enviably adult, athletic, and at home in the nature' (Pollay, 2001, p. 73). That is the advertising campaign would seem to have picked up on an image desired by young people and projected it on to the extreme sport experience in order to instil a pre-

determined sense of self onto the lives of young male targets. Thus the relationship to extreme sports may well be tenuous and not actually based on the experience as experienced. Still if this theory is accepted then participants should report increases in masculine attributes of independence, freedom from authority, and self reliance.

The image of the extreme sport experience as one that projects peculiarly Western adult male attributes has also been noted by theorists and researchers alike (Groves, 1987; Wheaton, 2003). Greenberg (1977) attributed the transformation to the concept of the Western male blue collar worker demonstrating characteristics that portray an image of individualisation, competition and being successful. Greenberg (1977) considered that whilst white collar workers could live such an image at work, blue collar workers had to find this image through extreme sports. Thus adult men portray lived experiences that are predetermined and socially acceptable Western concepts of male adulthood through extreme sports.

Whilst it may be that the balance of participation is still in favour of male participation this is more likely a response to a perception on expectations than extreme sports themselves. That is the thought pattern that associates extreme sports with masculine attributes may not be considering the total picture. After all it would seem that women have been just as much pioneers in extreme sports as men. For example Olsen (2001) traced women high level mountaineers to 1799. Similarly, Soden (2003) found records of the first woman parachutist, who safely landed after a three thousand foot jump in the Tivoli gardens of Paris, also to 1799. Perhaps, then the assumption that extreme sports portray certain predetermined attributes required for the modern Western adult male is more of a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is the more society pushes an image of ideal male characteristics the more likely it is that those wishing to portray the so called idealised Western adult male image will approach extreme sports. The result being that those who consider that they do not fit such an image (e.g. females) will avoid participating.

It may be that the continual push to portray extreme sports as a legitimate way of portraying individualised, competitive and independent attributes without enforcing the level of experience or knowledge required is also in part responsible for the image of extreme sports as a deadly activity. Even further it may also be that this continual emphasis on such an ideal image influences the incidence of accidents and deaths. That is

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the knowledge and experience required for participation is over shadowed by the portrayed image and inexperienced participants are skipping essential steps and dieing (Bachmann & Moldofsky, 1999). As Bachman and Moldofsky (1999) concluded the ingredients of inexperience and youth might be the ideal mix for fatal accidents. Breashers (1999), a veteran Everest mountaineer, seemed to support this argument when he noted that even as a well respected, experienced climber in his mid-twenties he was too young and inexperienced to climb Everest. Perhaps then the projection of extreme sports as the epitome of certain modern Western male attributes is just that, a projection. Still, if such modern Western male oriented theories are to be accepted then extreme sport participants should be noting that participation has just enabled certain masculine attributes.

Midol and Broyer (1995) seem to have recognised this point when they considered the case of female participation. That is extreme sports perhaps are more gender neutral than first assumptions appreciate. Or in other terms such activities actually provide a potential to merge the traditional male/female norms:

Young men have been able to access something traditionally defined as feminine, that is, to value that which comes out of the state of being while keeping a capacity for action, traditionally coded as masculine. The opposite is also true for young women. Youths of both sexes have sought a harmonious fusion with nature and the ability to act as well as to enter the state. They have crossed over the well-marked dividing lines of the so-called sexual differences and challenged the views of the patriarchal society around them (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 208).

Midol and Broyer (1995) continued to explore how attitudes, body shape and body movements challenge the norms associated with men and women. A notion supported by Yakutchik (1995) who observed:

There is no such thing as a glass ceiling in the mountains; male-dominated though mountaineering may be, I found no resistance to my quick rise to the top other than an occasional ice shelf (Yakutchik, 1995, p. 1).

Research on personality seems to confirm this proposal as the personality structures of both male and female participants are identical leading Ogilvie (1974) to talk about a 'human tendency' (Ogilvie, 1974, p. 93). For Ogilvie the connection to extreme sports and maleness is unfounded. Thus what evidence there is seems to suggest that those that

assume that participation in extreme sports transforms attributes into socially determined worthwhile modern Western masculine characteristics may not actually reflect the experienced experience.

The neotribe or sub-culture attributes

A second familiar perception about participation in extreme sports and lived experience is the assumption of specific sub-cultural norms. That is the extreme sport participant portrays and possesses certain characteristics associated with being a part of a sub-culture. Neotribe or sub-cultural identification has been considered in terms of role identity (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998) social identity (Hunter, Reid, Stokell, & Platow, 2000; E. R. Smith & Mackie, 2000) and self-categorisation (Turner, 1987). Often such identity characteristics are explicitly stated by the culture in question though sometimes they are implicitly determined. Self-categorisation suggests that individuals choose different social group identities for different contexts. That is it may be that specific cultural norms are chosen as a central function of living or as a particular aspect of living. Which ever identification is assumed the norms and values of those groups are readily accepted.

As with the transformation to idealised modern Western male, the relationship is often considered in terms of youth sub-cultures and the domain of the 'Generation Y' identity (American Sports Data, 2002). In this instance participation is about being identified as a person who enjoys taking risks. However, as we have seen in chapter V, risk-taking is not the focus of participation in extreme sports. Though of course it should be recognised that for some participation may involve such a focus and according to research by psychologist Bruce Ogilvie this accounts for about 6% of participants (Terwilliger, 1998).

However, others have considered extreme sports as epitomising dominant, white 'Generation X' sports (Davis, 2000; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). The essence in this instance seems to be the portrayal of positive peer related attributes and participation is for fun and the development of social 'uniqueness' (Davis, 2000). Often the assumption in this case is that participants will grow out of the need to participate as they become adults (Davis, 2000).

Essentially the statistics show an enormous increase in extreme sport participation and a decrease in traditional sport participation (American Sports Data, 2001) and some theorists and researchers associate this with identification to certain sub-culture or neotribe norms. However, such an identification may not be purely about being a certain type of Western male adult but more linked to being a specific type of person assuming specific sub-group defined characteristics.

Thus it would seem both researchers and theorists have posited a focus on pre-determined identity formation. Yet on careful examination of the assumptions it would seem that at best these assumptions do not portray the experience as experienced by participants. Participants do not seem to associate with an identity label as succinctly outlined by a B.A.S.E. jumper in this study who noted that not only does the identity extreme sport participant not fit but also that even being identified as a B.A.S.E. jumper is perhaps no more than convenient:

I just think it's a convenient label we have to put on things but its different if you look at a community of B.A.S.E. jumpers then it will be different for all of them what they get out of it and I don't classify it as an extreme sport I think it's a beautiful sport (ESP 8).

And following my enquiry as to whether the participant would prefer a different title:

I don't care what anyone else labels it it only matters what it means to me ... I do care in that now I want people to understand that it's a valid worthwhile thing to do and that umm ... you're cheating yourself when you label it as crazy as everyone does they just totally say oh that's crazy and that's just an indication that they're constantly judging and prejudicing and cheating themselves of a whole world of other possibilities and a whole other way of thinking about things so I don't umm ... I would like to see it understood better but a label is ... is meaningless (ESP 8).

Opposing attributes

Roberts (1994) presented the idea that participation in activities such as extreme sports reveals an identity opposed to the attributes encouraged by countries such as America. Fairlie (1989) observed that American society has become so risk averse that an essential element of human spirit has been lost and individual responsibility for personal

actions diminished. Shoham et al. (2000) extended this notion to include all developed nations. Thus participation is said to portray attributes of unpredictability and opposition to safe, predictable and boring societal norms (Roberts, 1994). Holyfield (1999) also noted a distinctly Western limitation that removes ‘the confrontation between self and uncertainty [and] the need to act, reflect, and appreciate our actions’ (Holyfield, 1999, p. 25 [brackets mine]). The assumption being that in modern Western society the extreme sport experience is about living a life that appreciates those neglected assumptions.

Still such an assumption implies that the ‘what’ of the transformation takes its form from an association with the perceived characteristics within a like-minded ‘deviant’ group. That is the extreme sport experience is characterised by a deviant social attitude and set of attributes. However, as I touched on when discussing the attainment of Western male attributes, other writers have considered the experience as a means to express certain mainstream messages such as healthy competition, personal drive and individual excellence (Greenberg, 1977).

Thus, which ever camp one belongs to the perception is still based on a peculiarly Western point of view. That somehow the extreme sport experience enables a life that is characterised by attributes that are either for mainstream society and generally based on individualisation, competition, independence and achievement or against mainstream society and based on the desire to portray an image of excitement, bohemianism and unpredictability or pro a certain sub-group and based on attaining the specific sub-group attributes.

Yet despite these Western oriented approaches that seem to suggest certain attributes inherent only in modern Western society other theorists would seem to counter such arguments. That is observations on extreme sports indicate a countercultural experience where the often assumed Western experience is just as much an Eastern experience (Gangully, Macintyre, & Randolph, 2001; Lambton, 2000; Yu, 2002). After all, the values of Confucianism and Hinduism could also be seen as determinants of specific male attributes or rule-laden and confining.

Furthermore to consider the experience as purely *modern* and *Western* would tend to negate the experiences of those peoples who travelled into the high mountains for the

sake of bygone religions. For example, human sacrifices have been found on mountains in the Andes as high as 20,700 feet (Breashears, 1999). Schultheis (1996) reported that American Indian medicine men climbed mountains for vision quests pre-history. In one example he reported that an eagle trap was found by the first westerners to climb a particular high summit. Buddhist and Taoist monks have often been reported to search out the high mountains in the Himalayas for a certain power (Schultheis, 1996). Even when the Chinese attempted to destroy high-level carvings on the Tibetan mountainside during the revolution they had to use highly technical abseiling devices to reach areas that holy men had reached with apparent ease. In Japan the Shugendo monks have been climbing the highest mountains in search of spiritual enlightenment for more than 1500 years. Furthermore those climbing to the roof of the world most likely do so only with the guidance of skilled and determined Sherpa guides.

Surfing in Hawaii was banned by strict Calvinists as far back as 1838 (Soden, 2003). Surfing was first seen by Western eyes as far back as 1778 by Captain James Cook though the indications are that surfing was part of Hawaiian life as far back as 400 A. D. (Soden, 2003). Furthermore the Pentecost Islanders, ancient Hopi's and Aztecs were consistently jumping off structures of perhaps one hundred feet plus before Westerners 'discovered' their lands. More recently, shoeless African mystics have been reported on the summit of Mount Kenya in areas supposedly only reachable by Western Mountaineers equipped with ice axes and crampons (Schultheis, 1996). Such an attitude would also tend to negate examples such as the first Japanese all women team that reached the summit of Everest in 1976 (Olsen, 2001).

Even from a purely *modern* Western mindset jumps off high structures have been recorded as far back as the early 1800's (Soden, 2003). The first parachute jump was witnessed in 1797, though Leonardo da Vinci is credited as the first designer of parachutes in the mid fifteenth century and the Chinese the first to use a parachute device hundreds of years B. C. (Soden, 2003). Mountain climbing has been traced to the B. C. era (Feher, Meyers, & Skelly, 1988) and for the first deliberate attempt to summit to the 1790's by scientists attempting to discover the world. The first mountaineering guide book on the Alps was published in 1860. Buddhist and Hindu siddhus and shamans have been spotted as high up as 22,500 feet in the Himalayas, at one time a mystic was even found asleep covered with snow in the middle of a blizzard, shoeless and wearing

only thin trousers, shirt and three button jacket (Schultheis, 1996). Essentially then it could be argued that such activities are neither Western nor modern. Perhaps then the route to understanding the experience lies elsewhere. Perhaps also as Shoham et al. (2000) noted extreme sports really do transcend cultural boundaries and the transformation is not about demonstrating peculiarly modern Western attributes.

Ogilvie (1974) established that participants were very selective about which social characteristics they adhered to and that following any set of social customs or attributes would be contrary to the trend for non-conformity. Bratton et al. (1979) also found little evidence of participation in mountaineering being as a function of identity formation. Lambton (2000) considered that the whole point of extreme sports was to be free from the social restrictions of teams, competitions and losers. For Lambton (2000) participation was about allowing personal expression akin to an art form, but as seems to be typical I am jumping ahead of myself and will return to this argument in later chapters.

In summary then despite the contention held by many in marketing, theory and research the relationship between the experienced transformations may be more complex (or perhaps more simple) than originally perceived. As I have noted the characteristics that are supposed to be assumed depend on the theoretical standpoint one wishes to take which may result in a little confusion. For example, those who assume a pro-mainstream society standpoint show that extreme sport participation enables pro-mainstream characteristics where as those supporting a deviant standpoint proffer an opposing view. Those that posit pro-specific sub-cultural standpoints will also add to the confusion depending on the characteristics that a theory wishes a sub-culture to portray.

One further complication to the previous viewpoints on the transformations experienced by participants is that participants most often report that the transformations were unexpected. In fact reports indicated that not only were the outcomes of transformations not expected but the fact that a transformation would occur was unexpected. For example, in a study on the white-water rafting experience by Arnould et al. (1999) participants reported enduring and positive life changes as a result of participation. However, these life changes were unplanned as the initial hedonistic intentions were transcended and the experience transformed their relationship to themselves and the world.

Bratton et al. (1979) recognised a similar understanding in mountaineering and Celsi et al. (1993) recognised similar perceptions in skydiving; that is the initial motivations for participation did not relate to the experienced experience. Perhaps then post-initial experiences also transform motivations as a participant becomes more committed. Perhaps herein lies the understandings explored by past research, it may well be that a naïve non-participant projects an image on the extreme sport experience that entails the living of certain characteristics that are presumed to be experienced by extreme sport participants. Still, even if motivations evolve reports from participants indicate that somehow life is different as a result of participation. That is, '*Life*' is transformed, not just view points on participation; but perhaps it is just that participants unexpectedly develop enhanced self-concepts.

Self constructs

The interaction between lived identity and the social environment has often been studied (Baumeister, 1987). For example, Heatherton and Vohs (2000) found that individuals who perceived a social threat to 'self' experienced diminished positive affect, decreased self-esteem and increased hostility. These conditions were noted for individuals with either pre-experimental high or low self-esteem. Nevertheless, as I have already claimed extreme sport participants invariably report that the social perception about what they do does not influence their decisions.

Celsi et al. (1993) established that parachute sports instigate positive changes in activity related self-efficacy and mastery. Brannigan and McDougall (1983) observed that 'nearly every response indicated that a change in a positive direction had taken place' (Brannigan & McDougall, 1983, p. 43). However, as Brannigan and McDougall (1983) pointed out these changes may only be in terms of a participants sporting identity and may not merge into other parts of life. Yet as I will argue those participating seem clear about the transformation as a life transformation not just linked to the activity.

Researchers have posited the extreme sport experience as medium for the enhancement of certain generalised self-concepts, in particular self-esteem and self-efficacy. Iso-Ahola and Graefe (1988) considered self-esteem. Specifically they considered the case

of rock-climbers and found that neither general perceived competence nor self-esteem was influenced by the number of climbs. However, what they did find was that certain specific climbs could positively affect self-esteem if accompanied by perceived competence. That is, both the novice and experienced climber can obtain positive self-esteem from quality climbs. However, the converse is also true, negative experiences can reduce self-esteem. The indication is that it does not require an extreme activity to enhance self-esteem. As such, there would seem to be no direct relationship to self-esteem and participation at an extreme level.

Yet participants seem to report that the transformations experienced enhance certain self-concepts defined as self-confidence or self-esteem when social life gets tougher (Roberts, 1994). For example Terwilliger (1998) quoted Cathie Cush a deep diver who considered that just one extreme sport experience was beneficial:

It was also certainly a tremendous sense of accomplishment, and a boost to self-esteem. I could have a client screaming at me, and I would think, 'Buddy, I've been places that would make you cry.' And even to this day, I feel I carry that with me (Cush cited in Terwilliger, 1998, p. 1E).

Thus the indication is that a change takes place that positively influences attitudes about self in social situations.

General self-efficacy was the only defining concept from all research papers reviewed that demonstrated differences between the extreme sport and high-risk groups (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997). General self-efficacy has been defined as 'the strength of an individual's perceived self-confidence or belief that he or she can successfully complete a task through the expression of ability' (Brody, Hatfield, & Spalding, 1988, p. 32). Essentially, Slanger and Rudestam's (1997) study indicated that an individual's self-belief enabled participation in extreme sports. Further still the indication was that the level of self-belief resulted in a participant approaching the activity without interference from fear or anxiety but just the ability to focus on the task at hand.

Percepts of self-efficacy operate partially independently of the skills involved and optimal functioning requires both the skills and self-beliefs of efficacy. The kinds of outcomes people anticipate depend to a great extent on their judgment of how well they will perform and they tend to undertake and perform with as-

urance in activities they judge themselves capable of handling. They set themselves challenges that hold their interest and they approach threatening tasks non-anxiously. Instead of being disturbed by thoughts concerning their own capabilities, they can direct all effort to the task at hand (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 356).

Thus the indication from their findings is that participants should feel no fear yet as we have seen in chapter VII participants generally report extreme fear (Todhunter, 2000). Furthermore it is not uncommon for participants to also experience thoughts and feelings of inadequacy whilst participating. For example, an extreme kayaker noted:

Well, there's a lot of feelings rapped up in that one feeling. Coming right back to this, people always say you must have an amazing positive mental attitude to know you are going to make it, but although I think I'm gonna make it, I never actually feel like I'm gonna make it (ESP 4).

And later after explaining what he considered to be 'nagging doubts:'

I sometimes wish I had a more positive mental attitude because it wouldn't make any difference to whether I ran the fall or I didn't but I'd like to feel positive on the way down (ESP 4).

Similar perceptions of self-doubt were experienced by most of those interviewed. Equally Slanger and Rudestam's (1997) study did not present an explicit indication as to whether the self-efficacy trends were learned or innate, the indication was that self-efficacy may have been learned. Slanger and Rudestam (1997) specifically noted the importance of some answers to the qualitative questions, that is, a number of the high-risk group were willing to participate in extreme sports (defined as extreme-risk).

However, in actual fact, some of the high risk group expressed a *willingness* to take the risk to which the subjects exposed themselves. For them it was *opportunity* which precluded involvement in the extreme risk activities (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 371).

Still, the indication was that self-efficacy was directly linked to participation and did not necessarily flow into other aspects of life.

Shoham et al. (2000) found an insignificant relationship between efficacy and frequency of participation and a negative relationship between efficacy and the probability of indi-

viduals participating in another similarly categorised sport. Interestingly, as with identity, they postulated a ceiling effect to explain the insignificant relationship between efficacy and frequency of participation. That is it may be that once a certain level of skill has been achieved the activity ‘fails to contribute sufficiently to encourage further participation’ (Shoham et al., 2000, p. 246). Further, as Ewert and Hollenhurst (1989) concluded self-efficacy does not fully explain involvement that contains risk and real danger; ‘risk and danger serve as more than a setting for expressing mastery and self-sufficiency’ (Ewert & Hollenhurst, 1989, p. 127). As Todhunter (2000) opined such perceptions on psychological improvement are inadequate observations on sane, careful individuals who participate to a level where death is a potential outcome.

In summary then, a multitude of researchers and theorists have recognized the potential for personal transformation and the development of an enhanced self, yet it would seem that research is at best contradictory and at worst on the wrong track. Still as I have argued extreme sport participants directly related their experience to personal transformations. Thus it would seem something does happen to a participant’s understanding of self, perhaps succinctly expressed by the following quote from a professional extreme kayaker; ‘kayaking has changed my life, it has taught me who I am. Going to rivers changes who you are in a positive way’ (Luden cited in J. Heath, 2002, p. 1).

Arnould et al. (1999) unearthed a similar perception from participants in their study. Essentially participants expressed the view that the ‘wild, continuous and alive’ (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 44) river was the vital element in helping people get back in touch with priorities. Whilst I shall return to the natural world relationship in a later chapter, for now it is important to point out that the activity somehow facilitated each participant’s reconnection with their own priorities. That is, both quotes suggest that the changes seem to be of a different type than the socio-cultural level and perhaps more about personal identity.

Essentially, Arnould et al. (1999) reported greater levels of optimism and an enhanced ‘faith in the victory of hope over fear’ (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 37). Participants reported physical, emotional and social changes and the reconnection to personal priorities. Positive changes were documented in relation to their sense of agency, intentionality and

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sense of who they were. Some transformations were dramatic whereby, for example, a professor of psychology reportedly left her work to become a river guide. Participants also reported feelings of calm and connectedness to self, others and the environment and an awareness of something greater than themselves (Arnould et al., 1999).

Participant reports often indicated that these transformations were permanent, instant and unexpected. McCairen (1998) was transformed after one whitewater expedition. Bane (1996) changed after one windsurfing session. Schultheis (1984) changed as a result of one mountaineering event. Jacobs (1998) experienced a transformation after one extreme kayaking experience. The instantaneous nature of the transformation is expressed by one participant (a committed professional medical doctor with years of training in the profession) who was persuaded to take part in a single event as an adult of 28 years despite initially thinking that undertaking such activities was crazy and tantamount to a death warrant.

I really felt like I was out of my depth I was seriously challenged ... and a couple of times I did think you know maybe all those people were right I am going to die but I didn't ... and at the end of the day I really ... it was really it was quite a ... uuuhhh ... what do you say epiphany at the end ... I had an epiphany at the end of the day because I realized that that you know what I mean I did not die but I really enjoyed it the whole environment that I never imagined existed was opened to me (ESP 7).

And later:

My life has been radically altered by that choice by that day you know like I said that day I can trace my change of path to that day because that day ... I might not have gone (ESP 7).

And later:

You never know when the bloody thing is going to happen to you you don't know ... I just went to work and this guy said hey do you want to do this on the weekend and I didn't know that my life was about to be turned totally on its head on the weekend (ESP 7).

Another participant put it this way:

I've been meditating for years and running for years so change was coming slowly you could see progress but I had explosive change in a short period of time so it was a catalyst for explosive growth (ESP 8).

And a later clarification:

... growth in everyway growth in physical spiritual intellectual emotional because you know I'm a firm believer in looking after yourself physically and taking care of your physical self because it impacts on your spiritual self and your emotional self and your ability to do ... so to me these are all expressions of self development of our ability to do of our willingness to try new things challenge ourselves beyond what we ever thought we were capable of (ESP 8).

Thus, this may be less about an external pull to identify with a certain group or an activity enhancing externally or internally constructed perceptions about self. Perhaps the extreme sport experience relates to self or identity in another way, a way unique to that particular experience. Still I shall return to this argument in chapter IX, for now I would like to return to Bane (1996) who wrote that his experience of windsurfing in storm conditions triggered a change in his life. Essentially as outlined in chapter VI, on death, he was clear that he felt better, as a result of this particular windsurfing session, than he had felt for a long time prior to it. This feeling triggered a quest to re-explore the experience through other extreme sports and that his quest would:

... change everything it touches, take me places I've only imagined. It will allow me to reach out and touch ... something. Something desirable, something mythical. But as is true of all fairy tales, it will extract a price (Bane, 1996, p. 5).

As we have already seen some extreme sport activities take years to plan and activate and then perhaps an equal length of time to wrap up afterwards and certainly this results in life changes with regards to the time and energy taken to undertake such a task. Certainly also reports confirm that the build up to the activity instigates emotional changes as expressed in chapter VII, on fear. However, the unplanned journey or the aspect of the extreme sport experience not necessarily expected is more than that; it is an experience that transforms a participant's life in many other ways (Celsi et al., 1993). That is beyond the focus required to plan and complete the immediate experience is a transformation that transforms life.

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Participants seem clear that the extreme sport experience is a transformational experience that spills over to life in general. For example, whilst for some extreme sport activities (e.g. B.A.S.E.) the actual 'active' element of the experience may only last a few seconds the experience seems to be more lasting. This is not just in terms of thinking about the experience or building up towards the experience which in itself is reported to be enduring (Celsi et al., 1993) but also in how life is transformed in other ways. Greenberg (1977) quoted a participant who considered that the transformation was a positive transformation and one that would also lead to becoming a better citizen.

Breashears (1999) remembered his first Everest climb and how he appreciated even before the climb that it would change his life. A surfing participant in this study experienced the transformation into his personal life, after exploring a description of the activity itself through a particularly large wave. Essentially the wave was so big that other surfers dropped off the back and did not surf it.

That's what I mean when I say 'that buzz' I mean I might die in bed. I'll probably try and remember those things and I'll just go 'yes', I'm ready to go, see you later, because nothing can upset you when you think of those things (ESP 2).

He continued by declaring that although surfing this particular wave happened fifteen years prior to our interview the inner transformation that came as a result of surfing this wave still remained. Even years later these inner changes coupled with recollections of being able to surf such a wave provided the strength to get through a divorce or what he described as the 'worst moments of my whole life' (ESP 2).

Like I said I think it just makes you a better person makes you more content makes you realize more what life is all about and the pleasures in life (ESP 2).

Furthermore, in my diary I have recorded that his face lit up as he spoke about that wave and he seemed to become lighter in appearance almost as if he had only surfed the wave the day before not fifteen years ago. It was only after these perceptions that I asked when the wave was surfed and was informed that it was fifteen years prior to our interview. For Arnould et al. (1999) this sense of keeping the feeling and its use in other areas of life is agency.

Thus the experience seems to be all encompassing and the transformation often instant and invariably unexpected. Bane (1996) wrote:

Extreme sports change people who participate in them. While a bungee jumper might feel a certain rush of immortality, the other extreme sports offer something far less tangible-and far more rewarding (Bane, 1996, p. 9).

Still, as I mentioned we shall return to explore how the transformation is triggered in chapter IX, for now I would like to return to the transformation as experienced.

However, before moving forward to descriptions of the ‘what’ of the transformations as reported by participants it is perhaps appropriate to sum up my argument to date. I have argued that the extreme sport experience is more than a momentary action by including the transformation as an element of the experience itself. As I trust has been made clear the experience does include pre and post aspects to the ‘active’ element of the experience (and I shall return to those points later) but the transformation is more constant and lasting. Furthermore, these transformations would also seem to be instant and unexpected, leading to the realisation that the experience may not be linked to a socio-cultural or psychological pre-determined ideal.

The transformation as experienced

For Ogilvie (1974) the lived experience is relatively simple, that is, a number of characteristics typically set the extreme sport participant apart from the non-participant. It would seem that participants are ‘extremely autonomous people who march to their own beat’ (Ogilvie, 1974, p. 93), are self-assertive, forthright, loners and emotionally stable. It would seem that participants have few friends but really trust those that are considered friends and certainly participants do report that they have very few real friends but that they would trust these friends with their lives, and quite frankly often do.

Ogilvie (1974) also demonstrated that participants tend to be non-conformist, against routine and with exceptionally low levels of anxiety. Feher, Meyers and Skelly (1998) established that climbers had low levels of anxiety, tension and the desire to achieve and less reliance on others to map out their destiny, they also found higher than normal lev-

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els of sociability and vigour. Koerner (1997) also reported that participants were emotionally very stable, low in neuroticism and low in general anxiety.

Participants seem to possess a strong sense of reality, very high levels of emotional stability, adaptability, resourcefulness and accept the consequences of their own actions (Koerner, 1997). According to Ogilvie (1974) as a group such participants have very strong positive personality structures. Though neither Ogilvie (1974) nor Koerner (1997) indicated whether participants had these characteristics before participating or whether participation provided a medium to develop such characteristics. Still such an exploration seems to be a perfect place to initiate our discussion on the 'what' of the transformation if only because the transformations reported have all been perceived as positive. In fact the only interview participant who did not associate the extreme sport experience to positive transformations was the fifty one year old surfer who clearly considered that his life had changed for the better but was not able to determine that the extreme sort experience was 'responsible'.

I think it goes both ways I think basically as I said to you I live my life with a very positive confident attitude I always believe everything will work out no matter what it is whatever challenges I meet so I take my attitude into surfing as I do into my business as I do into everything else I do surfing just reinforces that as does you know when I competed in tournaments I've played lots of sports all different sports and the same attitude you know with different levels of success but the same attitude applied right through it's a belief in myself (ESP 12).

Essentially then the transformations reported have all been in a positive direction and broadly in two ways; a positive evaluation of self and a change in ones personal philosophy on life and reality.

A positive evaluation of self

As this section will argue participants describe an experience that radically alters meaningfulness, manageability and comprehensibility and enhances their perceived inter and intra-personal capabilities and confidence. That is, part of the transformation is linked to positive changes in social interactions and their ability to 'do'. For example, Terwilliger's (1998) report on Cush above revealed what she determined was an increase in self-esteem which enabled a more positive approach to handling difficult social-

interactions. This change was therefore about being more comfortable about her self and as such being more able and capable in doing and interacting.

Participants also describe increased confidence (Olsen, 2001). Then of course sports in general have been associated with increased confidence (Davis, 2000). Still, increased confidence is reported but as Hill (cited in Olsen, 2001) was explained confidence should not be confused with egotism. For Hill such a self-centered approach would be counterproductive and perhaps even deadly. Hill also determined that every climb provides an opportunity for personal growth and to learn how her body can move more efficiently. And that whilst there would seem to be no practical purpose climbing ‘provides a very meaningful experience’ (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 66).

An extreme skier participant put it this way:

I think that skiing has given me incredible confidence in myself because I was not a confident person when I was in high school and it's been invaluable for that like I really really like who I am as a person and I think it's because I like who I am as a skier and yet I've grown to have so much confidence in myself as a person (ESP 3).

Thus it could be argued that part of the transformation might be a positive happening in a participant's ability to perform and interact. However, as I have documented earlier this change may not necessarily be in the form of the psychologically defined constructs of self-esteem, self-efficacy or self-mastery. For a B.A.S.E. jumper in this study the experience is one of being ‘self-possessed’ (ESP 8). Still, I intend to explore this more fully in chapter IX by considering the ‘what’ of the trigger to change.

Koerner (1997) describes freedom from anxiety and the tendency for excessive self-consciousness and concern for appearances such as waistlines and weight. Koerner (1997) related this freedom to the fact that hurtling towards the potential of death may alter a participant's priorities and certainly this point has been noted by others (Welser, 1997). Roberts (1994) observed that:

Many climbers reported using that empowering dynamic to overcome some of their own inner obstacles, among these, fear – of heights, of loss of control, of death – is the most commonly cited (Roberts, 1994, p. 4).

In particular, Roberts (1994) cited a 42 year old climber who considered that climbing helped with overcoming his fear of death. Participants in this study also considered that fears outside of the extreme sport experience become insignificant, not that such fears were not felt, just that the power of fear is reduced and re-categorised.

Other fears are generally insignificant ... the ones that plague most people everyday ... like speaking up, being themselves ... looking foolish, people won't like me all of those fears just seem insignificant and ridiculous (ESP 8).

Another participant (ESP 7) felt that this freedom from the chains of fear had ramifications that were part of a general struggle to be oneself and find oneself. That is the extreme sport experience enabled a re-framing of the fear that initially prevented him from finding his own potential, capacity and meaningfulness. He described the transformation as one whereby instead of fear making the choice for him and restricting his freedoms reframing the relationship to fear meant:

You have choice and you have freedom to have choice so its linked to all that stuff and that can be like you know physical emotional or ... mental (ESP 7).

In the interview with ESP 8 she expressed the feeling that she had transcended the fear of death, but we shall return to this thought later. Essentially, it would seem that whilst fear is not lost, it has lost its power to constrain action. That is, fear is still felt but its power to restrain has been lost. Participants report more positive perceptions on self and experience life as having endless achievable possibilities.

Perhaps the most succinct example of another element of this sub-theme was displayed on the American Express advert I noted earlier in the thesis. The advert depicts Luisa Megale, the forty something year old B.A.S.E. jumper, plummeting towards earth and quotes her as saying: 'Now I'm conquering the fear of letting go' (Megale, 2003). For me this advert succinctly epitomizes this theme in that participants feel that they no longer *have* to control or hang on to preconceived perceptions.

It is important to state that I do not intend to mean that participants live a life out-of-control or not-in-control as this would clearly be absurd and not in tune with my argu-

ments in chapter V, on risk. Rather, participants appreciate that some things are not within their control and that this is accepted when appropriate. This theme also allows for accepting the unexpected and not judging or holding strict opinions. Perhaps for the moment we can continue to call this a positive appreciation of self which leads to enhanced interaction and doing capabilities.

A changed view on life and living

Participants reported that the extreme sport experience transformed their view on life and perceptions about the perceptions of other. Sometimes this was considered in terms of becoming less judgmental about life and others. At other times this was considered in terms of becoming more open or aware. For example, Guy Cotter (cited in Spence, 2001) the extreme mountaineer noted that mountaineering had taught him about life, death and spirituality. He appreciated that what he once judged in terms of right and wrong he now welcomed as different perspectives. He continued by recounting that life became more polarized as mountaineering had removed the normal insulation from reality that is experienced in everyday life and instilled a more measured perception about the meaning of life and death. Being so close to death enabled Cotter to appreciate even the simple things in life more acutely, from a different perspective and with fresh and more appreciative eyes (Spence, 2001).

A B.A.S.E. jumper participating in this study related that before B.A.S.E. he was engrossed in his professional life as a successful emergency medical professional, on a defined career path that one could argue would be the ideal of many.

I can only compare myself now with what I used to be when I was not an adventurer and was a more closed arrogant limited ... umm ... unbalanced person and you know the worst part was I didn't even know I was unbalanced (ESP 7).

Later he likened the changes to getting off the treadmill of a pre-determined, socially desirable pathway, where even patients were treated in a more aware and human way.

Pretty well every aspect I handle differently now I mean it just seems like ... for example medicine you know when I practice medicine now I'm a lot more aware of ... umm ... of a patient in a ... I mean I am a lot more aware of them you know in a ... not just a umm bed four's got a stroke or what ever you know I'm

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much more aware that Mrs so and so is a lady who ... you know who's got a lot of other things and just happens to have a stroke right now (ESP 7).

Another B.A.S.E. jumper put it this way:

I think it might have been that part of it that enormous overcoming is probably what leads me to my own feelings about B.A.S.E. jumping and because you know if you look at something in such absolute terms as being ... what can only be horrific what a horrific thing to do why would you ever want to do that and then you do it and it's just the total opposite of what you thought and that's one of those mind breaking activities ... mind breaking moments when you think well I believed that totally and absolutely and unequivocally no one could have convinced me otherwise and here I am at the opposite end so what does that say about everything I think ... that it's an illusion or you know that it is just one way of looking at it not the right way so all of a sudden I don't ... you don't judge ... you try not to ... come back to that situation where you try not to judge things anymore (ESP 8).

Other participants described similar perceptions whereby life was deemed to have 'no limits' except those personally created. That is the extreme sport experience facilitates a freedom to live a life liberated from externally and internally imposed limitations. ESP 8 succinctly expressed this view by noting, later in the interview, that the extreme sport experience taught her that her possibilities were endless and that the absolutes she had previously enforced for herself were not absolutes but self-inflicted constraints to realising her potential. ESP 8 recognised this as liberation from holistic gravity or in other terms from all those aspects to life that pulled her down. Still, as is perhaps obvious from Megale's (2003) quote earlier there seems to be a link to this concept and the re-framing of the power of fear.

Jacobs (1998) a double PhD (health psychology and education) and kayak explorer underwent a similar change as a result of one unplanned extreme kayak event. Essentially whilst on a river expedition he found himself in the midst of a flash flood and a river that turned from grade five to grade six (plus). In Jacobs's words:

I had changed. I found myself to be more forgiving and more patient; reflection replaced reaction more often than before. My hard logic more readily made room for intuitive considerations, something I had seldom given much notice I no longer thought of truth as something definite and unyielding but as something woven into both sides of an issue (Jacobs, 1998, p. 17).

Later Jacobs reflected on whether the intense fear he had to face as a result of the experience had triggered off a deep concentration and subsequently released some profound abilities, he termed primal awareness. But I am ahead of myself again and will return to his fascinating story later.

Another typical response is that participation at such an extreme level teaches humility (Ahluwalia, 2003; Breashears, 1999; Muir, 2003b; Spence, 2001). For Gonzales (2003) humility is an essential element for successful participation in extreme environments, a humility that Gonzales related to the Zen philosophy of being open in attitude. Bane (1996) reflected on his initial intentions and described his experiences as:

I came to risk sports looking for Indiana Jones. Or, at least, someone like him. Some part and parcel of our mythology, cowboy or samurai, riding the edge jaggies for all their worth. Instead, I found a group of puzzled people with a tiger by the tail, interested not so much in mythology as in touching and holding an experience as ephemeral as spider silk, ghostly as morning mist over Montana river ...

There is, I think now, even more to the edge than the ephemeral feeling. It has its own time its own space. The edge has its own gravity, like a great dark star on the edge of the known universe. We approach the star only with the greatest of caution, because its gravity has the power to rip away our preconceptions, our sure knowledge of the way things are, to let us see the way things might be. The dark star has the power to give us back our feelings, sometimes in exchange for our lives.

I have never met anyone who has stood, however precariously, on the flanks of a great mountain, or who has been, however, briefly, to the dark world at the edge of the abyss, and not come back changed. Changed how? More humble, perhaps, more aware of the fragility of life (Bane, 1996, p. 232).

An interview participant B.A.S.E. jumper put it this way:

Well for me its about ... umm ... accepting that you're mortal and that you're very vulnerable and that you could you know you're like a piece of dust really or a leaf in the wind ...(ESP 8).

However rather than the reality of her own mortality defeating her she noted that being like a 'leaf in the wind' empowered her to become self-possessed and to make a difference.

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... when you accept that then the power of one day becomes more than just you know some sort of ... umm ... paying lip service to an idea ... does that make sense ... so self possessed in that you have accepted that while you're like a leaf in the wind you can also make a difference and you can also explore parts of yourself that you had no concept of even being there (ESP 8).

This quote of course also has other important points worth exploring further, for example the effect of accepting death, connotations of releasing control or surrendering during the 'active' aspect of the event and exploring parts of oneself that one was not even aware existed, and we shall do so, but later.

Bane (1996) wrote that by the half way point of his quest the extreme sport experience had changed him spirituality 'I am struck with how far I've gone, both literally, in miles, and spiritually in my head' (Bane, 1996, p. 107). He continued by observing that the experiences somehow triggered a re-birth; a perception that we have already examined in chapter VI whilst exploring the relationship to death. Where some traumatic experiences trigger 'a profound spiritual transformation' (M. Daniels, 2002a, p. 25).

Laird Hamilton (B. Williams, Hamilton, & Kachmer, 2001), an internationally renowned pioneer of extreme surfing, considered that he developed an appreciation of life and living through his experiences of the natural world as something greater than humanity; a realisation that changed him emotionally, physically, cognitively and spiritually. Jacobs (1998) extended his earlier perceptions on his transformation to an appreciation of profound and spiritual changes that even awakened hitherto unappreciated skills as a horse whisperer. Reaching the highest point on Earth also seems to be a prolific instigator of so called spiritual transformation (Ahluwalia, 2003; Benegas, 2003; Chiow, 2003; Weare, 2003).

Feelings of deep psychological well being and meaningfulness have also been reported as a connection with a core self (Olsen, 2001). As one participant realised whilst reflecting on the connection to knowledge about their own core self:

Finding my own truth my own being finding my own core and ... uhh ... honouring that because that's ... that's the essence of finding your own meaningfulness (ESP7).

And a later clarification:

Yeah well it's my concept of spirituality [it] is very much linked to my concept of kind of emotional and mental health so that yeah its integral to all that (ESP 7).

In summary, it would seem the extreme sport experience enables a participant to break through personal barriers and develop an understanding of their own resourcefulness and emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual capabilities and wellbeing. Furthermore such a break through also seems to trigger a change in personal philosophy or view on life and reality. Whilst Celsi et al. (1993) considered the event to be the 'manifestation of a person's "true" self, unconstrained temporarily by convention or by self-awareness' (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 11) it is important to appreciate that participants reported enduring changes, perhaps an enduring realization of a 'true' self?

Still these changes are most succinctly defined by those who started extreme sport participation later in life. Perhaps most clearly expressed by a participant in this study reflecting on his first experience:

That adventure was the thing that got me out of the mindset that I was in you know I was in a very constricted medical mind set where my life was very closed quite an irony really ... um ... it was my world was limited to the four walls of the hospital and although I thought I knew a lot I didn't and ... ahhh ... it was adventure that made me realise that made me realise the arrogance of my mistake and so because it was a very physical thing that really ... I needed a physical thing to really get through the I guess the psychological barriers that I had erected and then after that it became a ... uhh ... it was just natural to pursue the thing that broke through and it's led to many other things you know like the physical side has often ... is always accompanied by a mental and emotional challenge and that you know I can keep confronting these various things I grow both physically but also mentally and emotionally to able to deal with it I find as long as I am being challenged and able to learn and experience and grow then this is an area you know an area of worthwhile pursuit but you know that's time-limited by you know it's just I am not going to be well I don't know if I am going to be able to do this kind of stuff when I am 64 you know that's all there is to it (ESP 7).

Thus an experience is experienced that involves unexpected connotations, life changes at this point, often in an instant, where participants learn that fear does not have to control, that life is for living and a humility that allows for something greater than

humanity. This transcendence of a previous understanding of being and experiencing life seems to also transform their understanding and capabilities in other aspects of life, including a more sensitive comprehension of their relationship with others. Broadly it would seem that a previous self is transcended and life takes on a new and deeper meaningfulness. Thus it would seem a participant undergoes a type of re-birth that enables intra-personal transformations, inter-personal transformations and even extra-personal changes. For the last words on this transformation perhaps these words by Schultheis (1996) will suffice:

Hooking people into another kind of time-and-space frame than everyday life in the industrial world provides-a deeper, grander way of looking at things. It's hard to take the petty realities, the gossip, the fads neuroses, squabbles, half so seriously when you have been soaring with hawks, diving with the dolphins, running with the elk (Schultheis, 1996, foreword).

A phenomenological perspective

Those undertaking phenomenological explorations in human experience seem to have spent little time exploring concepts such as personal transformations. Yet, as Hanna (1993a; 1993b) argued the phenomenological method itself, as outlined by Husserl and Heidegger, might provide insights into such a transformation. It would seem that the practice of the phenomenological reduction enriched Husserl's psychic life and triggered a personal transformation that he reportedly compared to a 'religious conversion' (Husserl cited in Hanna, 1993b, p. 41). Whilst differences in the description of the phenomenological reduction of both philosophers have been widely documented Heidegger also seemed to have experienced transformational changes (Hanna, 1993b; Zimmerman, 1986). Though neither Zimmerman nor Hanna specifically detailed whether such changes involved re-birth, humility, non-judgement and so on, they did recognized these changes as profound and transcendent as a result of deliberately courting mystical experiences or entering the 'transpersonal realms' (Hanna, 1993b, p. 41). For Zimmerman (1986) the transformation is akin to an experience of personal enlightenment.

An implication of Hanna's (1993b) thesis is that the transformation resulting from the extreme sport experience might be similar to the phenomenological reduction and therefore akin to reaching transpersonal or mystical realms. After all, even though a description of the changed self was not described by either Husserl or Heidegger the end

result was a profound change in their understanding of consciousness (cited in the case of Husserl) and Being (cited in the case of Heidegger) and in their existential understandings (Hanna, 1993a). To return 'to the things themselves' also requires a way of knowing beyond thinking often described as 'seeing' (Husserl, 1977); a way of knowing prior to thought (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). Perhaps then, if such an exploration truly reflects the extreme sport experience, the extreme sport experience might also reflect an element of 'beyond thought'.

Still it is important to appreciate that the mystical experience as defined here is far from that typically espoused. Mystical experiences are nothing at all to do with the occult, mystery, astrology or any other similarly described assumption. Broadly, mysticism is powerful and transformative and occurs spontaneously or as has been noted deliberately. An essential characteristic of mystical experiences is the gaining of 'intuitive knowledge or insight which reaches beyond habitual modes of perception and thought' (Hanna, 1993b, p. 42). Mystical experiences also entail perceptions of unity, an ineffability that is often seemingly described in contradictory terms and an experience beyond subject-object distinction.

Often the experience includes, bliss, transcendence, freedom (or liberation), self-knowledge, consciousness, being, ultimate reality and an element of truth. Such an experience alters perceptions on what was considered to be 'reality' and as such results in deep personal transformations (Hanna, 1993b). Still, the aim of this discussion was to highlight that as Hanna (1993b) pointed out the rigorous and sustained process required for phenomenological application, as experienced by Husserl and Heidegger, resulted in a profound transformation. In Husserl's (1977) case the process triggered an opening 'to a possible self-experience that can be perfected, and perhaps enriched, without limit' (Husserl, 1977, p. 29). Perhaps, if indeed it is the transcendent experience perceived as mystical or transpersonal that has transformed, then the characteristics of the extreme sport experience should reflect such descriptions. Still, such a discussion is for a later chapter for now it is suffice to point out the similarities.

One writer who has considered the phenomenology of what could be seen as a similar experience is John Rowan (2001). In particular Rowan describes the phenomenology of the centaur stage as outlined by Wilber (1993; 2000; 2001). Essentially the centaur stage

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is considered as a higher stage of human development that can be likened to self-actualisation as outlined by Maslow (1967; 1971). Rowan (2001) described characteristics such as humility, resistance to enculturation, acceptance of responsibility amongst others. For Rowan the breakthrough to this stage came when he faced his own potential death.

Perspectives from the wisdom traditions

Philosophical writings from Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist traditions all note the potential of deep transformations that manifest themselves as core personality or life world changes (Hanna, 1993b; Mohanty, 1972; Spiegelberg, 1982; Zaner, 1970; Zimmerman, 1986). Schulthies (1996) focussed on the similarities between what he experienced and certain descriptions presented by Zen and other traditions. He found that in many traditions transcendence and transformations are deliberately sought by approaching potentially death inducing activities; the aim being to collapse the walls of ignorance, pride and ego. Transformations it would seem stem from self-awareness (Henry, 1999) and presumably the greater level of self-awareness one has the greater the transformation experienced.

Interestingly, Gyatso (2001) an internationally renowned teacher of Buddhism, described the gaining of humility and non-judgement of others in his chapter on enhancing and cherishing love. He also observed that the spiritual path is obtained by accepting the reality of death. Though, of course, the advice for obtaining such states does not include extreme sports. Cook (1985) observed that Buddhism teaches that each of us has the ability to reach that something MORE within us.

Campbell (1973) observed that an outcome of being released as described in Buddhism is to be moved from within and not from the sense of duty imposed by an external authority, namely society. However, to reach such a condition a person must become fully, profoundly self-aware; to detach oneself from the external world and focus on the internal world (Campbell, 1993). Adventure it would seem, unknown, dangerous and to the extreme, initiates such a focus (Campbell, 1993). By accepting the call to adventure and isolating oneself from the world a person eventually returns positively transformed.

A rite, or moment of spiritual passage, which when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of the threshold is at hand (Campbell, 1993, p. 51).

Schultheis (1996) found many similar descriptions in the shamanic rituals. A connection also recognised by Jacobs (1998) who focused on the shamanic descriptions whilst exploring his own experiences. For Jacobs the essence of the transformation was a connection to a primal awareness that he likened to the transformations experienced after a shamanic vision quest. That is to say the ancient process forcing extraordinary inner journeys akin to death and rebirth transforms the journey maker (Halifax, 1979; Linn & Linn, 1997).

One final interesting description can be found in Hans Urs von Balthasar's phenomenological description of Christian holiness (Harrison, 1999). Here we find a description of living a profoundly meaningful life with humility (or truth) is essentially a life of personal integration. To reach such a state a person must experience the death and rebirth of original personality which opens up the possibility of the infinite and cements the relationship between spirit and nature (Harrison, 1999). Still we shall have more to say about this in the next chapter.

Further discourses

The transformational benefits of extraordinary experiences in the natural world have often been noted (Arnould et al., 1999; Hartig, Mang, & Evans, 1991; Hull & Michael, 1994; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kuhn, 2001). Kuhn (2001) found that sailing in general and ocean sailing in particular triggered personal transformations in the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual realms. For Arnould et al. (1999) such experiences have been likened to magic where participants are involved in intense emotional experiences that often result in life changes. Often these changes are recalled, as if in the present, years later and the lessons learnt used in other aspects of life. In these instances nature is seen as immeasurably powerful and the human as intensely vulnerable (Arnould et al., 1999). For Arnould et al. (1999) both magic and science are concerned with the relationship between human beings and the natural world and by understanding the place of magic we can better understand ourselves. Further by better understanding ourselves

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and our place in the world we are able to maintain a level of humbleness (Arnould & Price, 1993).

Arnould et al. (1999) determined that magic manipulates the relationship between life and death and draws from the natural world and the transcendent forces that might be evoked. That is magic in this sense ‘activates a link between people and natural forces’ (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 38) that transforms both existentially and socially. However, to connect to this force a participant must be actively and physically involved, not passively as encouraged by modern commercial concerns (Arnould et al., 1999). The link to existential risk and encouragement to ‘transcend rationalistic logic’ (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 60) inherent in modern life in turn seems to facilitate a personal transformation. Arnould et al. (1999) encourage *communitas* for such activities to be fully effective. Still if their thesis has merit then active experiences should be ‘straightforwardly rhetorical, based on metaphor and simile’ (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 37). Indeed this notion is described further in chapter XI, on the ineffable.

A similar relationship to personal transformation and positive development has been noted by Robinson (1992). Robinson considered that personal growth, meaningful social interactions and social change can be triggered through sports that entail danger and outcome uncertainty. The examples he used were mountaineering, rock-climbing and whitewater kayaking. For Robinson (1992) the intense emotional and cognitive arousal experienced in such activities can be the stimulus for an expanded awareness of self and others and the skills and sensitivity to become more interpersonally effective (Robinson, 1992). ‘Interactions are proposed as being of a more intense, authentic, and meaningful nature’ (Robinson, 1992, p. 97) and ‘an individual engaged in authentic communication perceives him or herself as portraying his or her genuine self’ (Robinson, 1992, p. 97). Thus it would seem that a person becomes more authentic and able to engage more authentically with others. Perhaps akin to living with humility in the realm of Being or living the intrinsicness of Being values (B values) as described by Maslow (1971). For Robinson (1992) though this connection to authenticity is necessarily spontaneous and naturally occurring and involves mutually supportive and positive like-minded peers (e.g. a mountaineering expedition), though as we shall see in a later chapter many participants in this study note the experience as one of being alone.

Robinson (1992) also realised that participation allowed for an expanded awareness of self that also facilitated and expanded awareness of others and a more truthful, honest and open interaction. Robinson (1992) considered that events which have an intuitive and reflective stage can provide substance to the events of positive affect, positive self-expression and self appraisal and centrality to life style and trigger enduring personal growth towards a desired identity. Thus the experience changes attitudes and values and the quality of the experience becomes the point of judgment for all aspects of life. Essentially people are said to use risk as to develop an enhanced understanding of the self as unique and social; 'people learn to become more than they previously were' (Robinson, 1992, p. 100). Still the focus seems to be about moving towards a desired self, whereas as I have argued the experience is often one of unexpected changes.

Arnould and Price (1993) posited the extraordinary experience as a means to such transformations. That is, certain unusual events undertaken in an interpersonal environment trigger deep personal changes. Extraordinary experiences differ from flow in that they are triggered by unusual events and differ from peak experiences and peak performance as they neither require extra effort nor an independent relational model. In fact interpersonal interaction is seen to be essential for such a transformation. Still as already documented and as I shall argue later the extreme sport experience is partially an experience of being alone.

Lipscombe (1999) observed that such activities provided opportunities for self-actualization, self-realization and self-determination. Certainly, many of the reported experiences would fit with such understandings. Participants, it could be argued, do report experiences that indicate enhanced self-determination and that the transformation might be about a self-structure that they are striving to maintain beyond that determined by external forces (Ford, 1991). Yet it could also be argued that such theories would be stretched to explore changes in spirituality, deep meaningfulness and humility. For example the developmental model of self-actualisation proposed by Brennan and Piechowski (1991) does not even mention such terms for all five levels. Though they do associate some experiences with personal transformations and accept that those reaching level four and five have inner autonomy. Glendinning (1994), however, argued that nature based people live as humble participants in the cycles of life. Perhaps then by truly being connected to the natural cycles we live humility.

Kim (2001) accepted that one of the main ways to understand transformational changes is through the notion of transcendence and a person's relationship to the ultimate concerns of death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. Either one chooses to defend oneself against such existential dilemmas or one chooses to face and transcend them. If the latter becomes the journey and the four ultimate concerns are faced then the result is a feeling of deep spiritual meaningfulness (Frankl, 1966; 1984) and possibilities of choice (Kim, 2001). Certain intense experiences enable transcendent experiences that expand a person's existential 'scope' so that 'one can see, feel, and understand more' (Kim, 2001, p. 61). That is a person breaks free from a conditioned prison, becomes a different person and sees life anew. According to Metzner (1998) transformations are triggered by inner searches that alter one's world view. Whilst Metzner documents many transformational types it would seem that the progressive, open, lasting, abrupt transformations obtained by grace succinctly mirror those reported here.

Emmons (1999) in his book 'The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns,' devoted a chapter to such changes and the development of personal growth and meaningfulness. He noted that severe suffering and stress most likely in the form of trauma, tragedy or death drastically changes life. Maslow (1977) considered that such events could force changes in a person's perceptions about life and as a consequence everything that was done, providing a person was initially emotionally stable. Further continued inducements of what Maslow termed peak experiences enhance a person's sense of well-being (Maslow, 1996). Interestingly, after Maslow's heart attack in 1968 he reportedly admitted that his whole life was positively transformed as he had now experienced a death of sorts. This experience removed the fear and triggered his desire to live every moment of everyday. He coined this new aspect to his experience the plateau experience (Krippner, 1972). Wong (1998; 2000) echoed such determinations and persuasively argued that by facing our own fear of death and death itself we become fully self-aware, life takes on a new, profound and positive meaning.

Thus the perception that certain life crises positively change life in every way has become an important aspect of the study of personal growth. Emmons (1999) concluded that as the intensity of the stressful or traumatic event increased, so the triggered growth increased and suggested that:

It begins with changes in higher-order schemas regarding the nature of reality, followed by a positive evaluation of the self and the world in terms of meaningfulness, manageability, and comprehensibility. Central to the formulation is the intriguing notion that positive changes occur in the person as a result of the struggle with trauma and perhaps only because of the trauma (Emmons, 1999, p. 143).

Emmons (1999) indicated that for the resulting factors to be positive the participants would need to expect and have a measure of control over the event, have the appropriate personal characteristics (e.g. resiliency, optimism, hardiness) and have appropriate social and community support. Still, whilst it could be argued that the potential transformations of life crises and the extreme sport experience is similar, it is perhaps inaccurate to suggest that the extreme sport experience as just a trauma inducing event. Perhaps also as psychologists have been studying the unplanned traumatic event certain pre-determined essentials (e.g. the importance of social and community support) may not be a consideration in the extreme sport experience.

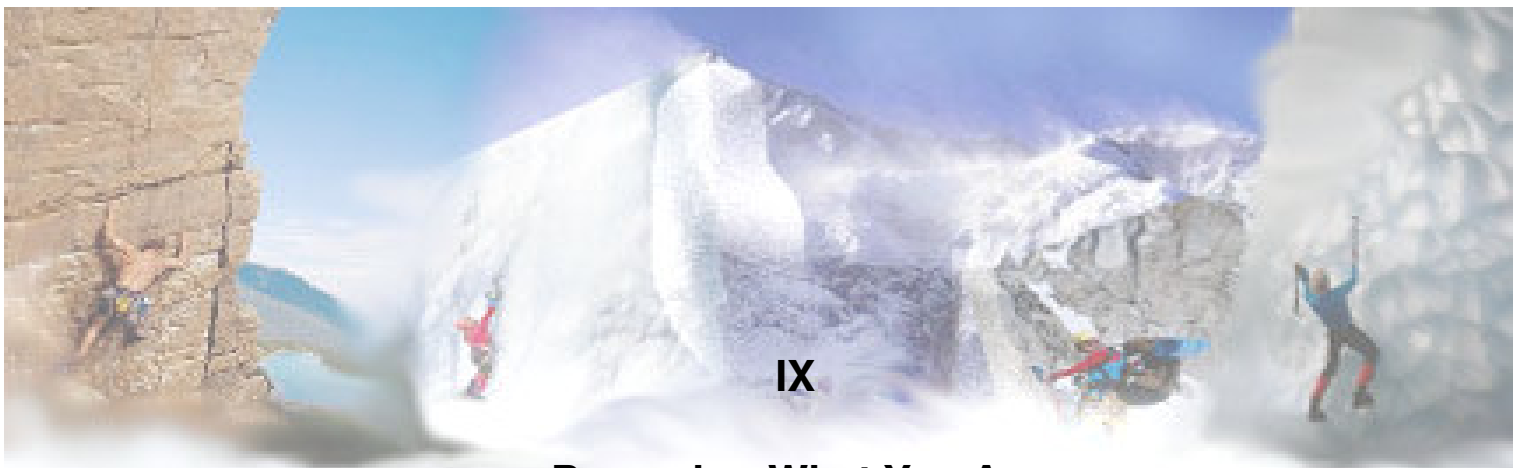
Those studying the transpersonal elements of humanness have also portrayed personal transformations. Miller and C'de Baca (2001) described a multitude of 'quantum' changes or epiphanies and found that the personal characteristics resulting from such changes include humility, spirituality, personal growth, self-esteem to name but a few. Braud (2001) recognised that certain experiences induce 'other forms of consciousness, and a MORE that is both beyond and within us' (Braud, 2001, p. 1). Such a MORE is rarely realised but is manifest as a better part of a person that is more deeply in touch with the world outside (James, 1971) and a person's own potential (Oatley & Djikic, 2002). For James such experiences were considered to be 'white crows;' rare but real (W. Braud, 2001).

Rhea White (1993; 1988) categorised a number of 'exceptional human experiences' that trigger profound transformations through the transcendence of a previous self. Grof (1979; 1985; 1988) also observed experiences that elicit deep transformation of personal understandings and the realisation of such a MORE. Ruumet (1997) describes similar concepts at level V of a VII level spiral to reaching divine union. Still, as stated, the aim of this chapter is only to detail the nature of the change and as such we will inevitably return to the transpersonal understandings later.

Summary

As I indicated in the preamble to this section the intention of each of these chapters is to explore an element of the extreme sport experience, this chapter has been exploring the transformative element of the experience. That is participant's understanding or knowledge about themselves changes as a direct result of participating in their chosen extreme sport. Furthermore this transformation is most often instantly noted as part of their first experience (though perhaps strengthened through continued experiences). Life changes at this point, often in an instant, where participants report positive capabilities, humility, meaningfulness and spirituality that allows for something greater than humanity. This transcendence of a previous self transforms participants and their understanding and capabilities in other personal and interpersonal aspects of life. That is, the experience results in positive, personal and life enriching transformations whereby participants become more aware and capable in the personal, inter-personal and extra-personal spheres.

As an exploration into the experience as described I have argued that similar observations have been written about in phenomenological practice, wisdom philosophy and other fields. Such writings have extended the possibilities and indicated that certain transformations would most probably be accompanied by enhanced relationships to death and the fear of death. Concepts we have already considered. However, once again we must accept that this cannot be the phenomenological experience just a point along the journey. For the indications are also that such a transformation would be accompanied by changes in a participant's relationship to self; perhaps the answer to our quest resides here?



IX

Becoming What You Are

There is no reaching the Self.
If self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not here and now but that it is yet to be obtained. What is got afresh will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say that the Self is not reached. You are the Self: you are already That.

(Ramana Maharshi cited in Wilber, 1993, p. 289)

In the previous chapter I explored the transformations that have taken place as a result of participating in extreme sports. The argument, if accepted, showed that the transformation experienced by participants reached a far deeper place within each person than had been previously assumed. The changes seemed to be of a more profound nature that encompass physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual domains. Participants report changes in their understanding of self and identity. The implication being that the changes happen on a personal level and not as a response to socio-cultural norms and in part this chapter explores this notion a little further.

According to Lipscombe (1999) participation is often a central feature in the lives of participants. Indeed it would seem to be so important that even with family disapproval they continue (Brannigan & McDougall, 1983). Extreme athletes clearly consider that not to partake of their chosen activity would elicit a certain inner death presumably more intense than an outer death (Rosenblatt, 1999). Ganguly et al. (2001) quoted Heo a 47 year old Korean climber as stating 'it is better to die in the Mountains than be hit by a car' (Ganguly et al., 2001, p. 74).

This chapter will show that participants report accepting a call to the personal challenge of exploring their inner selves. The closeness and potential imminent-potentiality-of-death and the effect of the environment seem to facilitate an instant window into each participant's inner being. The argument being that reports of a deeper understanding of their own resourcefulness and spiritual, emotional, cognitive and physical knowledge and capabilities stems from a connection to a deeper self. Though, of course, this does not necessarily dispute those that relate the extreme sport experience to a trigger to construct new selves (Shoham et al., 2000) as perhaps both are valid. Perhaps by becoming more aware of ones inner being one is more able to construct a social image. Still to make such an argument it is important to appreciate that other theories touching on similar profound changes also exist. As such this chapter will also review those that have in some way been associated with the extreme sport experience.

The constructed renewal

Celsi et al. (1993) considered that participation was an attempt to actively transform ineffective selves and to create new preconceived intrapersonal as well as interpersonal versions of self. Such interpersonal changes are both within the activity group and within general society (Brannigan & McDougall, 1983).

High-risk activities provide a well-defined context for personal change, as well as a clear-cut means to organize a new, and sometimes central identity (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 11).

Celsi et al. (1993) also posited that a dramatic model is the foundation of the Western mindset and therefore the foundation of identity formation.

... in Western society the dramatic framework is a fundamental cultural lens through which individuals frame their perceptions, seek their self-identities, and engage in vicarious or actual behaviours (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 11).

Thus participants as social actors influenced by mass media, social specialisation and technology undertake extreme sports. A new more ideal identity is created that allows for a renewal of a current identity considered by the participant as a non-ideal circum-

stantially determined identity. The assumption is that a potential participant actively intended to reshape their identity and looked for a medium to do so.

Shoham et al. (2000) also considered that risky sports in general provided an arena for personal identity development. That is a process of self extension enables a process of self-renewal. Extreme sports being a medium for instance image re-design (R. P. Heath, 1997). This may be in terms of a person undertaking an extreme sport in order to present a different image of themselves (Heath, 1997) or a specific attempt to develop an extreme sport identity based on an ideal image of self (Shoham et al., 2000).

For Brannigan and Mcdougall (1983) such an identity is often a major element of personal identity. However, Shoham et al. (2000) cautioned that this effect may have a ceiling whereby 'once individuals attain given levels of expertise and satisfy their need for identity construction, the sport may lose its luster' (Shoham et al., 2000, p. 245). That is, such an explanation may be appropriate in those activities where a mismanaged mistake or accident would most likely result in injury, but may not be appropriate for activities that might potentially result in death. In part this argument is supported by research carried out by Ewert and Hollenhurst (1989) who found a type of ceiling effect when considering identity formation as a socio-cultural or externally driven process. However, their response was that beyond this stage a participant becomes committed to the activity and participates at a high level of expertise.

Ewert and Hollenhurst (1989) presented and tested a simple model that proposed a three stage engagement based on individual involvement. The introduction stage included those who had minimal activity experience (e.g. the commercial raft trip). The development stage was for those who participated but most likely with a leader or instructor. The third stage, commitment, was for those who retained locus of control 'entirely with the individual and fellow adventurers' (Ewert & Hollenhurst, 1989, p. 128) and participated without the need for leaders. Often participation at this level is solo or part of small peer groups. Whilst the extreme sport experience was not considered as an element per se it could conceivably be part of the commitment group. As predicted the more committed the stage the less the social effect and the more likely participation was for personal concerns.

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Still, Ewert and Hollenurst (1989) considered that satisfaction is only obtained when skill and experience match activity difficulty. Thus indicating that as one gets more experienced and skilful the automatic process is to develop into the next stage of difficulty. Nonetheless, whilst this may be true to a degree, crossing the line to participate at a level where death is the potential outcome may not be an automatic linear process. This is evidenced not only in the fact that relative novices are taken to the top of Everest but also recognised by participants who observed that others who did not venture to the extreme were often more skilled. Furthermore, Schrader and Wann (1999) found no significant relationship between locus of control and participation in their multi-modal study that included activities such as B.A.S.E. jumping.

For Brannigan and McDougall (1983) the aim may be to identify with certain idealised sub-cultural norms as distinct from characteristics portrayed by society in general. Thus participants readily search out and immerse themselves in a specific language, dress and technical terminology in order to feel part of a chosen group and take on the identity defined by being a member of such a group. Such a group could be classed as maintaining semi-deviant norms that are partially tolerated by wider society.

Specifically, Brannigan and McDougall (1983) noted that for some hang-gliders identification with a similar group was important. Individuals deliberately entered the sub-culture in order to be part of an elite group. Interestingly Bratton et al. (1979) did not find a similar importance on identification with subgroup norms. However, as Brannigan and McDougall (1983) have pointed out:

The meanings we associate with our “selves” is guided by our imagination of how we believe we are experienced by others. By imagining the attitudes of others towards us we can begin to see the self as a social object (Brannigan & McDougall, 1983, p. 46).

Through reflection we are able to ensure that the ‘self’ is not a structure but a process. Hence identity formation can be as much about a function of perceived stereotypes on the group we identify with as well as a function of our own reflections. For some this identification process has become so rewarding that they proceed to develop careers within or related to the activity (Brannigan & McDougall, 1983).

Feelings of camaraderie that might be associated with belonging to a group are consistent with findings in white-water rafting (Holyfield, 1999). That is, Holyfield (1999) established that involvement with others enhanced the experience of participating. However, many activities involve others, so why do individuals need to take part in extreme sports to benefit from camaraderie? Perhaps the 'special bond' noted by Shoham et al. (2000) indicated changes in meaningful experiences with others, often called *communitas* or 'the sense of community that transcends typical social norms and conventions' (Shoham et al., 2000, p. 12), that can only be obtained by participating in such activities considered as high-risk. Yet, even this argument does not require participation at a level where death is a real possibility. Furthermore, as Rosenblatt (1999) observed just because a lot of people undertake an extreme sport it does not mean that a trend or culture is being formed it may just be that a lot of people are participating in the activities.

The rite of passage

One theory that has been associated with the extreme sport experience is the transformation from youth to adult and the notion of a rite of passage (Shoham et al., 2000). For some this is understood as an active process designed to gain an identity as adult or the next stage of personal maturity. That is, in bygone times a specific ceremony or rite determined the readiness of an individual to pass into adulthood. As I have documented elsewhere an example is the ceremonial process of jumping off tall structures with ropes tied to the ankles (Soden, 2003); or as Groves cited:

You killed a lion, and you were considered a man. And in this country years ago, a man joined the military, and then he could say, 'I am an adult.' A woman got married (Holmes cited in Groves, 1987, p. 193).

It seems that in today's age the answer to an adolescent male's question, who am I? is, potentially, to be found in the extreme sport experience (Groves, 1987). For as Groves concluded the only equivalent ceremony in modern society is the drivers licence which 'is a pretty shabby excuse for a rite of passage' (Holmes cited in Groves, 1987, p. 193).

I have presented my argument on the male/female divide elsewhere and as such will leave these connotations to the reader. However, for me the above quote does present an

interesting notion - the approach to death and dying. Perhaps there is something in this ceremonial concept that is more about the approach to the reality of death than the uncritical assumption of cultural norms? Perhaps the association to death transforms? Still as Arnould and Price (1993) accepted, rite of passage experiences are generally characterised as non-voluntary and involve separation, transition and reintegration.

The Pilgrimage has also been proposed as the theory that explains the extreme sport experience. In this instance the transformation is not necessarily from youth to adult. Pilgrimages share a similar structure to the rite of passage but they are voluntarily approached. Still the focus is on the reintegration as cultural citizens. Yet as I have already shown the external perception about the extreme identity is often vastly different from a participant's point of view. Furthermore as I argued in chapter VIII the change is often unexpected and unplanned.

The natural relationship

A commonly proposed theory is the formation of an identity through a relationship to nature. Shoham et al. (2000) recognized Simmons's (1993) thesis that nature is purely a human 'multi-faceted social-construction' (Simmons cited in Shoham et al., 2000, p. 249). As such, nature provides a medium for conquering or communion, a play-ground, natural reserve (Shoham et al., 2000) or even the Cartesian notion of nature as machine (Wilshire, 1997). For those theorists exploring the extreme sport experience the relationship between extreme sports and the natural world is best portrayed by a human desire to conquer or battle against nature (Celsi et al., 1993; Millman, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1999). A notion perhaps related to the perception that as humans we have become so insulated from the natural world that it has become something to fear and therefore control (Stilgoe, 2001).

Millman (2001) determined that those specializing in marketing consider the extreme sport experience as the epitome of naïveté and nihilism that sparks of self-indulgence and an assumption that nature's laws do not apply. The assumption being that as society enforces a powerlessness and insignificance on people so people will search for a way to prove to themselves that they are powerful. Le Breton (2000) considered the extreme

sport experience to be the ultimate hand-to-hand fight, where an individual's battle against nature somehow adds importance and value to their life.

The clash occurring between the body and nature is like seeking the ultimate truth of western individualism, it is seen as the only partner of any value, the only speaker worthy of respect. In this symbolic form of physical or sporting activities there is actually a new awareness of Life. Death is sometimes lying in wait when personal capacity to achieve has been overestimated and searing reality has to be faced (Le Breton, 2000, p. 2).

Though as I have argued elsewhere Le Breton's thesis seems to be once again a little confused as in the same instance he writes about the importance of being in 'perfect harmony with the world' (Le Breton, 2000, p. 2). Yet for me there is at least one point of intrigue. Conceivably, Le Breton's perception that nature is the only partner of any value may be significant, but perhaps not as a partner for conquering but a partner in our journey to learn more about ourselves. Still, others have re-enforced this battling notion through enforcing a view of nature as a playground ripe for mastering and controlling and the extreme sport participant as one who sets out to master and control (Millman, 2001).

Thus it would seem that there is a posited essential relationship between the natural world and the extreme sport experience. However, it may not be as initially perceived, perhaps it is not about conquering but about the journey (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001). The notion of the natural world being a thing to conquer may be more a reflection of a naïve non-participant understanding than an element of the extreme sport experience. That is, it may not be that a person constructs an identity through mastering the environment.

Houston (1968) was quite clear about his perceptions on attempting to conquer the natural environment:

Mountaineering is more of a quest for self-fulfilment than a victory over others or over nature. The true mountaineer knows that he has not conquered a mountain by standing on its summit for a few fleeting moments. Only when the right men are in the right places at the right time are the big mountains climbed; never are they conquered (Houston, 1968, p. 57).

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Compare those words with the following from a white-water kayaker recalling a trip in Russia:

You cannot conquer a river. How can you defeat something that is never the same twice, that is unaware of your presence? To the river, we are so much flotsam, and if we forget that the results can be decidedly final. It is often difficult to remember the force of the river in places like this; the water can smash a swimmer to pieces on the rocks and leave them broken like a doll or a piece of rubbish bobbing in the backwaters of an eddy.

There was enough force in “The thing you strain spaghetti through after you’ve cooked it” [*the name of a particular rapid*] to rip us from our frail craft and pound us like so much drift wood. And the river wouldn’t even know we were dead. There can be no competition, no way we can fight against the huge forces we travel on. We have grace and style and experience, but our arrogance is tempered by humility (Guilar, 1999, Chap 11, [*brackets mine*]).

Guilar (1999) continued by recognising the experience as more of a dance and that should the dance turn to competition or fight then the likely result would be death. Page (2003) noted that big waves pay no attention to the surfer riding it and by implication would not even know that a competition was in place. Thus, a more appropriate understanding may be that the experience is more of an interaction *with* the environment. Lynn Hill the extreme climber noted the experience of climbing as one of adapting to the rock and as such:

It is not about going out there and conquering something-proving that you are somehow stronger than other people or the rock you’re about to climb. It is much more about interacting with your environment (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 59).

Hill continued by noting that it is only by achieving ‘a harmonious relationship to the rock’ (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 60) that a climber can progress and that:

Climbing is a sport that involves you and the rock. The rock is a totally natural formation that’s been there for maybe millions of years. When you’re on the rock, you have no choice but to adapt to what is there. It may not be what you’d hoped was there or what you think should be there. The rock is indifferent to gender, size or whatever you think it should be (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 64).

Hill likened the experience to requiring skills ‘more like water-strong but soft’ (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 67) where a climber yields, adapts and is in harmony with the rock and the activity. That is the environment is considered to be alive and permission

for successful interaction is granted only when a participant appreciates and understands its intricacies. Perhaps akin to interacting with other human beings though one could argue with a potential for more deadly outcomes. A point recognized by Midol and Broyer (1995) who observed a nature–human relationship that seemed to be more about interacting and blending with the environment.

Snow and mountains are perceived as living entities, at once dangerous and benevolent. In their return to an intimate dialogue with mythical characters, skiers experience a phantasmogorical relationship that is also real. One must blend with the environment, become one with it (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 207).

Though later they seemed to understand this as being akin to a hand to hand fight with nature. Still, it is also important not to confuse the experience with an aesthetic or romanticised appreciation or blending with the natural world whereby the beauty seen instils a sense of wonder and integration as perhaps a naïve perception might presume (Arnould & Price, 1993; Robinson, 1992). After all as Houston (1968) noted such an experience can be obtained by easier routes or even vehicles, rather the beauty of the environment is a secondary concern whilst participating. This is not to say that aesthetics and beauty are not concerns merely that they are secondary concerns. After all, logic would determine that heading over a thirty metre waterfall does not allow for much time to enjoy the surrounding beauty. An extreme skier specifically noted that whilst the aesthetics were a welcome bonus they were not the essence:

... for me the beauty of the mountains and the environment is the bonus ... but that's not why I'm out there (ESP 3).

In an interview with a solo climber the subject turned to the beauty of the environment and he noted that:

Part of climbing is being up in the mountains enjoying the scenery or whatever although I think most people don't climb because of that they climb because of the fulfilment they get from the action of doing it (ESP 6).

It may be that the relationship to the extreme sport experience and participation extends perceptions of self. A point reflected by Charles Houston (1968) an experienced Himalayan expedition climber and surgeon.

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The aim is not to conquer, for mountain climbing is not a conflict between man and nature. The aim is to transcend a previous self by dancing a 'ballet' on the crags and precipices and eventually, at very long last, to emerge exhilarated and addicted (Houston, 1968, p. 49).

Olsen (2001) noted that women she interviewed spoke about a partnership with the natural environment or about being in harmony with self and the environment. Bane (1996) reflecting on his kayaking experience in New Zealand, considered that the participant is essentially part of the environment.

Imagine being caught in a cosmic washing machine in the agitate cycle. Imagine being lifted out of your crib by your mommy and shaken hard while your daddy turns the full force of a fire hose on your body. Make that an icy fire hose-the water temperature is just above freezing; my wetsuit feels more like a T-shirt. You cannot "fight" the river. You are in it a part of it, being acted on by not just what you can see on the surface, but surging raging currents below the surface. They pull you in contradictory directions, shove your legs apart and together. The river is unimaginably strong and you are so very, very small (Bane, 1996, p. 107).

Thus for me it would seem that the natural environment reveals the powerlessness of being human. Perhaps though rather than triggering a response that results in a participant giving up, an appreciation of powerlessness if effectively used enables one to dig deep within to find that extra something to remain a participator. Yet, perhaps even a surrendering of control or a realisation of non-control, but as is often the case I am ahead of myself and will return to the concept of being free from the need to control in the next chapter. For now it is important to appreciate that the natural world might be acting as a facilitator to a realisation that the natural world is immensely powerful and the human comparatively powerless. A participant foregoes any attempt to control natural forces but at the same time some type of control is maintained in order to participate effectively.

You really have to accept that you don't have ... you have a measure of control but you don't have control the mountain could fluff you out in a second (ESP 8).

Once again there also seems to be a pointer towards having no control, still as I mentioned earlier I intend to return to this notion later.

Though, perhaps the relationship moves beyond being in control when in an environment that is uncontrollable, perhaps the natural world when experienced in its raw sense where the acceptance of the reality of the potentiality of imminent death acts as facilitator of deep learning about ones-self and ones capabilities. For ESP 3 the relationship between being able to remain cool and mentally, physically, emotionally in control was considered empowering:

... it's really empowering it makes you feel like there's nothing you can't do like if there's avalanches coming down around you and you're on something where if you fall you die but then you still manage to keep your head together you feel really really good about yourself it's very empowering and so that was kind of addicting to come back from these experiences and to just feel so charged and so proud of myself and so just in control of my life despite all these out of control things that were going on around me (ESP 3).

Guy Cotter (cited in Spence, 2001) a New Zealand Mountain guide and owner of the International guiding company Adventure Consultants put it this way:

What we in New Zealand call sports, what we put so much emphasis into – really they're just games. Doesn't matter if you win or lose. Okay, so a few people get upset. But in reality ... whereas in Mountaineering, it *really* matters whether you make the correct decision or not. That's the beauty of sports like this. That's why I'm attracted to it. Because it's very realistic (Cotter cited in Spence, 2001, p. 54).

And later:

Going into the Mountains and actually making a decisions and doing something that's going to be the difference between you living and dying, on a daily basis – it's empowering for the soul (Cotter cited in Spence, 2001, p. 54).

For a surfer of big waves the concept was considered as a reinforcement of his ability to survive anything life had to offer.

I mean surfing is such a big part of my life and I've had a lot of time in the water alone and therefore I ponder much about life especially when I'm alone it also can be very challenging especially when I've been in a very very big surf by myself it's a real challenge to deal with that to survive it and to stand on the firm beach again, having survived that is an awesome feeling of achievement so I guess surfing gives me great ... I guess it reinforces that belief in myself that I'm a survivor in anything in life anything that I'll deal with (ESP 12).

And later:

I'm just determined and I have a strong will to survive because not everyone does have like a fighting spirit you know you sort of learn that about yourself just also like it reinforces how you deal with a crisis or a challenging moment and I'm the same in the water as I would be out of the water because I've had to deal with extreme challenge (ESP 12).

Cotter (cited in Spence, 2001) seemed to echo the words of many others and asserted that an extreme mountaineer cannot allow the ego to make decisions as each decision must be based on realistic appraisals of activity skills and personal capabilities, the alternative would most likely be death. He also noted that whilst participation teaches humility this has to be balanced with self-discipline otherwise a summit would never be reached.

For Laird Hamilton (B. Williams et al., 2001), the extreme surfer, it was participation in such extreme environments that transformed his life. Hamilton considered that he developed a deeper appreciation for life through the natural world as something greater and more powerful than humanity. Involvement in such extreme environments triggered a deeper knowledge of his inner self; a realisation that, as we have seen, changed him emotionally, physically, cognitively and spiritually.

Olsen (2001) also quoted a mountaineer who experienced the mountain as something spiritual and sacred. A successful mountaineer has to know their own limits, respect the mountain and accept that reaching the summit depends on the mountain 'tell[ing] you when it is possible' (Lignel cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 99).

Breashears (1999) also explained the relationship as one akin to a facilitator:

If ever there was a mountain that can temper human arrogance and teach humility, it's Everest. Whatever name you want to give it, the Nepali Sagarmatha, or the Tibetan Chomolungma-the Mother Goddess-or the British surveyor general's name, Everest, the mountain is a massive living presence that changes everyday. With the terrible winds of 1986, it seems that Everest was intent on showing us how fragile we truly are (Breashers, 1999, p. 171).

And later:

And I was certain that in exploring the terrain of the mountain, we were really exploring a far more mysterious terrain-the landscape of our souls (Breashears, 1999, p. 242).

For Breashears, climbing Everest focuses self-awareness:

People tell themselves that Everest is a dangerous place. For some people that makes the mountain more appealing. Only a few of the people heading towards camp IV that late afternoon really understood the indifference Everest holds toward human life. You can climb the mountain a thousand times, and it will never know your name. Realizing your anonymity, accepting it in all its terrible consequences, is the key to a mountaineer's humility, key to a climber's self-awareness (Breashears, 1999, p. 259).

Thus as Arnould and Price (1993) briefly pointed out the nature-human relationship seems to be one where the immense power of nature acts as a pointer to our inner beings. Lynn Hill the climber also noted an exploration of her inner nature:

It's all about learning to adapt totally to the environment you're in. I think it provides the perfect opportunity for learning about what makes you tick. When you're that involved in the external world, you can really explore your inner nature (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 66).

Boga (1988) quoted a free-solo climber who noted the intensity and variety of experiences:

I can't understand why people play baseball when they could be climbing. It's so many things not just one. Outdoors ... beautiful, with unbelievable exposures ... mentally challenging ... gives you the chance to face fear and overcome it ... And it's so natural ... little boys are always climbing trees aren't they? ... But the real reward is being able to look within, to learn about myself (John Bachar cited in Boga, 1988, p. 16).

And later Bachar clarified that he would rather hear the wind than receive approval as seems to be inherent in other sports.

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For ESP 8 the inner exploration seems to go beyond what was perceived prior to the experience, that is, somehow this relationship enabled her to explore the unknown within.

While you're like a leaf in the wind you can also make a difference and you can also explore parts of yourself that you had no concept of even being there (ESP 8).

Thus it would seem that those who participate in extreme sports consider the concept of fighting or conquering the environment, at best, an unfortunate misunderstanding. After all how can a person conquer a mountain that does not even know that they, the small insignificant human, even exists or defeat a river that is never the same. One cannot compete with nature when nature does not even know that a competition is taking place. For Arnould et al. (1999) the experience is more akin to a respect for the natural world and a realization that nature is both destructive and regenerative. And perhaps herein lies the essence of the connection to the natural world; the very terrible power, uncertainty and potential of death where the structure and laws of civilization are no longer apparent, facilitates a personal challenge to discover what lies deep within. As we touched on in Chapter V the natural world could be a great teacher about living as a human if we would but listen and experience.

Let us once again return to the words of Lynn Hill the extreme climber:

I guess the whole 'extreme' movement is somehow an attempt to try to recreate the 1960s ... maybe some people think that there's something to be gained by 'defying' nature the way the young people in the 1960s defied authority. I'm not sure. I just know that that's not the way I do things (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 60).

And perhaps herein lies the assumption of 'extreme' sport research and the formation of identity. Perhaps the theorists are somehow assuming that as one group battles human authority others must therefore become a homogenous group battling nature's authority. Perhaps this is just another example of the manifestation of the human (expert and non-expert alike) transference of their own perceptions onto others, as noted in a previous chapter Ogilvie (1974) certainly recognised this point. Still the point of phenomenology is to search beyond the preconceived and explore the unknown, perhaps even as noted

by ESP 8 in her quote above, to explore concepts within the experience that might not have presented themselves as known. Perhaps the following quote highlighted by Cotter (2003) succinctly explores the nature as teacher concept?

A Journey into nature.
Push yourself until the pain comes and then go on,
until you think you cannot survive.
Here the ego will let go.
Here you will be purified.
(Lilloet vision quest cited in Cotter, 2003, p. 207).

Still as Bell (2003) noted to find nature as it once was, raw and untouched, as still deeply embedded in human mythology and experienced as a spiritual awakening requires new sites. Thus those that desire to reach wild and untamed places and experience such a depth of human spirit also need to explore the edges in other ways.

Know what you are

As I touched on in the previous section, critiquing those views that the extreme sport experience is about conquering nature, it would seem that the experience touches something deep inside a participant's being that enables a participant to better know themselves and therefore their capabilities. Breashears (1999) observed this inner knowledge in himself and others when reflecting on the 'unworldly adventure' (Breashears, 1999, p. 304) of Everest climbing:

I recognized something very familiar about this scene; yet I also felt an acute sense of displacement. I've always looked to the sky, the snow, the clouds for that light. I've climbed to the highest reaches of the planet in search of it. But when I looked closely into Bruce Herod's eyes, facing his own camera lens, I saw what I might have known all along, and it is this: The risk inherent in climbing such mountains carries its own reward, deep and abiding, because it provides as profound a sense of self-knowledge as anything else on earth. A mountain is perilous, true; but it is also redemptive. Maybe I had dimly understood this as a boy, with no earthly place to call my own, I deliberately chose the iconoclast's rocky path of mountain climbing. But in the moment of pure clarity I realized that ascending Everest had been, for me, both a personal declaration of liberty and a defiant act of escape. Now suddenly, I felt an inexpressible serenity, a full-blooded reaffirmation of life, on Everest's icy ridges (Breashears, 1999, p. 304).

Usher (2000) when documenting the lives of free divers (those who descend to great depth without oxygen) noted that:

You are in another world, where there is no gravitational force, no colour, no noise ... one does not descend in apnea to look around but to look into oneself. It is a long jump into the soul (Usher, 2000, p. 1).

Roberts (1994) concluded: 'No wonder scaling the face of a cliff is a potent act that can penetrate to the very essence of self and help reshape it' (Roberts, 1994, p. 4). Celsi et al. (1993) made comparisons to the superficial and externally driven process of plastic surgery and concluded that self-change in this instance was an external process that an individual hoped would change something inside, where as the changes involved in extreme sports already occurs as a deep internal process. Essentially the extreme sport experience transforms a participant though not in terms of working towards an external (social or cultural) perception of identity or towards some constructed perception of an ideal self, but by touching something within.

Living the dream

This connection with a deep self has been established by researchers and theorists in the form of realising deep felt dreams (Gadd & Rubenstein, 2003; Shoham et al., 2000). For example Greenberg (1977) documented a hang-glider who determined that participation was as close as he could get to a life long connection or dream to fly like a bird. Roberts (1994) considered that climbers often spoke about connections to something inside that were realised when they began climbing. Wesler (1997) quoted a climber who connected to climbing even before being aware of climbing as an activity; 'it was something I always knew I'd do ... before I knew I would do it, I didn't even know what form it was' (Ted cited in Welser, 1997, p. 26). Todhunter (2000) quoted an extreme climber who considered that climbing was a calling and that he was put on the earth to climb, 'fulfilling a greater obligation' (Todhunter, 2000, p. 172). Olsen (2001) quoted an extreme climber as noting that from the very first moment, despite previously undertaking many sports, climbing connected with something deep inside to an extent that she knew it was to be her sport.

Interview participants in this study have also observed that from the first attempt at their chosen activity it was as if something inside of them knew that the activity was right for them. For example an extreme kayaker (ESP 4) who experienced an affinity for water

from an early age. However, whilst he tried swimming, surfing, windsurfing and other water based activities it was only when he discovered kayaking and in particular water-falls that something clicked inside. A B.A.S.E. jumper (ESP 8) reported strong feelings and dreams about flying at an early age and whilst B.A.S.E. was not attempted until the age of 33 years she had an instant connection to the activity. A connection she did not get through other air sports such as sky-diving or bungee jumping. Marshall (1968) noted a similar concept in army recruits who did not seem to fit into 'normal' army life but when in battle under extreme stress 'it is as if they had found their natural environment' (Marshall, 1968, p. 66).

For another B.A.S.E. jumper the connection to early dreams of flying (both day and night dreams) was noted as part of an all encompassing connection. After noting that the first B.A.S.E. experience was unlike any other experience including sky diving and describing the experience as a fun place to be, he further clarified the experience as something that was instant and pure.

It's a place that not many people well not a lot of people in society go to like not many people hang twenty feet of a rock wall traveling at two three hundred kilometers and hour and fly their bodies through the air and a lot of the flying thing is a big part of it ... I guess realizing that childhood dream ... that felt really pure to me ... like you go in an airplane and it's like you switch the motor on and it's man made whereas that felt a lot more natural to me (ESP 1).

For ESP 12 a surfer of big waves the experience was also experienced as natural. Perhaps then the intense experiential nature of extreme sports that involves both body and feelings enables the realisation of inner concepts of being. As if the participant is coming home. Still, beyond this connection once the activity is 'found' further understandings of self are challenged. Thus a participant learns about oneself by participating and extends this learning to develop better emotional and physical capabilities (Houston, 1968). Though, it could be argued, this may be less about learning something new and more about realizing the potential of an inner being that has always been there, as if waiting to be set free. Perhaps even a primal connection to being human. Roberts (1994) quoted a climber who considered that 'climbing brings you back to a primal place, where values are being created and transformed' (Pilling cited in Roberts, 1994, p. 5).

Listening and trusting

This connection to a core self also seems to be related to the often reported experience of being better in touch with inner knowledge during the activity (Rogers, 1996). For example, Agiewich (1998) cited a climber who considered that trusting ones own intuition and gut feelings was essential to effective participation. Messner (1998) the first person to solo Everest without oxygen described a similar reliance on instinct. Olsen (2001) quoted the extreme climber Lynn Hill as stating that she had to listen to her inner voice, rely on her own intuition and instincts, live in the moment, remain focused and rely on her own ability, even in team based expeditions. For Doug Scott (2003) high altitude mountaineering is all about being in touch with and listening to the inner voice, intuition or sixth sense. Tone stated that ‘you just have to follow your own line’ (Tone cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 185). Furthermore, being persuaded to undertake activities that did not feel right could result in considerable misfortune. Todhunter (2000) also seemed to recognise this point when he wrote that thinking too much and not trusting his feelings, negatively effected his climbing.

ESP 4 often spoke about kayaking waterfalls and picking the route down as ‘an instant gut feeling’ (ESP 4) coupled with reaction speeds to get him out of trouble (though his aim was not to be in trouble in the first place!!). ESP 2 observed that participation was dependent on gut feelings about his self-readiness and the environmental keys. Soden (2003) quoted a solo climber who observed that ignoring such inner ‘feelings’ would inevitably result in death.

I think the fool is the person who ignores what their body is telling them to do. That’s the person who ends up dying. If you’re going to solo, you have to listen to your body. Listen to your heart, your mind. Your fear is the thing that keeps you alive. So it’s a good thing, if you don’t ignore it (Mike cited in Soden, 2003, p. 254).

Thus the consensus seems to be that successful participation in extreme sports necessitates listening to and trusting ones inner knowledge, ones inner experience.

On being alone

This perception is perhaps in line with the fact that a majority of extreme sports are undertaken solo (Rosenblatt, 1999). Despite assumptions, for some practioners even the

thought of team expeditions being about social bonds is ‘an absurd opinion’ (Terry cited in Storry, 2003, p. 136). That is, even when part of a peer expedition each participant is inevitably ‘alone’ and dependent on their own physical, emotional and cognitive abilities. There is perhaps little team members can do to rescue a waterfall kayaker heading offline half way down a thirty metre waterfall or a B.A.S.E. jumper experiencing crossed, entangled lines heading for the cliff. Most often the participant is required to undertake their own rescue and trust their own decisions. Thus even as part of a peer team each member is required to be fully self-sufficient and confident in their own skills (Olsen, 2001).

An extreme kayaker interviewed for this study voiced the following opinion:

So many people come to me and say "god I love your lifestyle I'd love to do what you do" and ninety-nine percent of the time I can understand what they mean but when you sit at the top of a waterfall and the horizon line is the edge of the fall you can't even see the bottom it's so high you can see the clouds in the distance that's the picture you get and everyone has just spent the last half an hour walking down the side to sit at the bottom to pick up the pieces if you don't make it you feel incredibly alone (ESP 4).

And a later clarification:

There are some very strange physical situations as well at the top of the waterfall that make you feel like you are totally alone apart from the fact that you usually are totally alone because nobody has got any interest in sitting at the top of a fall when they can't see the bottom you are just the only person left sitting up there as soon as you say you're ready to go everybody leaves you also it's very quiet up there much quieter than people would expect because the roar of the waterfall is at the bottom and the sound can't really travel up the waterfall and back over to the top (ESP 4).

Arnould and Price (1993) found that participants in their study frequently spoke about the power of solitude. Lynn Hill the extreme climber accepted that climbing is distinctly personal where each participant focuses on only the essentials and has to be continually aware of what the body is doing at all times. Kristen Lignell the mountaineer put it this way:

It's always a mental exercise. If it's really cold and snowing hard, you can't waste time and energy thinking about how miserable you are. You need to focus

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and mentally walk through what you're trying to do. You can't go moaning about the fact that there's no one to help you (Lignell cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 104).

ESP 12 was clear about the relationship to being on ones own in such an environment:

I wrote a brief article on the history of this wave that I surfed and the one thing I said that no matter who is with you in the water or watching you on the land when you paddle into that wave you are on your own but when you fall off or break your board or swim or get held down under water or get into trouble you're on your own you're totally responsible for yourself and you have to deal with that so obviously if you can't or don't want to be put in that position you don't do it but it's an incredibly obvious thing that goes with that situation (ESP 12).

For ESP 8 the experience of undertaking a B.A.S.E. jump, of stepping of the edge to the potential of death, to face death alone was considered as 'incredibly empowering' (ESP 8).

Perhaps this focus on the experience of being alone would indicate support for the development of the individualistic identity as observed by the export 'A' marketing example previously discussed. Yet there would seem to be easier ways that are equally individual and perhaps this is the case. Perhaps the confusion that seems to lump any individual activity from skateboarding in parks to the solo mountain track walk to those that we are currently considering as extreme sports has created these perceptions. As participants have continually expressed participating in extreme sports would be an extremely perilous way of creating an identity. As Ulmer (an extreme skier) stated 'imagine if every time you missed a basket, somebody would shoot you in the head' (Ulmer cited in Koerner, 1997, p. 2). Furthermore the B.A.S.E. jumper, extreme skier and big wave surfer do not necessarily share the same language, dress or technology, yet as the focus of this thesis demonstrates they do share a similar experience.

Perhaps a participant may already need a certain identity confidence in order to participate. Research would seem to support this notion. For example, as I previously detailed, Ogilvie (1974) considered that participants are invariably loners with high levels of independence, self-reliance, assertiveness, higher than average levels of emotional stability and a greater willingness to accept the consequences of their own decisions (Ogilvie, 1974). Brannigan and McDougall (1983) concluded that acceptance of per-

sonal responsibility for the consequence of actions is a major element of the extreme sport experience. Perhaps then, instead of being about individualistic identities, participation has some other relationship to self understanding.

Perhaps as Houston (1968) recognized the experience is just part of human nature to explore the self and test its capacity.

This constant stretching of capacity is one of the characteristics that distinguishes man from other animals and has led to his mastery of so many skills. When early explorers set out to sail across the apparently endless ocean, they were testing limits (Houston, 1968, p. 52).

For ESP 7 the experience was expressed in the following manner:

Mahatma Gandhi says that fearlessness is the king of all virtues and ... we do these things for a number of reasons but one of the most powerful reasons for me is overcoming my own personal fears that ... umm ... gives you so much more of an insight into your being into your potential and into your capacity (ESP 7).

He continued by reflecting on the instinctual fears of falling, separation and dieing that once confronted and transcended, as opposed to avoided, allow for feelings of personal power and a type of fearlessness that comes from a better understanding of ones inner being. Essentially for ESP 7 the relationship is akin to answering his own personal call to be himself and fulfil his own destiny. Or in other words to discover what lies within and the realisation of his own potential. Thus it would seem the extreme sport experience presents one with an amazing gift, the gift of discovering the inner being that had previously been dormant and hidden (Ament, 2001; Niclevicz, 2003; Scott, 2003). ESP 7 had spent sometime reading and exploring the experience from a scientific and mythological point of view in an attempt to investigate what he considered to be a profound medium that helped him discover his own core self.

... you know you're in this incredibly spectacular environment dealing with really really primal forces not only primal forces in the environment but primal forces within yourself you know we are we are genetically we are we have primitive parts of our being that are connected to primitive parts of every other being you know like Jung's collective unconsciousness we are part of everything that's around us at some deep deep deep unconscious level connected to it so to go mountaineering is to reinvigorate re-establish that connection with a really fundamental core part of your being and yourself and ahhh you have to go

through this you know in a this 40 days in a desert to do that you know that's the that was metaphor of that you know Jesus going out there like that's what it is all about to find you know that core stuff within yourself (ESP 7).

Later ESP 7 returned to this theme:

... you know that's an irony because ... you learn ... I mean really you learn so much about yourself when you do any adventure sport ... particularly when you stand on the edge of a cliff knowing like that if you don't know yourself then you might die then you get know yourself pretty fast (ESP 7).

A phenomenological perspective

Let us for a moment briefly revisit Chapter VI, On Death. The argument presented was that extreme sport participation allowed an experiential relationship to death and this relationship enabled an experience that equated to living life to its fullest. The phenomenological concept of being-towards death was presented as one piece of evidence to support this argument. In making my claim I also briefly mentioned that by experientially accepting death the Heideggerian concept of authenticity would be revealed (Heidegger, 1996). It is to this authenticity that I would now like to turn in order to explore this aspect of the extreme sport experience further.

Heidegger (1996) posited that Dasein had the potential to connect with and be itself. Truly being-towards-death provides the environment to receive the call to live authentically. According to Heidegger the typical Dasein lives an inferior inauthentic life caught up in a 'they-self' resplendent in an illusion or lostness in an existence already determined by the 'they' of its world. Or to put in simpler terms it would seem that a person inevitably leads an inauthentic life wrapped up in the mundane and predetermined rules, tasks and standards. However, Heidegger considered that it was possible to reconnect with an authentic life by connecting with a deeper sense of self, a self beyond all psychological, biological or anthropological definitions (Heidegger, 1996).

Essentially Heidegger theorized a summoning 'call' to return to the self (as opposed to the 'they-self') a call without words or explanations. In Heidegger's words, 'the call of conscience has the character of summoning Da-sein to its ownmost potentiality-of-

being-a-self' (Heidegger, 1996, p. 249). However, the potential of becoming this self depends on Dasein's ability to hear the call:

Losing itself in the publicness of the they and its idle talk, it *fails to hear* its own self in listening to the they-self. If Da-sein is to be brought back from this lostness of failing to hear itself, and if this is to be done through itself, it must first be able to find itself, to find itself as something that has failed to hear itself and continues to do so in *listening* to the they. This listening must be stopped, that is, the possibility of another kind of hearing that interrupts that listening must be given by the Da-sein itself (Heidegger, 1996, p. 250).

In Heidegger's view the 'they' listening is interrupted by the silent unambiguous call to conscience. Returning to Breashears (1999):

The stresses of high-altitude climbing reveal your true character; they unmask who you really are. You no longer have the social graces to hide behind, to play roles. You are the essence of what you are (Breashears, 1999, p. 274).

This authentic self is a self already understood by Dasein but lost in a world swamped by the experiences of the they-self (Burston, 1998). The call removes Dasein from its lostness in the they-self. However, Heidegger was quick to note that this was not an inwardly directed analytic dissection of an inner life. Once the call is answered the authentic self is realized with a 'worldly' orientation (Heidegger, 1996, p. 253). Thus the authentic self is summoned to its potentiality-of-being or in other terms to live out its potential. It would seem that being-towards-death in an authentic way enables the realization of the authentic self. Further as Zimmerman (1986) understood, those that are more daring that 'catch the scent of death' (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 250), that perhaps give up the struggle and let things be, might reach a deeper fulfilment. Perhaps then the extreme sport experience, being one where death is experienced as real, triggers of the call to authentic self and authentic living free from the ties of external environment. However, this authentic self is not an idealised or willed version of self as, say, a more macho, indestructible being that masters his or her environment (Greenberg, 1977). More than that, it is a self already part of each Dasein and each Dasein will have its own authentic self and by listening and honouring that authentic self one is able to live ones own authentic life. Hanna (1993a) showed how the phenomenological method provides a route to authenticity where the philosopher opens up to a mode of thinking that is intuitive in nature.

Still, living the Authentic life is not to indicate that self then becomes individualised in the extreme sport experience, as is necessary in selfishness, but perhaps the total opposite. As Heidegger (1996) noted it is only through living an authentic self that one can live an authentic relationship with others. A point also noted by Covey (1999) in a less philosophical recognition that a person has to be fully independent before they can be effectively interdependent. Heidegger (1996) extended the point further by inferring that those living authentic lives encourage others to do the same.

Zimmerman (1986) in his critique of the mature concept of Heidegger's authenticity presented another stage to this argument. That is a truly authentic being is free from the anthropocentric assumptions. Life does not orient itself around man (Heidegger, 1973). The Western-technological understanding that nature is to be conquered is replaced by nature as friend (Caputo, 1978). As Merleau-Ponty reportedly suggested the natural world is not outside of being it is at the very core of being and human beings understand themselves by being engulfed in the natural world (Bourgeois, 2002). A point also alluded to by the phenomenologist and editor-in-chief of *Analecta Husserliana*, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Ryba, 2002). Indeed Tymieniecka (1988) in the third volume of her four volume exploration on logos and life reminds us that man cannot be separated from nature. Further, such an experience cannot be willed but released to authenticity. Thus perhaps in less complicated language each of us is presented with an opportunity to get back in touch with a 'self' that is beyond our social self and outside of our tendency for anthropocentrism. Perhaps the extreme sport experience presents such an experience and extreme sport participants experience the experience as a connection with who they are, a becoming what they already are.

So it would seem that if the arguments in chapter VI, *On Death*, are accepted then the transformations that participants experience result from being connected to a deeper sense of self already known but hidden from view by socio-cultural noise and interference. Noise that dictates who each of us 'should' be and how each of us 'should' lead our lives. The extreme sport experience strips away the socio-cultural noise and allows an individual to hear their authentic own-self. Thus providing each keeps in contact with their own reality of death, participants can consistently realise their authentic own-self

as authentic living. In Heideggerian terms ‘in order to gain everything, one must give up everything’ (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 292).

Critics of the Heideggerian position on authenticity focus on this aspect and Heidegger's connections with the Nazi party to show the limitations in this view of authenticity (M. D. Daniels, 2002; Rockmore, 1992). That is it is presumed that it is possible to be an authentic Nazi as being authentic does not relate to any judgment of good or bad. Still as Zimmerman (1986) pointed out Heidegger's earlier thought considered authenticity as stemming from resoluteness perhaps akin to self-actualisation. However, the mature authenticity stems from releasement and therefore not about a willed state of being. Thus the ego is removed and one is released to authenticity. It would seem that the extreme sport experience is about a more positive set of transformations that enable one to appreciate one's inner beauty, as perhaps succinctly noted by an extreme mountaineer.

Expeditions have an amazing power to help people realize the beauty that is in each of us. The most important thing in life is to be true to yourself (Tone cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 185).

Furthermore as I have shown in the previous chapter participants consider that they are changed for the better, with participants exploring this notion as increases in well-being or meaningfulness or even spiritual changes. Such changes were not calculated but unexpectedly given.

Sartre also spoke about authenticity. Though initially his focus seemed to be on reaching the authentic being through developing reflectivity he later seemed to relate authenticity to action and in particular removing the realm of emotions (Golomb, 2002). It would seem that the choices we make define our authenticity. Husserl (1977) expounded his notion of the *époché* where to know a thing in its entirety the explorer is advised to ‘know thy self’ (Husserl, 1977, p. 157) and discover truth from within. A self that Hanna (1993a; 1993b) clearly demonstrated was reminiscent of the Upanishad description of *atman*, thus similarities to the Eastern approach are once again to be found. But more than this if extrapolated the extreme sport experience of getting to know one's inner being could be likened to the application of the phenomenological process. As such it may be that beyond the willing of authentic self the experience suggests a mystical, transcendent or transpersonal experience. Perhaps even as a later Heidegger

purportedly theorised (Zimmerman, 1986) the experience may be less about willing an authentic Being and more about being released to authenticity. A process that Davis (1999) likened to elements of various wisdom philosophies as leading to our true nature. Still, such a notion and its definition will have to wait until a later chapter.

Perspectives from the wisdom traditions

Humphreys (1996) noted that self is central to Buddhism and the path to enlightenment. For Humphreys (1996) the construct that is called self is a three-fold entity that he termed self, Self and SELF. In these terms self defines the body or ego-self, Self can be related more to the soul self and SELF to the universal spirit. It would seem that the path to enlightenment involves looking within and accepting that one's version of self is unreal and then moving towards SELF via Self. Or as Cook (1985) presented the argument, transcending inauthentic self to become authentic self. This should not be mistaken as a definite path or 'way' to reach the SELF as no such wilful goal exists (Zimmerman, 1986). Instead one must be ready to accept and let go of the need to cling to life (Campbell, 1973; Watts, 2003). Thus, to undertake such transcendence one has to also accept the possibility of no-self:

The Buddhist way is the process of the death of self. As self dies Self grows, and as Self is purified, the light of SELF, the awareness of Enlightenment, grows in the mind which now returns in fullest consciousness to the All-Mind whence it came (Humphreys, 1996, sect 4).

Still the self fights to maintain its illusion and for self-preservation as dictated by its fear of death or annihilation and perhaps this is the fundamental description of extreme sport experience. That is participants are describing an experiential acceptance of death which is a key to unlocking such a realisation and a window to observe other potentials. Perhaps even as akin to the concept of death and re-birth.

According to Humphreys (1996) such a journey is not philosophical or of a specific doctrine but of experience. That is, it is through experience that these concepts are known. Still it would seem that traditionally great courage is required to let go of inauthentic self and continue the pathway. Cook (1985) wrote that through the experience of self-forgetting one walks the path towards enlightenment. However, fear of death and impermanence in particular enforces the inauthentic self. To reach authenticity or

enlightenment one must give up the desire to cling to life and accept death. In the past the Samurai used swordsmanship to confront and accept death (Zimmerman, 1986). Perhaps the descriptions volunteered by extreme sport participants present one modern path that enables a process of letting go or self-forgetting. It could definitely be argued that such an activity reflects Cook's (1985) description of 'a radical confrontation with one's own essential impermanence and mortality' (Cook, 1985, p. 144). However, to reach such a state requires the realisation of non-duality, and we shall return to this subject later. Still it is interesting to note the similarities within Heidegger's (1996) authentic self and the Self as presented by Humphreys (1996) and Cook (1985).

For Humphreys (1996) Buddhism clearly considers the concept of Self as something better than self, perhaps, but not precisely, more related to a Western concept of soul. Though not in the sense of an immortal soul as Christianity might use the word. This Self is both an illusion with attachments to the bodily version of self and a window to the spirit of SELF.

The thing which I call Self exists in all of us, and will continue to exist until that thing or individual merges in Nirvana. Until that day it will be lit from above by Spirit, held down in ignorance by the low desires of self and be fighting, splendidly or feebly, to regain the full awareness of the Buddha-mind within (Humphreys, 1996, sect 6).

Accordingly, such a journey is in its essence a realisation of an original innate state of being that Shaner (1985) described as primordial awareness. Such a position is also described in Hindu philosophy (Osho, 1994), Taoism (Watts, 1982), Christianity (Depraz, 2003) and Japanese philosophy (Elwood, 1994). That is we are already what we seek we just need to be released from representational thinking to realise what lies within (Campbell, 1973; Depraz, 2003). Such a release cannot be through self-reflection but must be through genuine experiential awareness (Elwood, 1994). For Campbell (1993) such an experience is necessarily brought about by a radical alteration of focus from the external to the internal world.

Arguably such descriptions are reminiscent of the self referred to by participants as their inner essence or core, the implication being that the extreme sport experience enables a transformation that moves towards Enlightenment and a more 'spiritual' understanding

(Cook, 1985). Interestingly, Cook (1985) also noted that a sign post to such an authentic self is the 'denial of human beings as the absolute locus of value' (Cook, 1985, p. 142). It would seem that the natural world is repositioned as more than an enemy, a resource or play thing since the authentic being has transcended anthropocentrism. The natural world is us and as such 'we are an exact mirror image' (Carter, 1992, p. 148). As Watts (1970) considered, it is only in relatively recent Christian, Western culture that such alienation and hostility to nature was manifest; a pattern of thought that has led to anxiety, fear and loneliness. Traditional wisdom makes no such separation; each of us is at home in the natural world as we are perhaps at home in our own skin (Watts, 1970). Thus, in agreement with Heidegger's understandings it would seem that the authentic nature cannot even be theorised, heard, let alone reached within a 'world dominated by modern science and technical progress' (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 274). One has to experience life outside of these constraints perhaps as Guatama experienced enlightenment in the forest under the Bodhi Tree (Lowenstein, 2000).

Further discourses

William James also noted a similar perception of self that was beyond the often assumed constructed perception (Throop, 2000). Essentially James considered that self and emotion were inextricably linked and grounded in experience. Throop (2000) noted three constituents of self, the material self (cited includes all those material elements that are of 'mine' – e.g. body, family and so on), the social self (cited includes all those self images developed through social contexts) and the spiritual self (those mental, consciousness and psychological aspects of ourselves). For James the Spiritual self also has an inner centre that primarily consists of experiences and includes concepts such as uniqueness, personality, continuity and agency. Wilber (2001) shows how such a consciousness development moves through an achiever spectrum towards sensitivity to the environment (Coombs, 2001).

Maslow (1971; 1999) also clearly describes similar qualities. In his descriptions of self-actualizers (which he also described as authenticity) he shows that such people most often choose the progressive fear filled choice as opposed to the regressive, safety choice. Such a choice necessarily leads to self-growth and a move to self actualisation. Maslow (1971) was quite clear that the self he was describing was one that was already

there all one had to do was ‘let the self emerge’ (Maslow, 1971, p. 46) by listening to the inner voice and taking personal responsibility. Rogers (1965) described similar qualities in his work on becoming authentic. For Rogers four essential qualities abound; an openness to experience, deep self trust, internal focus and becoming a process. Maslow (1971) was also at pains to ensure that self-actualisation was a process as well as an outcome. Thus one is on the self-actualisation path to self-actualisation and each single, tentative, step forward is another glimpse, another little accession. It is about people doing what is right for them despite external introjections. In Maslow’s (1971) terms the peak experience is considered to be a transient moment of self-actualisation.

Support for these arguments also comes from those who have studied meaning and existential psychology and its place in the human drama. As I argued in chapter VI by facing death and truly experiencing the reality of our own death we learn to live fully. May (1983) observed the importance of true death awareness in enabling a fully lived life. For Marshall (2002) this is authentic living obtained as a direct result of experiencing ones core self. Wong (1998) considered that the combination of discovering our own truths and connecting to the inner essence of our own being that is brought about by the acceptance of death enables a deep meaning and the living of a complete life. Often preoccupation with the external, social day-to-day living can prevent our inner search and thus our ability to find our own inner being and meaning. The end result of accepting the reality of our own death is that life is lived fully and at the same time the sense of who we are, our relationship with others and our understanding of the spiritual are all enhanced (Wong, 2000).

Walsh (2000) also clearly demonstrated the gap between conventional and authentic lives whilst emphasizing the importance of authentic life. For Walsh (2000) the seduction to live socially determined, typical, superficial, trance-like, fearful and deficient lives defines conventional living. Yet somehow we deliberately deceive ourselves and remain trapped in inauthenticity, we are alien to our own authentic self. To escape such a reality a person must somehow break free from ‘the biggest cult of all, namely culture’ (Walsh, 2000, p. 7) and transcend it.

Rowan (2003) outlined four levels of personal experience defined as a set of developmental stages; mental ego, real self, soul and Spirit. The last three are in the

transpersonal realm. Essentially the notion is that in the second realm a person deals with their shadow parts and gets to understand more about their deeper self and their capacities. Once past this stage certain so-called spiritual experiences may be felt (Rowan, 2003), to make the most of such experiences a person must be ready. Certain experiences or training can provide a peek into other worlds. Perhaps the extreme sport experience is a gradual preparation for such a peek. Rowan (2003) noted the place of surrender and the development of intuition, often perceived as if from an inner voice. Equally a sense of vocation is often associated with such awakenings.

Beyond the egocentric and homocentric approach to health lies what Kleffel (1996) described as the ecocentric approach. Nature has intrinsic value for its own self and thus becomes being-for-itself as opposed to being-for-us (humanity) (Oelschlaeger, 1992). Such an approach has been defined as ecophilosophy or the study of the bond between self, place, community and the natural world (Drengson, 1997; 1999). Ecopsychology (as distinct from ecological psychology, environmental psychology, environmental education or deep ecology), is a merge of psychology and ecosophy specifically concerned with such a human-nature link (Scull, 1999). Ecopsychology has evolved greatly from the time of Roszack's (1992) introduction, based on psychoanalytic concepts, to become more inclusive and expansive but still focused on the human-nature connection (Brown, 1995; Scull, 1999). In this instance though not as a direct link to authenticity but by theorizing the disconnection from nature, or the more-than-human world, adversely affects mental health (Frumkin, 2001; Scull, 1999; Wilson, 2001).

For Glendinning (1994) human-beings are inseparable from the physical world with the implication that to be fully healthy beings such a connection must be re-established. Indeed research has demonstrated that truly wild nature triggers deep transformations (Davis, 1996). That is, despite naïve perceptions that human beings are unique amongst animals our connection to nature is as so called 'lower-animals' (J. Williams & Parkman, 2003). This is not in the sense of nature as playing field or resource but in the sense of nature-as-family, nature-as-self or nature-as-unity (there is no relationship as there is no separation) and facilitator of a deep sense of being and even extraordinary states of awareness and consciousness (Glendinning, 1994). Thus to fight nature is to fight oneself, to understand nature is to understand oneself, to be in the natural world in all its glory is to be in oneself in all its glory (Watts, 1970). A condition that integrates

what Glendinning terms the 'primal matrix' (Glendinning, 1994, p. 5). Or as Duerr (1985) observed we can only really know our true selves if we experience and cross our civilised boundaries by re-turning to wildness and confronting death.

Summary

Thus a participant accepts the personal challenge to explore their inner being. The closeness to death and the effect of the environment seem to facilitate the potential of an instant window into each participant's inner being. It would seem that the extreme sport experience might be the living bodily expression of a participant's inner being which then also enables a deeper understanding of a participant's core or authentic self. Thus it is both the key to releasing ones deep felt dreams and the becoming more aware of ones core-self, perhaps akin to the Heideggerian call to realizing and living ones authentic self. By searching out, accepting and honouring that call participants note learning lessons in the personal and interpersonal realms, where humility and humbleness mix with confidence, trust, personal responsibility, meaningfulness and well-being.

Still this might not be the whole story for even as Heidegger, in later writings, began to appreciate beyond the existential perception of authentic self is pure Being (Valle & Mohs, 1998), a sense of something more than the existential, something more open, more allowing and less willful. As both Hanna (1993b) and Caputo (1978) proposed both Heidegger and Husserl were not averse to decidedly mystical interpretations, interpretations that were almost a direct consequence of a profound phenomenology (Walsh, 2000). Thus it might be that if indeed participants are describing a state akin to touching their core self, or a self beyond that experienced in everyday life, then might not other essential elements of the experience be beyond those of everyday life? If the knower changes would not the known and also the process of knowing undergo similar changes? It is to these points that I would now like to turn.

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X

Freedom

Projected image on projected screen;
Here's nought to see of true experience.
Still the machine of thought is sounding. Still,
Recording nothing worth, the folded sheets
Of knowledge clatter through. What function, then,
What process of im-mediate consciousness
Shall tear the mask from seeming, break each mould
And thus let life, all body shed, be free?

(Beyond cited in Humphreys, 1993, p. 170)

The notion of extreme sport participation as a search for freedom has attracted various theories on those who participate in 'so-called' extreme sports. Those few studies that have presented snippets of phenomenological data seemed to have focused on this notion as defining the activities studied. For example, an unpublished Masters thesis by Welser (1997) considered the experience of climbing and recognised freedom as the major focus. Winstead (1996) also recognised freedom as an important element in his unpublished Doctoral thesis on the phenomenology of merging with rock whilst rock climbing.

Such presuppositions can also be found in the categorisation of many extreme sports as 'free sports' (Lambton, 2000). In kayaking, for instance, a particular style that developed from playing in river features that had previously been avoided became known as freestyle kayaking. Freestyle kayaking has now become an International competitive sport with regulations and rules (Brymer, Hughes, & Collins, 2000). Though the pace of technological change and development has ensured that the sport remains a continually evolving sport and rules and regulations still loosely defined.

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The freestyle, competitive forms of such sports are often naively assumed to be indistinct from the extreme arm of the sport (Lambton, 2000). To confuse the issue participants of the extreme form are often also involved in the competitive arm. For example those participating in extreme skiing and kayaking interviewed for this study are involved in both the extreme and the freestyle sport. However, this is not always the case and some freestyle competitors are not involved in extreme sports, furthermore, some extreme activities do not have a direct competitive cousin. Thus despite the apparent association the extreme sport experience is perhaps something quite different.

Being free has been perceived as an essential element of the extreme sport experience not only by those who wish to exploit the concept and sell an image but apparently also by participants. However, it is important to revisit a notion that arose in previous chapters, that is, perhaps freedom has been forced on extreme sports by those who wish to be seen as what they consider to be free; another example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Still the notion of freedom prevails and it would be remiss of me not to explore this notion further. Furthermore, an explicit relationship between the extreme sport experience and freedom has also been highlighted by those participating in this study.

The aim of this chapter then is to explore the theme of being free or freedom. Once again those who have theorised and researched an experience that could be the extreme sport experience will be reviewed against the words of those who participate. However, whilst some writers have proposed elements of being free from, say, societal constraints and the boredom of routine (Carlyon, 2003) it would seem that few studies have explicitly researched the relationship to freedom whilst in the 'active' stage of the extreme sport experience. Yet such a freedom is important to those who participate.

As with all chapters I have included papers and writings that posit a relationship to the extreme sport experience. That is those writings that may, for example, discuss climbing but do not explicitly differentiate between the extreme and non-extreme elements have been included. Welser (1997), for instance, in his qualitative thesis on the meanings that dedicated climbers associate with climbing does not make clear at what level each climber climbs. Yet one of the themes he developed whilst exploring the socio-cultural relationship to climbing is based on the activity of free soloing or climbing without ropes. Thus it would be difficult not to include information that could be valuable to an

explication of the extreme sport experience. In this way I hope not to throw the baby out with the bath water. As such, the notion of being free as an element of the extreme sport experience is critiqued. However, my contention is that whilst freedom is part of the extreme sport experience it is perhaps not as defined by first impressions.

In the previous chapters I argued that the relationship between the extreme sport experience and socio-cultural theoretical issues was perhaps not as previously assumed. Yet I failed to re-present what could be considered a more appropriate relationship and in part this chapter aims to do just that. That is, those concepts that seem to have been left hanging in mid-air by an argument that refutes a previously posited perception will, in part, be re-addressed. In chapter VIII I explored the notion that the extreme sport experience transformed a participant. In the narrative I critiqued those view points that assumed explicit pro-dominant socio-cultural attributes, explicit pro-opposing attributes or explicit pro-predetermined subcultural attributes. In chapter IX the exploration into the extreme sport experience considered how such transformations might have taken place. Once again the flow critiqued those concerned with the socio-cultural definition and the deliberate construction of identity and cultural transition. Yet, as noted I proposed no alternative. On our journey through the mists of freedom we will once again consider elements of the socio-cultural but this time rather than argue what the relationship might not be I will present an argument of what it might be. That is this expedition into freedom will begin by exploring the socio-cultural not as conformity or opposition but reframed as freedom.

Freedom as a socio-cultural reframe

As I noted briefly in chapter VIII along with fear and identity this notion of freedom has been grasped in advertising and used to sell a multitude of products. For example, Lambton (2000) exemplified the media group SSM Freesports which explicitly exploits the expectations of younger people. In his thesis on climbing Welser (1997) specifically drew on the Mountain Dew campaign as an example of an organisation encouraging purchase of their product through an association with a type of freedom. Pollay (2001) showed how the tobacco industry developed an association with freedom from restrictions by creating the Marlboro Man as the essence of their products.

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The Marlboro Man epitomises this as he is totally and autonomously free-usually alone with no parents, no older brothers, no foreman, no bullies, indeed no one at all whose authority must be respected. It seems no accident that there is no sheriff in Marlboro Country (Pollay, 2001, p. 72).

Thus the notion of freedom is presented and then hijacked and sold to a youth generation as epitomising 'the answer;' in this case the answer is not to identify with external or internal perceptions but freedom from that which restricts.

For Lambton (2000) the extreme sport experience is a reflection of a New Age life and in particular life as freedom. Lambton (2000) considered that the traditional rigid, controlled and team oriented approaches to sport do not allow for freedom of expression. For Robinson (1992) traditional sports directly reflect the social value system of the dominant society. Extreme sports, however, emphasise 'freedom of behaviour (when, where, with whom, and how to partake) and self-responsibility' (Robinson, 1992, p. 101). The essence seems to be that such sports allow a freedom from the constraints, structures, rigidity, conformity and expectations of more traditional sports. Ironically, as such activities become organised sports, the association with freedom is lost.

To suggest that extreme sports were entirely radical would be somewhat misleading. There is an inevitability about the fact that as a sport becomes popular it becomes commercial and that, in itself, propels it towards the mainstream. Being popular, commercially viable and radical is a difficult line to walk (Lambton, 2000, p. 21).

Yet this is just the argument being made, extreme sports are providing a space for just that type of freedom. That is extreme sports allow freedom from the need to conform to any predetermined attributes and a freedom to be responsible for oneself.

Escaping from the humdrum routine of everyday city life and everyday constraints have also been associated with the extreme sport experience and freedom (Carlyon, 1999). Greenberg (1977) maintained that participation in extreme sports allowed a freedom from societal controls and routine lives. Welser (1997) supported this notion and argued that modern society has tended to enforce norms or constraints that define a persons reality.

One dimensionality describes the condition that exists when an individual's entire reality (i.e. his/ her definition of self, conception of life, sense of purpose and meaning) is submerged and swallowed up in the rationality of society. This condition comes to be perceived as normal. The way things are becomes the only perceived option. The very organisation and presentation of life in one-dimensional society constrains thought and action to a range of options which do not threaten the continuation of the status quo (Welser, 1997, p. 7).

Welser maintained that work often alienates and acts as a route to disempowerment for workers due to the imbalance in power relations. For Welser (1997), climbing is an active means to free a participant from the one-dimensional thought and behaviour patterns theorised by Marcuse (1964). Thus climbing is understood by participants as a freedom from normal social constraints. For Marcuse (1964) the essence of freedom is best reflected by its opposite which seems to be that modern society instils the trap of comfort, reason and democracy which leads to the justification of submitting to domination (Welser, 1997). Welser focused his arguments on Marcuse's (1964) theory to show that climbing also becomes a freedom from domination, freedom to live by ones own rules, freedom from extrinsic projections and freedom from society's control.

Thus, it would seem that extreme sports may provide an opportunity for participants to free themselves from the rules, restrictions and limitations enforced in the everyday social world (Yakutchik, 1995). Or as Yakutchik (1995) phrased it 'this is a place to color outside the lines' (Yakutchik, 1995, p. 1). Bower (1995) in his article on extreme sports considered that the experience of participation was about 'looking for a sense of excitement and challenge that is missing from their everyday lives' (Bower, 1995, p. 21) and by extension extreme sports participants are freeing their very selves from boredom and routine. Shoham et al. (2000) also found a similar concept whereby extreme sport participation allowed freedom from a persons 'normal life'. They emphasised findings from a study by Celsi et al. (1993) where participants explained that 'what people do and how much money they make just doesn't matter' (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 12).

For Midol and Broyer (1995) extreme sports provide an 'aesthetic liberation of life' (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 209) that transgresses both traditional sporting rules and those regulations imposed by traditional societal norms. If rules are associated with such sports then participants are observed to invent rules as they go along many of which are spur of the moment rules that have no real link to end results. Olsen (2001) quoted a

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climber who left gymnastics for climbing, even though she enjoyed the movements of gymnastics, because of the monotony and routine; 'climbing let me use my gymnastic skills, but in a way that offered much more freedom and spontaneity' (Hill in Olsen, 2001, p. 58). Thus the indications are that those involved in extreme sports are not searching for attributes within mainstream or opposing mainstream or even within a sub-culture but desire to be free from such needs and assumptions.

Welser (1997) quoted a number of climbers who considered that climbing enabled them to break free from the need to fit into the social norms of peers and the potential to take drugs and the desire for money and materials. Money loses its power to control and direct life and becomes a means to a climbing end. A similar realisation was observed by Yakutchik (1995) who considered that 'the arbitrary rules, restrictions and limitations of life at sea level vanish into thin air at higher altitudes' (Yakutchik, 1995, p. 1). Koerner (1997) appreciated that the lack of restrictions in how extreme sports are undertaken also allows for a freedom to develop and explore the boundaries by inventing new versions or tricks to undertake. Shoham et al. (2000) found that even age did not restrict participation. It would seem that those older people who participate in such sports seemed to do so more often than their younger counterparts.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988) whilst exploring his notion of 'flow' observed that climbing reality and real life are different. Where real life is perceived to be about slavery to time, about spurts of action, extrinsic, exotelic, material and oriented towards ends. Climbing reality loses this being controlled by the clock, life becomes process oriented, intrinsic, autotelic and one could even argue without specific use. The essence of flow has been defined as an optimal experience and is to be found in many activities (Jackson, 1995). Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) argument was that climbing provided a good example of flow in action, an experience that leads to higher performance levels and altered states of consciousness. But I shall return to the notion of flow later.

Freedom from gender norms

For Midol and Broyer (1995) the extreme sport experience also provided an experience free from the expectations of gender norms which they noted in their study on snow sports.

First the new status of the body is associated with gender liberation. The movements of the body challenge the traditional notions of tenseness in men and lack of strength in women. The movement is no longer an action of the body on the environment, but the activity of the body/equipment/environment complex characterised by its blurred boundaries. For both men and women, movements are energetic but fluid, gracious, imaginative, fanciful, and full of rhythm (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 208).

Midol and Broyer (1995) maintained that everything about those activities explored was significant in the presumption of gender liberation.

Zones of muscle tension disappear in the happy celebration of a new relationship with the environment. Muscles are just as efficient but less apparent. The bodily attitude is such that these young people appear decided but not voluntary. They surprise by their cool attitude, which suggests they have no immediate goal and are far from the bustle of the work world, although their speed is astonishing once they clip on the boards they call “guns.” Their commitment appears obsessional and their emotional and mental approach explains why their uncontrolled and fun “training” is essentially a solitary affair or one shared with a few (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 208).

Lynn Hill the extreme climber considered that she was ‘not limited by what other people thought a little girl was capable of’ (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 58). Yakutchik (1995) also reflected on similar perceptions about her personal experience of mountaineering.

This is a place where men and women can be both strong and nurturing; where fierce independence walks hand in hand with cooperation. Here I understood what I could not comprehend at sea-level (Yakutchik, 1995, p. 1).

Hamilton (cited in Booth, 2003) considered the ocean as the only place where true equality exists. In his view a wave does not judge the worthiness of who it is to land on.

Thus it could be argued that the extreme sport experience is merely the absence of constraints from a typical perception of what constitutes a normal socio-cultural life (Welser, 1997). Extreme sports become the essence of a free lifestyle not only free from the restrictions of sporting norms and competitive rules but also from the constraints of a wider socio-cultural context such as perceptions on gender norms and ageing. The

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perception that life is work is altered as participants become free from its chains; though paradoxically often work harder at their chosen activity.

Still there is a faint dissenting voice amongst those who discuss the extreme sport experience as freedom. According to Kiewa (2002a; 2002b) in her discussions on climbing, those theorizing from poststructural, post-Marxist or post-modern standpoints would argue that as self is contextually and biologically based then the notion of freedom is no more than delusion. It would seem that such notions are based on societal power relations and freedom from certain institutional practices. Still the implications of Kiewa's (2002a) thesis is that climbing has become a process to allow spontaneity and creativity whilst escaping from an over rationalized and bureaucratic society that has instilled feelings of alienation and constraint. As such, whilst heeding such opinions it is important not to lose track of the experience of participants where their words describe, for example:

... 40 seconds of pure happiness ... I am engulfed with optimism, screaming with the feelings of freedom and liberation. An addictive sensation. Birds feel similarly (Zundar cited in Shoham et al., 2000, p. 1).

For Midol and Broyer (1995) the attraction of the socio-cultural is too strong and they seem unable to resist its pull. That is rather than stop at theorising that participants gain freedom they pose an additional step; that of socio-cultural re-integration. It would seem that extreme sport participants might be the modern version of ancient profits or pioneers. That is certain individuals are ahead of their time and live a life that portrays an acceptance of who they are and a freedom to be who they are. However, rather than stop there Midol and Broyer (1995) proposed that this is done with the sole intention of changing society. Specifically, Midol and Broyer (1995) considered what they called whiz sports (e.g. snowboarding, windsurfing, surfing, flying kilometre) in France. They concluded that such sports were developed through a transitional space.

We believe it is within a transitional space that sports pioneers have had to invent new motor forms, new means of communication, and a new kind of community (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 207).

For example, a group of skiers in France broke away from the traditional approach as if freeing themselves from society's guilt complex. Thus a new type of skiing was born

that searched for pleasure in the 'present moment' (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 207). The assumption being that disparate groups challenge the status quo, practice transgressive behaviours and live new values. Thus rather than being a mode of identity formation the new sport reveals a desire for freedom from 'a societal crisis' (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 207) in a deliberate attempt to change society.

Skiers freed themselves from the guilt complex linked to Christianity in order to invent another culture removed from guilt. This new generation replaced the morality of guilt (born of original sin) by a pleasure-seeking in the present moment, a search for the thrills experienced by athletes as they go faster and higher (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 207).

For some this indicates that the extreme sport experience has just become an anti-Christian icon and no more than a lust for material pleasure (Jordan, 2003). Still in the view of Midol and Broyer (1995) the development of such innovative forms later became absorbed into and transformed the 'established institution' (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 209). Perhaps then, if this argument is accepted, participants are realising a set of values and attributes that society needs to take on board. Still even if Midol and Broyer's (1995) argument is not wholly accepted it might be that a few individuals are just living their lives with freedom and no intention of changing society, but perhaps society can learn from such people. Interestingly a similar perception has been noted for artists who extend the boundaries of normality. That is, those with the gift of being able to explore outside expected boundaries are able to explicate potentialities outside of normal vision even if it is not their goal to do so (Philp, 2001).

In summary, then it seem the mist is lifted the extreme sports person can see the way; the purpose of life becomes personal meaning and not socially imposed constraint (Welser, 1997). The societal emphasis (whether dominant or sub-cultural) on integration, domination, awareness, repression and desire loses its power (Welser, 1998). As Welser (1998) found in his study on climbers, it might be that there is dissatisfaction with norms that are not necessarily unreasonable but not explicitly to move away from something that is inherently bad but because they have found something of greater personal value. The trappings of comfort and security are given up for a life of personal meaning and challenge. Thus life becomes a matter of choice not necessity as determined by the

'they' (Heidegger, 1996) as a person accesses that inner space of being and as I have argued elsewhere this would certainly fit with the perceptions of those participating.

However, whilst all the above experiences may well provide an element of superficial truth the relationship to freedom and the extreme sport experience is perhaps more. Essentially the notion of freedom as proposed so far is an active and deliberate attempt by a participant to free themselves from constraints of a socio-cultural nature. Yet there is a deeper felt sense of deliberate and active freedom that seems to lie beyond the assumption of being free of cultural or societal constraints. This aspect of freedom is recognized as an active physical freedom. A kayaker in this study reflecting on freedom spoke about the importance of accepting responsibility for his own physical life expressed as 'my responsibility is just for my life' (ESP 4); but on deeper reflection also seemed to note a freedom associated with the physical aspect of his chosen activity and environment.

The thought that my life is in someone else's hand would worry me quite a lot but having it in my hands doesn't really feel very special ... I think that what is coming out of this thinking more about my answers as I give them to as you well is that it's very much a way of thinking rather than a sport ... If I'd been a kid who was always jumping off things to try and fly and ended up in paragliding I think I'd be the same person in paragliding but I just love water I don't know why I love water and I've been drawn to water (ESP 4).

For me this quote signifies that not only is the freedom of being deliberately and actively responsible for ones self and actions an essential element, and we shall return to this notion later, but there is also a suggestion that the movement associated with the chosen environment is about an essential freedom.

Olsen also realised such a connection quoting Lynn Hill the extreme climber as observing that not only did she feel the sense of discovery that might be associated with a freedom to challenge herself mentally and emotionally but also a freedom associated with the movements of the activity (Olsen, 2001). Welser (1997) uncovered a similar perception from those climbers who participate in free solo climbing, or climbing without ropes. Specifically, Welser (1997) found that participants observed a sense of freedom of movement not found in other aspects of climbing. That is, the climber was

free to move without physical or equipment constraints. A participant of solo-climbing in this study expressed a similar feeling:

... so I was stuck on my own usually in mid week here in Wales and that's when I started solo climbing and so I really started from necessity really plus it appealed to me but I found out that I had a great delight in doing it I liked the feeling of the freedom of it being up there you know with no paraphernalia no slings or things or ropes and you just move freely (ESP 5).

And a later clarification:

... that sort of freedom was really freedom of movement as opposed to what you'd think as freedom being in the mountains and the wide open spaces (ESP 5).

Welser (1997) established that climbers in his study considered this feeling of being free more intense than other forms of climbing. A similar perception is recognised by other participants, for example a B.A.S.E. jumper maintained:

Again its linked to the freedom thing like if you compare it ... one way to describe it is to compare it to a skydiver when you skydive you're reliant on that plane and you're relying on the pilot and you're stuffed in with a bunch of other people so its anything but peaceful lots of noise lots of umm smells and things like that ... on a B.A.S.E. jump off a beautiful cliff ... again there are no people and there is no wind because you're not going to jump if there is wind so its very very still very quiet and so you can ... you take a few moments to become one with the environment and that's very peaceful like you sometimes sit at the top of cliffs for ages waiting for the right ... waiting for the conditions waiting for the wind to drop and those times there's nothing else to do but be there and be with yourself and be with what you're about to do and you you've taken yourself out of your everyday existence where peace is quite hard to find and put yourself in an environment where it's easy to be peaceful (ESP 8).

For Welser (1997) this more intense feeling of freedom was directly related to a participant being responsible for imminent destiny and physical life. Though from the above quote (ESP 8) there also seem to be relationship to the natural world and the intensity of peace. Still, the experience seems to be one of intensity levels, whereby participants indicate that the felt physical freedom in extreme sports is on a different conscious plane to their less extreme cousins. A plane that requires a deeper focus, a realisation of mortality and the real potentiality of death, active precision and an enhanced awareness of surroundings. In Welser's (1997) study on climbers, the solo climber related this experi-

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ence to an Ultimate Freedom. Thus, it would seem that the freedom experienced might be more than the ability to have free movement but perhaps a bodily feeling of freedom, a point I shall return to a little later.

Freedom, then, has become more than an active and deliberate attempt to un-knot the socio-cultural restraints but also an active and deliberate attempt to experience a physical freedom. Further the suggestion seems to be more than just the ability to physically move but also a kinaesthetic realisation of being free.

Another element to this freedom would seem to be linked to accepting personal responsibility. ESP 1 a B.A.S.E. jumper interviewed during the course of this exploration reflecting on his own experience seemed to echo Welser's (1997) perceptions:

I would have to take TOTAL personal responsibility for my actions too ... there was just me, my physical and mental abilities my training, and "a piece of nylon and string" to save my life ... this satisfied another one of my dreams to be able to exist outside the confines/rules/protection/brain numbing existence that typifies modern society (ESP 1).

Thus it could be argued that freedom is perceived to be more than solely an active and deliberate attempt to be free from the socio-cultural or physically free but also a freedom to accept responsibility for ones own actions and ones own physical destiny. Another B.A.S.E. jumper expressed a similar opinion in that the active and deliberate accepting of responsibility for her own destiny was recognised as a total freedom but more than that this freedom came from letting go of the need to attach experiences to external answers and an acceptance of ones own inner experiences.

I call it defying gravity and I define gravity as all the things that pull you down in life you know everyday living just dealing with ... with everyday life is often a hassle where as B.A.S.E. jumping is very free its very peaceful it's very ... and people call it selfish and it probably is the ultimate ... it's ultimate selfishness because its just you and nobody else can help you so you ... there's no-one else to turn to so you're totally responsible and there's a lot of freedom in that knowledge because you're not looking outside of you for the answers only ... they can only come from inside ... and so that to me is freedom it's ... well there's a couple of things actually there's ... (ESP 8).

And later:

Its linked to that concept of commitment and taking responsibility in doing something that the vast majority of people would never contemplate they would just look at and go **[that's]** nuts ... but the powerful thing about it is that as I mentioned to you before its totally up to you no one can help you and you are taking responsibility for your own life totally its your decision to jump or not jump and you know that's ... umm ... in itself like everyone else around you makes their own decision based on their skill and experience and how they're feeling that day so you decide well if I am yes I am going to jump (ESP 8, **[brackets mine]**).

In the same quote she continued in defining freedom as also a physical expression directly linked to her chosen activity within her chosen environment. Once again the self-reliance is observed.

.... the sensation is a great freedom like you're defying ... you defy Einstein's law of ... and there's a physical sensation in that that's very umm ... that feels very free ... we did one jump at night and that was a ... another time where its like nothing you don't have a filter for that you don't have anything to compare it to you imagine just jumping into blackness ... so the only thing you got to rely on is yourself (ESP 8).

This experience of self-responsibility then relates to being responsible for ones own life in terms of the 'life-death' relationship and also in terms of being-and-accepting-personal-responsibility. In the words of ESP 7:

... you know to accept and handle that responsibility and say yes I will I will find my own meaningfulness and my own fulfilment and you know everybody gets an opportunity but not that many people actually take up the mantle (ESP 7).

Time magazine (Dowell et al., 1999) associated the rising tide of extreme sport participation to a desire to recapture life as it was and be free to push personal boundaries by living life 'closer to the metaphorical edge, where danger, skill, and fear combine' (Dowell et al., 1999, p. 29). The article continued by exploring the notion that socialization desensitizes a person and by undertaking extreme sports a participant is searching their soul to explore personal limitations. By deliberately searching for activities that perhaps human beings 'should' not be theoretically doing a participant gains a freedom from inhibitions and a realization of personal potential.

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For Agiewich (1998) part of the attraction to climbing is the freedom to explore challenges not found elsewhere; to push personal limits and explore new territory. Usher (2000) reported on a record breaking free diver who considered that she would continue to dive until she found her own personal limit. Greenberg (1977) also found the desire to extend personal limits, though this desire to extend limits is balanced by an understanding of ones own personal capabilities and a participant is able to consider all options and turn back if necessary (Terwilliger, 1998).

Brannigan and Mcdougall (1983) contended that personal responsibility included the important element of deciding what is possible to control. In particular the freedom of personal responsibility for ones own choices and destiny is considered an important part of the experience. Kristen Lignell put it this way:

Most people do sports under very controlled conditions. They ski on groomed marked trails. If the weather is bad they stay home. In a sport like mountaineering, you have to deal with many unknown factors at once. The weather can change in matter of minutes. There is no telling how your body will react to the altitude. And most of the unknown factors will be entirely out of your control (Lignell cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 98).

She continued by maintaining that because there are so many elements not within a participant's control, mountaineers have to know a great deal about what they can control. Though as we have seen in chapter IX this link to control should not be confused with controlling the environment but that participants have to know what elements they are able to control and what elements they have to accept as uncontrollable (Olsen, 2001). Gonzales (2003) considered this in terms of flexibility or the ability to make plans but also the ability to let go of the plan if the requirements dictate, nature it would seem is too powerful to attempt to control (ESP 9).

Yeah very important controlling what is happening there everything from the equipment I use right the way through to well I'll exercise as much control as I possibly can with the exception of walking around the parts around the edge of the waterfall to get to the bottom (ESP 4).

Furthermore, this should not be confused with being out of control but more about accepting that certain elements are not within a participant's control. In the study by Celsi et al. (1993) the elements of non-control or the unplanned, unscripted or uncertain ele-

ment of the experience is all important, again not that participants wished to be out of control but more accepting that some experiences have uncertain outcomes. Participants have to know their own abilities and be clear what can be managed as well as accept the non-controllable-uncertainty. In the words of the mountaineer Eric Perlman 'we are designed to experiment or die' (Perlman cited in Dowell et al., 1999, p. 30). For an extreme skier interviewed for this study the feeling seems to be more about straddling the edge of control.

Well like I said when I'm skiing my very best I feel like I'm on the very edge of complete destruction ... like I look totally in control like my skis are just ... like you look at a downhill skier in slow motion and their skis are just wobbling all over the place but they're still hanging on that's when I'm skiing my best ... like how that looks is how I feel (ESP 3).

Todhunter (2000) cited a mountaineer who reported that an important part of the Alpine experience is accepting that there is an element of potentially fatal randomness that cannot be controlled. ESP 4, the extreme kayaker, expressed the feeling as:

... not a feeling of accomplishment but this feeling of freedom more than anything else ... and particularly that I had bitten off more than I could chew almost as soon as I'd done it and I can remember that so often in life that feeling that I really shouldn't have done this and it still happens all the time now when I run waterfalls on the way down I'm thinking I really shouldn't have done this ... I really didn't need to learn this lesson (ESP 4).

To clarify this point for ESP 4 the experience was not about just seeing what happens but a managed non-control. Thus the aspect of control seems to be one of controlling what can be controlled and accepting, understanding and perhaps even surrendering to the experience. Gonzales (2003) observed similar experiences and described them as a release of the desire to predict and anticipate and the ability to watch, be clear and calm and act decisively to stimuli.

No that's not really how I lead my life to see what happens I like to have a good knowledge of or a good idea of what is gonna happen before it actually does I wouldn't throw myself off a waterfall to see if I'd come out at the bottom I do believe I can get out of the bottom of it but not a hundred percent there's always that nagging doubt probably more of the nagging doubt than there should be I sometimes wish I had a more positive mental attitude because it wouldn't make any difference to whether I ran the fall or I didn't but I'd like to feel positive on the way down rather than feeling negative But I also feel that I like the attitude

really of almost putting out fires that way of living your life that you deal with what goes wrong rather than living life in such a structured way that you know exactly what is going to happen and nothing does go wrong and if I'm running a fall and I hit a rock I like to bounce off the rock and the boat will spin around and I know that I'm dealing with something then I'm dealing with a situation I think I feel thinking about it now I feel that I'm bringing the control back into my court when something has gone wrong I can deal with the thing that is going wrong rather than when things are going right I feel that I'm going with the flow of the waterfall and it's letting me out at the bottom and I'm still in the hands of the waterfall it's going along with me if it then does something that messes up my plan I can deal with that because in this kind of flow diagram way okay well if the boat went slightly to the left of that rock and I wanted it to go right having gone left what are my choices spin to backwards and run the rest of the fall backwards or try and go back to straight and go even further to the left that kind of thing and I can deal with that very fast mechanical thinking on the way down a fall but while I'm just floating down there thinking what is the waterfall doing with me I feel a little bit out of control just because I'm not doing anything the water is taking me really so it's not to see what happens but just certain maybe five percent of me feels that I don't actually know what is going to happen (ESP 4).

Thus in an instant ESP 4 is able to 'mechanically think' and carry out actions on the way down the waterfall, perhaps akin to what others have described as an ability to take in more, but we shall return to this point in the following chapter. Returning to ESP 4's experience, he often spoke about the paradox of both being in control and not in control at one point he noted the turning point being as soon as he leaves the eddy there is an intense feeling of the reality of non-control over his own death.

I'm sitting at the top and the final goodbye is said and the last person walks away from the top of the fall I quite often at that stage stop talking to people completely even if they're standing next to me talking and saying "I've got quite a crowd gathered here today" or something like that I can hear the sounds but they couldn't ask me anything about what they're saying because I'm totally inside this kind of almost like going over in a barrel for me it feels like my only job is to get out of the bottom of the waterfall alive and that's the real turning point it's like this last person walks out the last person I have any responsibility to walks away from me and closes the door behind them and I'm on the river and I'm part of my kayak and I'm so happy that I've spent all the time designing that equipment and getting it all exactly how I want it everything fits perfectly I've got all the wrinkles out of my wetsuit before I sat in the boat that kind of thing and that's totally focussed on the only thing I have to do is to survive and then the arm goes down the signal to leave the eddy current and that's quite an amazing turning point because that's the last point at which I can never do it but that's the last point at which you could say no if I am going to die that was the last time that I had any control over it and it's a very very strange feeling to break out of that eddy current (ESP 4).

Rosenblatt (1999) considered the case of B.A.S.E. jumpers and noted a strong resemblance to the freedom to step to the edge and leap off as if free to undertake the impossible, not just to fly as a bird but step into the abyss. Addison (2003) also noted similar connotations with ‘reaching over the edge’ (Addison, 2003, p. 3) and ‘into the abyss’ (Addison, 2003, p. 3). A similar consideration was observed by Greenberg (1977). A Time cover story (1999) determined that such an experience acts as a metaphor for leaping into the void, of being ‘closer to the metaphorical edge’ (Dowell et al., 1999, p. 3). Still, Rosenblatt (1999) also noted that ‘routine phrases such as “living on the edge” and “pushing the envelope”’ (Rosenblatt, 1999, p. 95) perhaps only really demonstrates that the everyday experience is limited and constrained.

Watters (2003) an extreme kayaker respected the importance of the experience being real enough to kill and wrote:

It is moments like these when the metaphor *on the thin edge* seems particularly apt. Teetering on an edge or walking a fine line are visual images that give shape or form to the abstract quality of sports in which the element of risk of bodily harm separates it from other endeavours: a climber delicately perching on the edge of the cliff with the abyss looming below, a circus performer balancing on a high wire without a safety net-and, yes, a kayaker caught precariously in a vicious hole in the midst of a raging rapid (Watters, 2003, p. 258).

Still freedom in the extreme sport experience could be considered even further perhaps a freedom that is at once socio-cultural, physical, emotional and mental as epitomised by the following reflections from an extreme skier:

... you feel so free out there, You don’t worry about anything, you don’t think about the bills you've got to pay or your life problems, you **[are]** just kind of free of thought. That's kind of what makes it all worthwhile, just for that whatever, five minutes of freedom (Binning cited in McCallum, 2001, [brackets mine]).

For me this quote emphasizes that whilst in the ‘active stage’ of the extreme sport experience this participant felt free from all thoughts and anxieties or fears and also experienced a physical freedom, perhaps even connotations of surrendering to the ex-

perience. By this I do not intend to mean a submission or fateful acceptance but more akin to a deliberate relaxation into the experience.

Freedom as mental quietness

Terwilliger (1998) found that participants reported a freedom from everyday thoughts and quoted a diver who specified that the focus required whilst undertaking an extreme sport leaves no room for any other thoughts (Terwilliger, 1998).

On the one hand, it put a tremendous amount of stress on you, because you couldn't make a mistake. But because you were so focused on doing what you were doing, everything else goes away ... you're doing something so primal, your focus is just getting there and back alive (Cush cited in Terwilliger, 1998, p. 3).

Richardson (2001a) quoted the extreme kayaker, Corran Addison, who maintained that when kayaking waterfalls his focus is so intensely on the route that he intends to follow that all other thoughts are excluded. Agiewich (1998) a climber noted that 'everything disappears from consciousness except the nubbin of rock' (Agiewich, 1998, p. 1). Lynn Hill another extreme climber (cited in Olsen, 2001) also stated that the focus required to climb extreme climbs frees a participant from thoughts about other aspects of life. Scott (2003) described the experience as a calmness that results from climbing beyond ego. A climbing participant interviewed in the process of this study reflected that the intensity forced such a complete level of concentration.

... so that you really had to concentrate then you'd lose track of other things (ESP 6).

Celsi et al. (1993) quoted similar feelings of freedom in parachute participants who experienced a mental release from everything except the experience of flying. A state of complete relaxation where nothing else used up mental capacity and participants spoke about floating or lying on a cushion of air. Guy Cotter, an Everest guide, compared mountaineering to meditation in that everything else is stripped away except the focus on the task in hand (Spence, 2001). Such a comparison has also been observed by others where participants move into non-normal tranquil states (Dowell et al., 1999; Schultheis, 1996; Welser, 1997). For Todhunter (2000) this is akin to letting go of the need to think or control and climbing in a thoughtless state of mind. For ESP 9 such a freedom

was likened to freedom of the mind akin to meditation. Still, as I shall note in the following chapter, such a focus should not be confused with tunnel vision or a narrow state of focus, merely that the focus required frees the mind from unnecessary mental activity.

Freedom as the release of fear

Reflecting back to chapter VII, on fear, Addison (2003) the extreme kayaker was clear that intense fear was experienced in the lead up to kayaking over a waterfall. Specifically he noted his own experiences of almost paralyzing fear that precedes a waterfall undertaking. However, when he accepted that kayaking the waterfall was theoretically possible the power of fear seemed to drop away. For Addison (2003) there seems to be a point where as soon as the decision is made and the first stroke takes him from the safety of the eddy to paddle the waterfall the fear just vanishes:

And while the fear remains, when I finally look up, ready to take that first stroke, it simply vanishes. It must be gone so that the body is loose and can function efficiently, quickly and naturally (Addison, 2003, p. 1).

Stipech (2003) noted that fear is transcended when participation takes place even though fear is initially intense. Thus fear loses its power. For Stipech though it is the fear of fear that is overcome but necessarily by action. That is it is only through action and the deliberate approach of fears that transcendence happens and the power of fear is depleted. That is not to say that fear is no longer felt just that its power to restrain is removed and a participant becomes free from its chains. Samet (2002), when writing about the solo climber Tim Wagner, reported that whilst Wagner admitted ‘to being “so gripped that I had to get up and shit at 5 a.m. every day” while on a difficult wall route’ (Wagner cited in Samet, 2002, p. 5), he was utterly calm whilst participating. Garrison (Garrison & Dallison, 1975) related similar experiences where fear vanished as he stepped into space and in its place was clarity and feelings of being alive and free. Genereaux (2002) also experienced a relaxation from fear whilst solo climbing.

Todhunter (2000) quoted an extreme kayaker as feeling an intense fear that almost absorbs him. Yet it disappears on activity:

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Fear mounts and swallows him in a rush. He falls into his fear and soon wants nothing more than to let the paddle slip from his fingers, lower his head into his hands and, and close his eyes. He will stop paddling and disappear beneath the surface of the waves. At the very bottom of his fear his mind grows quiet. He cannot hear the wind or feel the spray against his face. He feels nothing but a blessed warmth (Todhunter, 2000, p. 34).

Still this almost automatic freedom from fear may not be the whole story as for some the experience requires an active process to relax from fear (Todhunter, 2000). Rogers (1996) described the inner struggle with fear before climbing a mountain she described as a metaphor for her life. For ESP 2 such a deliberate attempt to relax from fear also results in a feeling of relaxation:

... the trick I think is to be able to control the fears and then if you've got full control over that then you don't feel hyped up with adrenalin but that's why you are feeling relaxed (ESP2).

For ESP 4 the background feeling of fear experienced as respect for the power of a waterfall does not completely disappear until he reaches the bottom. Still even with this background feeling he describes being relaxed and ready. For ESP 8 the experience is described as:

... you know we learn all these complex systems of fear as we get older and that's part of society's rules and so the real reward of doing something like B.A.S.E. jumping which initially you fear like it's scary ... the real reward ... personal reward is overcoming that fear going right through it and turning it into elation like turning it into this incredibly exhilarating experience this absolute ... celebration of you know of living (ESP 8).

In this instance freedom from the effects of fear seems to be also about going through fear and into elation. ESP 5 contended that as the moves required to climb at any level are the same the only difference to soloing at high levels is the ability to control the fear. Thus the challenge was an inner challenge and moving through the fear described as a feeling of well-being. For ESP 5 once positive action is taken negativity disappears. For ESP 8 the relationship to freedom, fear and the activity was described in the following way

... comes back to pushing yourself physically past what you thought you could do to even get to the top and then to be able to stand at the top and just with a lit-

tle rig on with one single parachute on it and to look at all of your fears as one particular ... as you know umm ... represented by one fear which is the fear of dying and to be able to just act regardless of those fears ... is umm ... is well its very powerful but all of a sudden you see well you're not this body you're not these thoughts and you're not part of you that's constantly chattering away to you about the things you can't do you're none of those things you're so much more than that (ESP 8).

And a later clarification:

... everything else is stripped away so we don't have any of the things that distract us and we don't have ... it just comes down to your ability to keep going and your will to do and ... when you continue to drive yourself past the point where you thought you could not physically take one more step or go any further or you're terrified but you keep going then all of a sudden you know the world keeps getting bigger because your possibilities are bigger because you taught yourself that those ... you know those absolutes that you were putting on yourself were not absolutes at all ... they were just false yeah ... it's a false feeling you know the fact that we think we're bound by ... by a particular area and we're not really but you can't get that on an intellectual level I don't think you've got to get ... well who knows ... but for me it's a combination ... of the place you know you can go really incredibly special places B.A.S.E. jumping where people don't even visit generally because people just don't go there ... only birds go there ... and if they happen to be special wilderness places well that's all the more awesome and then to get there you have to push yourself very hard physically and then to step off you have to let go for an instant of your attachment to everything your attachment to your life your attachment to things you just have to let go of that (ESP 8).

A similar perception about letting go was recognised by the solo climber and B.A.S.E. jumper ESP 5:

... the greatest fear comes the night before when my mind is in overdrive but I seem to be very calm when it actually comes to do it because there seems to be like an inner turmoil where one part of my mind says "don't do this it's crazy you might kill yourself" and the other part says "no I'm gonna do it" and it seems to me that's when the half that's trying to the part of me that's trying to keep me alive gives up and says "well you are gonna do it anyway" and it more or less joins forces with the other side to keep me calm because subconsciously you probably realize that's the way you are gonna do it as safely as possible (ESP 5).

A comparable joining of inner forces was also recognized by Gonzales (2003) in his thesis on survival experiences. That is Gonzales (2003) reported survivors experiences of intellect and emotion working together to ensure effective disaster management.

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For another participant the experience of freedom was summarized as:

You get back to the basics of life, it's about your own survival, none of the other stuff exists. It's not about putting yourself near death, I do everything possible to write death out of the equation – it's not the kind of liberty you get from cheating death – that's missing the point completely. It's about stripping all the crap off life and getting to the source – just being alive, only that, all of that, for a few moments. It just so happens that the purest moments in life are when you are very close to death, it's unfortunate that this is the case really, because it's easy to think that it's a suicide trip and sure, dying is an unfortunate by-product for some people who do this sport.

But when you're there, and you're in that moment with things so pure and simple and everything is about your survival and your experience it's almost to the point where it becomes a spiritual moment. I don't mean it in a religious sense, but a spiritual moment where everything is pure. For that moment, for those few seconds it makes everything else worthwhile (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

Later the same individual spoke about the few seconds of freefall being about 'diving into a few seconds that are a culmination of everything' (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b), and an experiential realization that nothing else mattered except the fact that he was alive.

Thus it seems that participants reach a state that is akin to letting go of the security of attachments, perhaps even to life itself, and the desire to maintain physical, mental and emotional control, specifically mental activity and fear. Perhaps this is what is meant when participants talk about the experience being 'relaxing' (Todhunter, 2000).

In summary then an element of the extreme sport experience is freedom from socio-cultural control. On a closer inspection of this type of freedom it would seem that it can also be seen as a freedom to be responsible for ones own destiny. That is the experience of freedom is reportedly both a negative experience of being-free-from and a positive experience of being-free-to. Beyond the socio-cultural is a freedom that is at once physical, emotional and mental. It seems that whilst the socio-cultural might reflect an active desire to move towards a becoming-free, the active aspect of the experience requires a high degree of specific focus that becomes a being-free. Participants speak about being physically free to move, mentally free from unwanted noise and free from the chains of fear, often considered to be a total relaxation. A freedom that is seemingly

about letting go, of finally surrendering the need to control and experiencing the experience.

Thus the obvious question must be how does such a freedom manifest itself in the thoughts and experiences of those theorizing on the subject of freedom? On first glance freedom has had an enormous following by those positing aspects of humanity and as such freedom in one form or other has been ‘discovered’ and presented in such topics as sociology, education, cultural discourse, psychology and philosophy to name but a few. However, the point here is not to concern ourselves with a deep journey into the critical mass of freedom but to explore the notion of freedom in an attempt to elucidate the experiences of those experiencing the extreme sport experience. Thus the following sections follow a similar path to other chapters by exploring how phenomenology and other works understand a specific element of freedom and relating the findings to the words of participants.

A phenomenological perspective

Sartre’s (1956) human-centric philosophy determined that to be human is to be wholly free in that each of us is able to choose or make our own self. In other words, Sartre (1956) concluded that human nature is not directed by an inner voice, Being, or if you like ghostly soul nor is it determined by external influences but by our own free choice; human beings make themselves what they are (Raynova, 2002). In the words of Sartre ‘human reality can not receive its ends, as we have seen, either from outside or from a so-called inner “nature.” It chooses them’ (Sartre, 1956, p. 443). For Sartre then, the essence seems to be that to be human is to be free but not just as freedom in doing, perhaps as self-determination, choice or agency but also as freedom in being or the choice to be who we are.

Sartre (1956) even perceived that limits on a ‘person’s’ freedom are in themselves not limitations but result from being free:

The only limits which freedom bumps up against at each moment are those which it imposes on itself and of which we have spoken in connection with the past, with the environment, and with techniques (Sartre, 1956, p. 531).

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That is Sartre also noted the implication of an immense responsibility including the responsibility for one's life and one's death. Thus to be human is to have unlimited freedom and as such no imposed direction or security (Zaborowski, 2000). As Sartre determined even not to choose is to choose (Zaborowski, 2000). The realisation or awareness of such freedom is also considered overwhelming as with it, a person becomes aware of the reality of infinite responsibility and the knowledge that any decision would logically exclude the actualization of all other potentialities (Zaborowski, 2000). Still, the essence of Sartrean freedom was, at one stage in his thought, essentially a total freedom and awareness of such a freedom often sudden and perhaps akin to a mystical experience (Zaborowski, 2000). Perhaps as best voiced through his character Orestes (Sartre, 1976, 1981):

Suddenly, out of the blue, freedom crashed down on me and swept me off my feet. Nature sprang back, my youth went with the wind, and I knew myself alone, utterly alone in the midst of this well-meaning little universe of yours. I was like a man who's lost his shadow. And there was nothing left in heaven, no Right or Wrong, nor anyone to give me orders (Sartre, 1981, p. 310).

According to Golomb (2002) there is a fundamental connection to freedom and authenticity in Sartre's early work; 'freedom = consciousness and authenticity' (Golomb, 2002, p. 335). Thus authenticity and consciousness combine to create freedom. The point being made is that freedom as a Sartrean phenomenological consideration does have a place in the discussion on the extreme sport experience. Certainly the first, freedom as doing, would seem to fit with the experiences as reported to an extent that a participant's search for a freedom to do with their lives as they wish, a life lived under total personal responsibility.

Nevertheless, Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness' philosophy on freedom is not assumed by all who propose freedom in phenomenology, for some this view is too extreme and even Sartre reportedly reviewed his position in later writings (Zaborowski, 2000). The stumbling block seemed to be related to the struggle between freedom and responsibility. For, as Zaborowski (2000) noted if responsibility reigns supreme over freedom then freedom is already limited. Still the aim of this section is to draw attention to phenomenology and freedom as a route to exploring the extreme sport experience. Thus whilst the terrible reality of the potential for death is a total personal responsibility assumed as

part of the extreme sport experience, responsibility does not seem to be experienced as infinite.

Merleau-Ponty (1999) recognised the Sartrean extreme view on freedom as limited in essence by a person's embodied abilities. Thus he rejected certain elements of Sartrean freedom whilst accepting the fundamentals of the pre-reflective and the body (Raynova, 2002). Dreyfus (1996) pointed out that Merleau-Ponty's focus on embodiment has two distinct phases. The first relates to 'innate structures, basic general skills, and cultural skills' (Dreyfus, 1996, p. 1), the second to motivation. In the first phase the innate structure and general skills relate to our 'physicalness:'

On the first understanding, embodiment refers to the actual shape and innate capacities of the human body - that it has arms and legs, a certain size, certain abilities (Dreyfus, 1996, p. 1).

How we live these concepts in a cultural environment is what is meant by cultural skills (Dreyfus, 1996). Thus Merleau-Ponty (1999) highlighted an error in the Sartrean extreme view of freedom. That is freedom is limited by our physical capacities.

That mountains are tall for us, and that where they are passable and where not is not up to us but is a function of our embodied capacities. That the shape and physical capacities of the body is reflected in what we see is a powerful argument against Sartre's over-estimation of human freedom (Dreyfus, 1996, p. 1).

Still the point is to discuss freedom and from Merleau-Ponty another element of freedom is noted, that of freedom related to physical action. For Merleau-Ponty (1999) freedom is still considered to be an element of human nature but perhaps limited by certain embodied realities. Once again there seems to be some correlation to the extreme sport experience, though perhaps for some the embodied freedom is about extending perceived limitations on physical freedom. Still, for this to be so we would expect participants to experience physical potentials beyond those experienced elsewhere, and I shall return to this notion in the following chapter. For now though it is worth noting Merleau-Ponty's (1999) notion that:

We all know the moment at which we decide no longer to endure pain or fatigue, and when, simultaneously, they become intolerable in fact. Tiredness does not

halt my companion, because he likes the clamminess of his body, the heat of the road and the sun, in short, because he likes to feel himself in the midst of things, to feel their rays converging upon him, to be cynosure of all this light, and an object of touch for the earth's crust. My own fatigue brings me to a halt because I dislike it, because I have chosen differently my manner of being in the world, because for instance, I endeavour not to be in nature, but rather to win the recognition of others (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 441).

Still as has been mentioned by participants, choosing to extend such self-imposed physical limitations has additional, unexpected potentialities. This of course brings the story neatly to Merleau-Ponty's second notion - that of motivation (Dreyfus, 1996). Dreyfus pointed out that a true skilful action does not require 'thought' or goals to act and that in certain situations thoughtless action equates to more effective motion. For Dreyfus then 'one does not need a goal or intention to act. One's body is simply solicited by the situation to get into equilibrium with it' (Dreyfus, 1996, p. 5). Dreyfus theorised that the motion might be akin to flow as experienced by athletes, a flow that does not attempt to control. Thus the motion or action is purposeful without a person entertaining a purpose for the action (Dreyfus, 1996). Perhaps here we have a notion of what happens in the extreme sport experience. Still the perceptions of those participating seem to be that action in such an experience requires a focus that triggers a freedom from thought and the negative influence of fear.

Merleau-Ponty (1999) then recognised that action does not necessarily require thought or even cognitive structure. That is action does not necessarily require a predetermined memory for how-to-act (Dreyfus, 1996) - and as we shall see in the following chapter experiences are claimed to be outside of comparison - still even this realisation seems limited in exploring the freedom from thought as a function of the extreme sport experience as such a thoughtless action is to be found in all skilful action, whether extreme or not. Skilful action may not require thought but how does this relate to the extreme sport experience seemingly forcing a freedom from thought and from fear? A freedom experienced as commitment to - or perhaps as consciously letting go or surrendering to - the action or the potential outcomes of the action. That is whether focusing on the extreme freedom of Sartre or the freedom of Merleau-Ponty the understanding seems to be that of freedom as action, however, an important element of the extreme sport experience is freedom as experience or non-action. That is the action of undertaking an extreme sport, once committed to, seems to open the door for another type of freedom.

Hegel (cited in Franco, 1999) reportedly considered human freedom as central to philosophical thought. For Hegel freedom is related to self-determination and self-dependence and the positive relationship to nature, otherness and the world considered in terms of free will (Franco, 1999). Thus freedom, in Hegel's view, is 'being at home with oneself in one's other, depending upon oneself, and being one's own determinant' (Hegel, 1999, para 24). Franco (1999) observed that for Hegel freedom was essentially free thought that directed a practical (as opposed to merely theoretical) existence. Freedom, then, is the thinking and representing aspect of thought that is considered to be the element that distinguishes human representation of desires from animal instinctual acts (Franco, 1999). Hegel's concept of freedom then encourages a perception that freedom liberates a person from their biological nature and reflects one's own authentic nature. Perhaps this might add to our exploration for freedom in that the experience entails liberation from those primal or natural fears that might otherwise stop participation. However, it would seem that the experience of freedom as non-thought and relaxation from fear still presents a quandary.

Ricoeur (1966) also contribute scholarship to the notion of human freedom. For Ricoeur the structure of Human freedom is freedom as choice, freedom as movement and freedom as consent. Thus freedom is also seen to be freedom as action of 'some kind', though for Ricoeur (1996) action can be considered in terms of a decision, a movement that confirms my freedom and also importantly 'a consent' to carry out such a freedom. From Ricoeur (1966) we learn that freedom entails an awareness that a person is free to choose their own destiny but what prevents the realisation of each person's freedom is fear, perhaps fear of death but more specifically fear of being an individual (Ricoeur, 1966). For Dante (cited in Took, 2000) freedom also seems to be a freedom for a certain action described as free will.

Heidegger also considered freedom, not only in some of his early lectures but also as the fundamental root to 'Being and Time' (McNeill, 2003; Nichols, 2000). Heidegger posited a positive freedom in that he considered freedom to be more than just the absence of constraint or freedom-from. In Heidegger's terms authentic Dasein is freedom for grasping and choosing itself. Thus freedom is determined as:

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Dasein's authentic potentiality for being, a potentiality which reveals the being of beings as they are "in themselves", including both innerworldly beings and Dasein itself (Nichols, 2000, p.14).

Freedom entails being free from the 'they' and accepting the reality of the abyss, of being free for one's own death. Thus, freedom is once again thought to be more than being free to do what one wants but about choice based on a primordial freedom. For Heidegger such a common ordinary freedom is only possible if the primordial freedom or the connection to or '*revealing* of historically "grounded" truth' (Nichols, 2000, p. 14) is first experienced. Without such an intimate connection negative freedom is at best enslavement and at worst dangerous (Nichols, 2000). Perhaps then the extreme sport experience enables a perception of 'truth' as primordial freedom leading to a positive freedom as choice?

Still, even with Heidegger's view on freedom it would seem that phenomenology as philosophy has focused on a positive freedom as freedom-for or freedom-to action perhaps revealing itself in choice. That is whether one follows the extreme freedom of Sartre or the bodily freedom of Merleau-Ponty or even the self-determined freedom of Hegel the underlying concept is that freedom indicates action. Yet as I have noted reports from participants also indicate a freedom-in-action or to put it in other words a freedom that seems to be born from the 'freedom-as' or 'freedom-for'. A freedom that entails a thoughtlessness and deep relaxation of fears that does not seem to result from conscious will or action but seems to be experienced as letting go or surrendering the need to have conscious will or action. The question must be how is such a freedom to be considered? If indeed the phenomenological perceptions of human freedom do not consider it as an essence of freedom.

As I briefly noted in previous chapters Heidegger in his later writings seemed to minimise the wilful approach to authenticity and focused on an experience he termed 'releasement' (Zimmerman, 1986). The suggestion being that far from striving to authenticity as if desiring self-actualisation a person is almost released from self-willing. In this instance it would seem that a releasement from representational thought also takes place and the phenomenological explorer becomes open to the experience in question. Still as Zimmerman (1986) noted such a state cannot be willed, it is beyond activity and passivity; it would seem that humility and patience are required. As a meta-

phorical example the subject person used the environment for her/his own purpose where as the released person 'regards the earth as a source of life; hence, in tilling it he takes care that the earth remains fertile and healthy' (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 247). Interestingly such an experience has also been described as an essential phase of the *époche* (Depraz et al., 1999). Perhaps this is analogous to the freedom from thought as described by those experiencing the extreme sport experience.

Still, if this is so then participants might be expected to experience a form of non-duality where self disappears, a feeling of home-coming or becoming what they already are. Those who touch this realm are the venturous that 'catch the scent of death' (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 250), 'let their own emptiness be revealed' (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 250) and gain fulfilment through self-renunciation. For Caputo (1978), the experience can be a type of calm felt when facing the 'terror of the abyss' (Caputo, 1978, p. 247). By experiencing the void of terror that is death a person is able to step back and know what is and can be. Such an experience results from courage, not of willing 'but a letting be' (Zimmerman, 1986, p. 250). As Hanna (1993b) noted in later Heidegger this notion of letting be was central to his notion of freedom. Barnes (2003) described similar experiences of inner peace and quietness of mind in deep meditative states.

Perspectives from the wisdom traditions

One set of philosophies that do explore the concept of inner peace from thought and emotions are such Eastern Philosophies as Buddhism, Zen, Taoism and Hinduism. In Zen freedom is not that which can be granted by a social system it must be obtained by direct experience (Cleary, 1989). One of the states identified by Zen is an inner calm, no-mind or empty mind often termed as letting go or surrendering of all thoughts and rational thinking (Enomiya-Lasalle, 1995). No mind is defined by a state of not 'knowing' what is happening (Nordstrom, 1980). For Watts (1982) such a state is reached when attachment to security and certainty has been let go. Only then will one experience mental calm (Barendregt, 1988), where intuition tends to be more effective and a feeling as if one is walking on air (Watts, 1982).

Osho's (1994) discourses on the Upanishad philosophies of Hinduism reveal that freedom as being free from thoughts and emotional negativities comes only when the

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rational side of humanness is surrendered and the person lets go of attachment to self. In this way one is able to explore ones true nature. The process seems to be that as one ceases to control the doing aspect of humanness so anxieties cease followed by the cessation of desires or thoughts.

Buddhism also speaks about an experience of no-thought and the quietness of mind that includes a release of fears and mental activity (Humphreys, 1996).

The simile of a 'break-through' implies a mind self-fettered with its own past thought and feeling, which beats upon a wall created by such thinking, and strives to break through the wall to the realm of Non-duality. In the West, the strongest of these fetters, the most unyielding concept, is the illusion that thought, however strong or clear, can of itself directly *know* the Truth, as distinct from learning more and more about it. It cannot (Humphreys, 1996, no page provided).

Humphreys's (1996) understanding suggests that knowing is an experience beyond thought and feeling. For Humphreys (1996) to know experiences such as those described by extreme sport participants one must let go of attachment to the 'ego' or thinking self. The dropping of such a 'self' expands the mind and opens one up to be free to experience (as distinct from create) our own potentiality of being (Humphreys, 1996). Freedom in Buddhism can be considered as four levels where reaching the fourth level (Nirvana) is the ultimate. Freedom as elimination of fear is level three (Barendregt, 1996). Trungpa (1976) describes the concept with a metaphor pointing to the doing beyond the thinking that seems appropriate to this study:

Skilful means is the confidence to step up to the edge of a cliff and power is the confidence to leap. It seems to be a very daring decision, but since there is no reference point, it is an extraordinarily ordinary situation; you simply do it. In a sense, it is much easier than self-consciously making a cup of tea (Trungpa, 1976, p. 122).

Trungpa (1976) continued his discourse on freedom by exploring the importance of aloneness, a fundamental element to the extreme sport experience, and determined that 'aloneness is freedom, fundamental freedom' (Trungpa, 1976, p. 151). Though Trungpa (1976) extended the concept of aloneness beyond the letting go of psychological and physical entertainment of the moment, perhaps such a view presents one more piece of

the descriptive puzzle, one more piece of the map that peeks into the essence of the extreme sport experience?

If you would attain the realization of transcendent mind and non-action,
Then cut the root of mind and let consciousness remain naked.
Let the polluted waters of mental activities clear.
Do not seek to stop projections; but let them come to rest of themselves.
If there is no rejecting or accepting, then you are liberated in the mahumudra.

When trees grow leaves and branches,
If you cut the roots, the many leaves and branches wither.
Likewise, if you cut the root of mind,
The various mental activities will subside (Trungpa, 1976, p. 158).

Epstein (1998) noted that apart from those process recommended in Buddhism the type of experiences that might enable a peek into such freedoms include being close to death. For Epstein (1998) fear of letting go often resulting from a lack of self-trust prevents the realisation of such experiences. In adulthood it is only by rediscovering the ability to lose oneself that such a freedom can be experienced. When these experiences are realised they often involve feelings of floating and the dissolution of self but as Epstein (1998) noted this is not a feeling of chaos. Still if these arguments are to be considered then participants might well report experiences beyond the everyday, different concepts of space and time, different states of awareness.

Further discourses

Over the years much has been written about the socio-political experiences of freedom and the connection to human development (Fromm, 1942; Sen, 1999). At first glance philosophy focuses on freedom as responsibility and freedom to create our being. For example Nietzsche (1974) considered freedom to be linked to the power that each of us has for defining our own destiny and as such linked to responsibility and conscience (Zaborowski, 2000). However, as my thesis has shown that freedom in the extreme sport experience is beyond the socio-political it is perhaps most appropriate to focus on this less well described phenomenon. Watts (2003) for one noted a conscious state that involved a mind 'free from wandering words and from the floating fantasies of memory' (Watts, 2003, p. 15). By attaining such a mental state a person might take a glimpse of 'reality.' Still for Watts (2003) the key to attaining this state of concentration is in the doing, however, 'thinking-about-doing' or 'thinking-about' freeing ones mind from

thought is inevitably counterproductive, it seems that the focus should just be doing itself. Perhaps then the extreme sport experience by its very nature enables such a state of relaxed focus?

Wilber (1993) another Western philosopher-psychologist who has explored alternative perspectives also opened up dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophy in an attempt to understand human consciousness. Wilber determined that to know through thought limits that which can be known. Wilber (1993) wrote about the integration of mind and body and the expansion of ego to a level he described as the total organism or Centaur. By integrating the mind-body dualism one is able to move into a deeper sense of consciousness and experience and into what he described as soul. At this point a person experiences a deep sense of infinite freedom (Wilber, 2000). Perhaps it is extending the point too far to claim that extreme sport participants experience infinite freedom, however, the journey to such a point transcends the social and political freedoms and includes a peek into states whereby a person experiences thoughtlessness on the journey to appreciating pure Mind. According to Took (2000) Dante also recognised that living in authenticity triggers peace and an exhilaration that results in intense joy; an experience that includes a brief sojourn from the ties of fear. That is whilst even the authentic being experiences fear, fear does not become a self inflicted prison.

Thus Wilber (1977) noted a state whereby thought is prevented from forming. Perhaps it is this type of thoughtlessness that extreme sport participants report. Still for this state to be reached the indication is that participants would be living with full attention on the experience, living in the present and fully integrated with their experiences. Most often such a state is reached by intense inward focus. Perhaps then the experiences that I have presented in this chapter might be one route to quietening the mind as determined by those philosophers describing the journey to inner peace. Still if this is so then participants should also describe what Wilber (1977) observed as ‘a state of crystal, vigilant alertness, of intense but relaxed attention’ (Wilber, 1977, p. 314) and we shall return to explore these notions in the following chapter.

Gonzales (2003) noted that many primal cultures have organised experiences that aim to ‘switch off’ cognition or thought. Examples included the Native American vision quest. For Gonzales (2003) such experiences not only provide confidence in a persons ability

to survive but also releases the strangle hold of cognition and enables a person to realise unexpected physical abilities as if experiencing an innate 'animalness.' Thus, participants might well report such experiences of altered awareness and ability.

Summary

It would seem that an essential piece of the extreme sport jigsaw of experience is freedom, a freedom that is at once negative and positive. As a negative freedom, freedom is described as a freedom from social, cultural and other elements that determine a participant's life. However, more than this the freedom described is also a positive freedom in that participants describe being free to accept personal responsibility. In this positive form freedom is mental and physical encompassing the notions of movement and desires. For the most part the phenomenological descriptions of those exploring freedom in human nature can be amassed to satisfactorily describe freedom.

However, there does seem to be another type of freedom, one that equates to freedom from thought and fear and for this freedom to be explored we have had to turn to those philosophies and philosophers that explore those realms of consciousness beyond those traditionally considered rational. A consciousness that might indicate the extreme sport experience touches realms of human existence beyond that experienced in every-day-living. Still we have only just started to scratch the surface of such experiences and to explore these notions further I invite you to continue this journey into the extreme sport experience by evoking the ineffable.

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XI

Evoking the Ineffable

More than once when I
Sat all alone, revolving in myself,
The mortal limit of the self was loosed,
And passed into the nameless, as a cloud
Melts into heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange, not mine---and yet no shade of doubt
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self
The gain of such large life as matched with ours
Were sun to spark---unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world.

(Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1991, p. 328)

In the previous section and the preceding chapters in this section I have explored the extreme sport experience through the words of others; through poets, writers, participant accounts and interviews. Each chapter has been undertaken akin to a funnel that starts broadly and refines the experienced experience and then flows out into a broader discussion on perceptions that might help explore the extreme sport experience. The intention of this chapter is in its essence no different. Once again I will delve deeper into the experience through interview transcripts, the published words of participants in extreme sports and other works that might shed light on the extreme sports phenomenon.

However before venturing into this valuable source of information a deeper clarification is required. As is indicated by this chapter's heading I will claim that certain elements of the extreme sport experience are ineffable. Inevitably such a claim introduces the possibility that certain aspects of the extreme sport experience might be too great or sacred

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for words; are essentially ‘unutterable.’ Such a claim might also suggest that the extreme sport experience is more than that, as Dienske (2000) writing on phenomenology and the ineffable for the journal ‘Phenomenology and Pedagogy’ observed:

... the ineffable is more than the absence and the impossibility of linguistic utterance. It is an entity, an experiential fact which manifests itself in a variety of ways (Dienske, 2000, p. 1).

That is, as darkness is an event in itself and not merely the absence of light, the ineffable is also its own entity.

In many ways the ineffable fills our everyday bodily experiences with ‘tacit rich knowledge’ (Murray, 1975, p. 78). The experience of dance, for example, has been referred to by participants in previous chapters, yet without our own experience of dance and the appreciation of both the internal and external understandings, dance might become just an empty movement. As Dienske (2000) pointed out:

A metaphor such as “the mosquitoes dance” is understandable to me because of my not fully expressible experience with dancing: it is this partly unnameable experience which allows me to use the word “dance” in its literal and figurative meaning. In short, the ineffable part of our experiences is a prerequisite for a rightful understanding of the utterances about our experiences as well as for a proper use of metaphors (Dienske, 2000, p. 2).

Thus it could be argued that the ineffable is merely a part of the everyday. For Dienske (2000) the ineffable is ineffable as a result of too smaller a vocabulary, a response to complexity of feeling or atmosphere, a result of certain oppressions or taboos and the attempts to explore extrasensory perceptions. Yet, as I indicated in chapter II exploring phenomenology, this should not be confused with an understanding that everything unnameable is simply experience as ‘unreflected’ experience and by extension what is unnameable does not exist. For as Brockmeier (2002) suggested some events will remain pure experience. Griffin (1978) in her thesis ‘Woman and Nature’ poetically illustrated this point:

Behind naming, beneath words, is something else. An existence named unnamed and unnameable. We give the grass a name and the earth a name. We say grass and earth are separate. We know this because we can pull the grass free from the earth and see its separate roots-but when the grass is free it dies. We say the inar-

ticulate have no souls. We say the cow's eye has no existence outside ourselves, that the red wing of a blackbird has no thought, the roe of a salmon no feeling, because we cannot name these. Yet for our own lives we grieve all that cannot be spoken, that there is no name for, repeating for ourselves the name of things which surrounds us what cannot be named. ...Hand and breast know each one to the other. Wood in the table knows clay in the bowl. Air knows grass knows water knows mud knows beetle knows frost knows sunlight knows the shape of the earth knows death knows not dying. And all this knowledge is in the souls of everything, behind naming, before speaking, beneath words (Griffin, 1978, pp. 190-191).

Thus the ineffable or unnameable speaks volumes but perhaps tests our readiness to listen. As Dienske (2000) observed 'our discursive way of thinking is powerless against the ineffable' (Dienske, 2000, p. 6). Perhaps to explore such experiences and value once again the ineffable in our lives we must move beyond the Cartesian tradition and begin to provide room for the inexpressible (Dienske, 2000). To put it simply, words become metaphor like the finger pointing to the moon, a map or indication of the territory to be explored not the territory itself (Romanyshyn, 1981; von Eckartsberg, 1981). As Watts (2003) reminded us great care must be taken not to confuse the finger with the moon.

To return to the point of this introduction, my claim is that certain elements of the experience are ineffable but not because of the experience is an 'unreflected' or 'prereflective' experience but because it is an experience that is beyond words. Thus words become metaphorical, pointing to a description of the experience and hearing these words dependent on our own understandings. As such care should be taken not to confuse the words with the experience or to reduce the experience to words. As Abrahams (1986) warned we must be careful when reporting experiences to avoid, as far as possible, the danger of reducing the experience to a merely typical or representative experience, for to do so would lose the spirit that resides within the actions.

Still, the aim of this chapter is to point to an experience and to relay the thoughts of others in such a way that the ineffable can be understood or if not understood then at least recognised. Thus this chapter is not purely about relaying the metaphors that explore the experience but also about relaying the words that might further explore the metaphors. To attempt to write the private experiences of meanings and feelings *as if* a public experience, without losing its 'truth'. To describe, if only to a degree, the extreme sport experience.

The inadequacy of words

Without exception those interviewed for this study were clear that words were inadequate tools for exploring a certain element. Celsi et al. (1993) reported similar perceptions by participants in parachute sports, that is, participants considered that the only way to know the experience was to experience the experience. For Schultheis (1996) the extreme sport experience is akin to a solo vision quest where a participant is taken out 'into a nascent, analphabetic space, a sort of intellectual free-fire zone, where reality is in effect up for grabs, and the possibilities well-nigh endless' (Schultheis, 1996, p. 69).

For those directly discussing the experience for this study a typical response was that not only could words not explore the experience but finding a simile was also difficult. For example ESP 8 deemed that words were inadequate as sensations felt had no comparisons:

... there are no words I think English is a very limited language and there are no words because it is a complete sensation it's a sensation that's taking in all your senses and then some that you didn't know you had (ESP 8).

And Later:

... it's more of a self discovery activity its more of a spiritual esoteric ... umm ... its another form of expression that's so outside any normal type of activity yet you can get results from it that are so outside anything you'd expect from any normal activity (ESP 8).

Even ESP 1's attempts at comparisons with sexual orgasm were deemed as inadequate representations. A similar response was made by other interview participants. For ESP 12 for example, whilst the sexual experience and the big wave experience were different, the big wave surfing experience would take priority. ESP 2 explored the notion of fulfilment and enjoyment only to accept that nothing else compared:

It's just better than sex better than any shit like that it's just very very hard to describe like I say only the guys that have done it would be able to put it into words ... if they can (ESP 2).

And Later:

You couldn't you couldn't unless they're surfers and they've been in a barrel a really good barrel you've got no chance in hell of describing it to them I know what I'm talking about but they wouldn't they'd just go "look at you you idiot" like they'd say "what the hell are you on"? But eh I don't know what 'druggoes' get but this is better than that you know (ESP 2).

Thus it could be argued certain elements of the experience are beyond description by words, or at the very least by those words making up the English language. Though it should also be recognised that participants felt that perhaps it was just them that did not have the ability to verbalise the experience, perhaps as suggested by the above quote or epitomised by the following quote from a participant answering my request to describe the experience.

No I can't actually because well one I'm not clever enough and I think it's such an extreme feeling that you cannot describe it until you've done it no ... but there's no feeling like it well you know yourself life seems so sweet and you feel so good (ESP 5).

Thus the ineffable element is pointed to as a ripple on a pond might point to a 'something' that instigated its happening. Still, the point to this thesis is to explore the extreme sport experience and determine its phenomenological structure as an hermeneutic process and as such interpretation of the experience essential. Still metaphor seems to be the only means of description and thus the only route for interpretation.

Interestingly such metaphors can be found in some previous papers that have explored the extreme sport experience. For example, data from those scientific publications presenting qualitative data presented reflective metaphors. Slanger and Rudestam (1997) for instance relayed a brief series of quotes that they considered represented an 'unanticipated, motivating factor' (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 370).

A solo climber stated that he did not use ropes because it interfered with the dance-like quality of climbing, while another said that he was motivated by the movement of climbing. A kayaker said, "What motivates me is the state I enter into. There is a real clarity and heightened senses-both physically and of mind. The risk is completely out of my mind. I am connected and in it. All my senses just feed in" (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, p. 366).

And later they observed:

Climbers spoke of the feeling of movement and rhythmical pleasure of the experience. Aerobatic pilots spoke of the pleasure and beauty of controlled movement in space. Kayakers expressed their appreciation for the beauty of the natural environment in which their activity took place and the pleasure of intimacy with the rivers, getting to know their various characteristics and idiosyncrasies (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997, pp. 370-371).

For Booth (2003) surfing big waves is likened to a dance ‘to and with a natural energy form’ (Booth, 2003, p. 316). Still, to comprehend ‘dance’, or for that matter ‘connected’ and ‘intimacy’ might need further clarification or an experience that is in the same class as those spoken about. Exploring ‘connected’ as an example, for some this may include the experience of being chained and the desire to fight or escape, for others akin to an arm being connected to the body and for others still, perhaps even as a leopard is connected to the natural world or a bird to the sky. Slanger and Rudestam (1997) considered these as aesthetic considerations. They also noted that a few participants experienced an altered state of consciousness (perceptions on time were altered, attention was focused and well-being experienced) that was compared to flow or peak experience (Slanger & Rudestam, 1997).

In a related anthology Llewelyn (1991) compiled narratives from pilots who had had what could be considered extraordinary experiences. His view was that the combination of natural elements and the potential for death provided the necessary ingredients for extraordinary feelings.

Most who fly have a desire and passion for flying which often verges on obsession. Why they wish to pit their wits against the elements and their own mortality is known only to those who have become one with their vehicle of flight – when they truly free their ‘spirit’ from earthly bonds. Regardless of their origins, military pilots with lesser constraints than their civil counterparts, are more likely to be the recipients of this feeling (Llewelyn, 1991, p. 5).

A similar proposal was also noted by Torrance (1968) in a study that considered what he termed preadolescent stress seekers. Lipscombe (1999) in his paper exploring peak experiences and skydiving quoted metaphorical descriptions of the free-fall experience such as ‘a trip into the unknown and dark interior of the soul where children’s terrors dwell’ (Garrison cited in Lipscombe, 1999, p. 268). The experience was also described

as ‘unimaginable, its immediacy is such that one cannot piece together a satisfactory inkling of it ... resembling rapture of the deep’ (Garrison cited in Lipscombe, 1999, p. 268).

Then there is the poetic description of reaching another realm in mental, emotional, physical and spiritual performance outlined by the first hand account of the anthropologist Rob Schultheis (1996). Though Schultheis was quite clear that he could not fully describe the experience he viewed it as ‘that strange person inhabiting my body’ (Schultheis, 1996, p. 12).

Essentially an average mountaineering experience became an extreme experience as the environmental conditions drastically and suddenly changed leaving Schultheis (1996) to descend the mountain in a manner that he described as a life or death situation. As a result he felt and realised extraordinary powers.

Something happened in the descent, something I have tried to figure out ever since, so inexplicable and powerful it was. I found myself very simply doing impossible things: dozens, scores of them, as I down-climbed Neva’s lethal slopes. Shattered, in shock, I climbed with the impeccable sureness of a snow leopard, a mountain goat. I crossed disintegrating chutes of rock holds vanishing from under my hands and feet as I moved, a dance in which a single missed beat would have been fatal. I used bits of rime clinging to the granite as finger holds. They rattled away into space but I was already gone, away. Tatters of cloud drifted over me, rubbed up against me like cats; I could feel the static in them, throbbing. It was drizzling sleet to the west, misting where I was; the rocks gleamed damp. *What I am doing is absolutely impossible*, I thought. *I can’t be doing this. But I have the grace, radiant mojo, and here I am!* (Schultheis, 1996, p. 11).

Schultheis continued with descriptions of ‘unsane joy’ and feeling light and impossibly athletic as he ‘reveled in the animal dance of survival’ (Schultheis, 1996, p. 11). The feelings and experiences accompanying this event were so intense and real that Schultheis spent a considerable part of his life attempting to rekindle them. He noted the neurological effects and considered the similarities between the experiences of non-competitive extreme ‘games’ and the ancient rituals involved in Shamanic quests and Buddhist meditations. He considered the Zen like qualities that were part of the original situation. He spoke on the importance of accepting real physical, emotional and psychological uncertainty, a state of ego surrender or sacrifice in order to reach oneness with everything that was around, a state he described as pure enlightenment.

However, his search was unable to reproduce the feelings, he reportedly came close a few times but something was always missing. Still, Schultheis described this initial experience as ‘the best possible version of myself, the person I *should have been* throughout my life’ (Schultheis, 1996, p. 12). An experience that tantalised him as he appreciated that it came from somewhere within, where it had always been and always would be.

ESP 1 searched for parallels to point to the experience as experienced during the activity. To clarify ESP1 was adamant that the experience could not be compared to any other single experience but perhaps illustrated through certain parallels. As a response to my question on whether the experience could be compared to any other experience ESP 1 stated:

No not all the experiences you get on the one activity no but you could pick the various parts of it out and maybe compare them with other parts of life but not so concentrated (ESP 1).

ESP 1 made specific mention of the intensity of fear and ‘healthy respect for mother nature’ (ESP 1). One parallel drawn was akin to losing control whilst driving:

I just have to think of a parallel it's a whole combination of things for example if someone is driving a car and it's raining and they lose control and at some stage of that losing control they basically get their shit together and take control of the situation and put that car back in a safe position you know like they do the right amount of braking or accelerating to get themselves out of the spin and suddenly they regain control and there's a bit of aggression about you know a bit of good clear thought and you stop and after that experience a lot of people think WOW I was scared first off but now that felt good because I mastered that situation like where I felt the fear of danger and all that sort of stuff so I guess that would be one parallel... another one ... (ESP 1).

Another attempt at a parallel involved describing a controlled and ‘scientifically’ (ESP 1) researched attempt to drive at a wall and brake just before hitting the wall, whilst remaining completely in control of oneself. Another was to vigorous sexual intercourse and the orgasm. Though again ESP 1 was at pains to clarify that these were weak parallels, that if combined might still not equate to the experience as experienced.

An extreme skier interviewed for this study put it this way:

... it's just three hours of AAAAAARRRRR (yells out) and when I get back to the car, like that's my memory of going skiing, it's just this crazy wild ride for three hours in the day (ESP 3).

On further reflection the feeling was further defined as being cool and as if every cell is twitching. An extreme surfer spent sometime reviewing a description of the experience:

... like you're just wound up and YEAH and going NO WAY you know "how did I make that" just CRRRRR! Oh mate it's just amazing what it does to you (ESP 2).

A little later:

... like seeing something that was totally um like you'd never seen before and you can't believe it you know like GRRRRRRR what do you do? Ah we were all screaming and freaking out and yahooing and ... what can you do that would do that to you? Nothing, except this, you know (ESP 2).

Still ESP 2 continued to explore a description and settled on a descriptive reflection that compared different feelings through perceptions about auras.

... when people are in a really happy mood a really nice mood where they're not gonna get upset with anything you know top of the day I feel great today imagine that was like a two foot aura around them and you could see everyone's aura a surfer when he gets a barrel I swear the aura would have to be twenty foot around him (ESP 2).

Yeah, that's probably the best way I could describe it and the situations I've explained to you I'd have to say they're thirty foot around you that's the buzz thing that's what I mean when I say "that buzz" (ESP 2).

That's how strong that aura is it will stay with you for as long as you care to remember it (ESP2).

ESP 4 observed:

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I would just so much love to and I often dream that I'm able to do this to take somebody else's being and put it inside my body just to let them look out through my eyes because it's such an amazing situation to be in I mean if you want to get to the bottom of the waterfall why don't you just carry the boat around I mean it's that kind of logical thing but for me it's not (ESP 4).

Later on in the reflection:

Well why I'd like them to do this is because I don't think they would understand it there's no way they could possibly understand the feelings to feel what I'm feeling and to see what I'm seeing at that point partly because you never get to see those things like I don't know staring off the top of a skyscraper if you're leaning out over the balcony it's that feeling of you could never describe what that feels like until you actually go and do it and at the top of the fall not only are you looking at something like that this incredible power and the fact that this medium you're sitting in then just goes vertical which is a totally unnatural state for water but also they won't be able to comprehend the fact that you have to then go down there because it's not logical I mean you wouldn't jump off that skyscraper you'd walk down the stairs but it's a weird feeling that you've put yourself for me it feels like being in another world and I think it's an overused quote from me really but to go back into the real world you have to step through this door and arrive back at the bottom and the only way back to that real world where everyone else is sitting waiting is to drop over the fall (ESP 4).

For ESP 4 the journey seems to be through another world which he continued to describe as being like dropping through a door and back into the real world. The experience of sitting at the top of the waterfall is described as quiet and 'totally cut off in this really artificial world' (ESP 4). ESP 4 also reported an enhanced awareness of his beating heart and breathing intensity, which is akin to the B.A.S.E. jumper ESP 1 above who noted a feeling of claustrophobia, ESP 1 described the feeling as 'enclosed'.

That makes me feel quite unusual and therefore alone the silence and as I just said the removal having all your senses removed from you so you turn very inward on yourself and also this feeling that you might not make it and that's always in my mind that I might fly through the air out of the corner of my eye I can catch a glimpse of that other world that I want to be in but I might not emerge from the bottom of the fall and that does happen occasionally (ESP 4).

ESP 4 continued by describing an incident that almost resulted in his death and the fact that the feeling of being alone and the inner connection became even more intense. Both ESP 7 and ESP 8 noted a similar perception about moving into another world though the metaphor used was a world between life and death.

... jumping into the space between life and death and that's a pretty good description of it because its another type ... you know its like a different universe (ESP 8).

ESP 7 found the initial experience so profound that he has been attempting to communicate the experience ever since through the medium of film.

ESP 8 on describing the experience noted that it seemed to be an ultimate metaphor for life where a participant is committed to experiencing life rather than quivering on the edge. ESP 8 continued to describe the experience as an experience of powerful energy:

... it's a physical challenge in climbing to the top and it's being in wilderness environment where the place is still powerful the place still has energy and its giving back to you its ... you know in the city there is some energy but it tends to be draining like if you spend a day in the city you feel like being run over by a truck whereas if you go to a beautiful wilderness environment ... (ESP 8).

Here ESP 8 describes feelings of interconnectedness:

... and you're part of the environment then for me you get an insight into the fact that we're interconnected and that while we can die ... that life and everything is connected and we're all ... we're part of this cycle I mean this sounds very esoteric I know and its difficult to put into words but with B.A.S.E. jumping you can go places that other people can't go you can stand on the edge of these huge cliffs and you know put your arms in the air and you're totally vulnerable and totally part of the environment at the same time so its give an opportunity to experience places and a way of looking at things that we can't normally do because we're too restricted by fences and rules and our own fear and when you can get though that its like um ... the first time I base jumped I realised that ... it was like a um it was one of those experiences that shatters the way that you looked at things in the past because you look at things I think through all these filters and we judge stuff without even being aware of it its an unconscious thing ... constantly constantly filtering and judging and an experience like B.A.S.E. jumping helps you shatter all of those things so you become inordinately humble but inordinately self possessed and confident at the same time (ESP 8).

And later:

I think it is about a level of awareness and an understanding of what we as people have you know how much potential we have inside us ... hhhmm its difficult to put into words ... perhaps people get there ... people experience ... in meditation is one way to see it in meditation the aim is to get to the place where

your conscious mind ... you go underneath your conscious mind and you find a place that is infinitely calm and there is no monkey mind and that place is inordinately powerful and peaceful at the same time I guess that sounds weird ... but you can also ... you can also experience the same awareness through B.A.S.E. jumping and through ... not all the time in climbing just the odd moment where you know all of a sudden you're not you're totally connected to the environment so you're no longer um an I ... you know you're not ... you're not umm ... bound by the constraints ... by a physical body anymore ... so I suppose you know ... you lose the fear of death because death is just a death of a physical body and you know ... and you know that you're not the physical body ... that it's you know a vehicle or its an expression of you at the moment but there's much more so ... and you don't get it all the time but on the odd moment you get an insight into that and it's a um ... it's a life altering insight (ESP 8).

ESP 6 also maintained that the experience was akin to losing himself through the action of participation. ESP 5 described an experience whereby the essential movements required were unexplained. In particular a climb was recalled whereby:

... to get over the bulge in the ice and I had a real weird feeling at that point ... I felt as if I was going up onto a higher plane and I can't tell you today how I did that move but I felt something go like there was no way I was going to go back and also the problem was that the higher I got in the ramp there was squalling storms ... (ESP 5).

On further reflection and attempts to clarify the structure of the experience ESP 5 determined that such an experience is devoid of fear as if everything else is 'blacked out' (ESP 5). Messner (1998) reported a strikingly similar experience that that left him relaxed and joyful. ESP 12 a big wave surfer also depicted a similar experience where at a certain point everything goes blank and fear drops away.

The experience in time

Before continuing on to describe the 'what' of the experience it is important to appreciate the 'when' of the experience. That is to help shed more light on the experience as experienced it seems important to briefly note when the ineffable moment is evoked. Essentially it seems that the ineffable takes place immediately after the commitment to action. For ESP 4, the extreme kayaker, this point in time is highlighted by the experience of being committed to an 'other world' that happens as soon as he peels out of the eddy. For those involved in B.A.S.E. jumping the experience seems to be as soon as

active commitment to jump has been made and up to the point that the parachute is opened.

ESP 8 described the feeling as an intense fear on the way to a jump, taking in the environment which ESP 8 indicated is not a fully conscious exercise, walking to the edge and checking conditions and finally, if all signs indicate jump, commitment. For ESP 8 this point is perhaps a few moments before stepping off the edge. From this point to when the parachute opens the ineffable is experienced and freedom and relaxation is felt. When the parachute opens ESP 8 describes switching into a more active mode. For ESP 8:

The part that's intoxicating the part that probably ... drives people back to it over and over again is the part between stepping off and the part ... and between opening the canopy it's a time of complete and utter freedom (ESP 8).

ESP 5 expressed a similar perception, that is when the commitment has been made feelings of relaxation and being cool ensue until the parachute is opened. ESP 10 reported that the moving through fear to relaxation and focus were related to moving from anticipation to the actual extreme situation. However, on occasion such experiences could be reached without explicitly moving through an acute fear. For ESP 12 the big wave surfer the experience begins whilst dropping into the wave. At a similar point in time Jacobs (1998) also described a state whereby he 'relaxed into a consciousness that filled me with peace and clarity' (Jacobs, 1998, p. XII). What follows then is a synthesis of those characteristics that present themselves in the moment that is essentially ineffable. That is those characteristics that can be described.

Intimacy and nature

Whilst we have considered the relationship between the extreme sport experience and the more-than-human world in Chapter IX there does seem to be one further element that most appropriately fits with the theme of this chapter. Schultheis (1996) originally published his book in 1984, in the edition reviewed for this thesis Schultheis added a foreword expressing his conviction that: 'There is a Mystery Zone out there, beyond the edge of the human world, in the back country, the empty skies and waters of the planet' (Schultheis, 1996, foreword). For Schultheis the experience was akin to a Shaman vi-

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sion quest that instigated an over-the-edge experience into transcendence and a feeling that extreme experiences were the only sane thing that he had ever undertaken. A trigger to a new perspective on life bought about by 'soaring with the hawks, diving with the dolphins, running with the elk' (Schultheis, 1996, foreword). This comparison to animal prowess seems to be Schultheis's way of making concrete his enhanced abilities which he later described as:

An acrobatic variation on Zen Sartori: a feeling of mystical interdependence with the outside world, welling up from somewhere deep inside, and manifesting itself physically as acute sensory awareness and a relaxed and boundless strength (Schultheis, 1996, p. 30).

As I have already shown through quotes exploring other elements of the extreme sport experience the relationship to acquiring the sense acuity or prowess of animals or birds has been expressed by others (e.g. Messner, 1998).

Midol and Broyer (1995) also seemed to recognise similar extraordinary experiences where snow and mountains were considered 'living entities' and participants experienced 'intimate dialogues with mythical characters' and a 'phantasmagorical relationship' (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 207). Arnould et al. (1999) reported participant experiences of the river being perceived as alive and the whole process considered as mediating 'between the visible and invisible worlds' (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 46). Guides spoke about a unity between human and the natural world metaphorically, biologically and spiritually. Whilst the relationship between commercial rafting and extreme sports is not immediately apparent it is worth noting that Arnould et al. (1999) conducted interviews with the raft guides as well as consumers. For Arnould et al. (1999) the metaphorical structure of responses underlined the power of the magical experiences whilst white water rafting.

The perception of the natural world as being alive has been reported in other extreme sports. For example in this study ESP 2 maintained that the feeling of surfing big-tube-waves was akin to being in a room that was alive and changing.

... the vacuum inside them is really an experience because it's changing all the time it's like being in a room that is alive sort of thing you know ... and then you've got the eye coming up sneaking up on you if that catches the back of your

board it will spin you out so it's like right behind you and you just feel your board drifting a little bit sideways every now and then and it's a real buzz and if it spits it can really hurt you 'cause it's like a shotgun going off behind you and it actually accelerates you as well ... it's like someone like as if you're in a shotgun barrel and someone has pulled the trigger it's like woof out you go you know way faster than you could ever accelerate yourself you know so it's just a buzz and only guys that have been in there and done it know that feeling (ESP 2).

ESP 2 concluded that he could not think of any feeling more enjoyable. He observed that he became part of the wave and positioned his board only on the section of the wave that the wave allowed. Page (2003) described a similar perception about a particular big-tube-wave that was alive and ‘humming and glistening and breathing and pounding, and then the lip slowed down and I found the open door and came flying out’ (Page, 2003, p. 312). McCairen (1998) also experienced the river as alive where merging with the river’s spirit opened up a reality ‘beyond the ordinary world’ (McCairen, 1998, p. 224).

Midol and Broyer (1995) a few lines after the quote above theorised that:

Dropping one’s defenses, feeling the harmony, becoming the snow field, becoming one with the scenery – that is the “kick” the reference word with it’s multiple meanings that all bespeak the whiz culture (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 208).

For ESP 4 the relationship to the environment is also something that is sought and he describes sitting next to waterfalls and becoming aware of its power so that it became a natural event. ESP 10 maintained that intimacy with the natural world was essential to the experience.

ESP 8 noted that the relationship is both external and internal and ultimately peaceful:

... the closer you can come to being at one with the environment then the more peaceful it is and so it’s a sort of you know both things meeting in the middle ... I suppose when you think about it it has to be coming from the inside because a lot of our feelings of stress they’re all driven by they’re all in here its not what’s going on around is ... may be stressful but its how we choose to look at it that makes us determine how stressful so I suppose its how peaceful each jump is determined by how well a umm how well I do at getting into that state (ESP 8).

Gonzales (2003) explored this notion as an intimate understanding of the energy and forces of nature that seems to be forgotten in the modern world as we become further removed from nature's presence. As Gonzales reported those successfully participating at extreme levels have developed an intimate relationship to their chosen environment, a relationship that feels the energy and reciprocally absorbs the same energy when participating (Gonzales, 2003). However, from the descriptions obtained it may be that participants experience more than an intimate understanding as this might indicate a detached knowledge.

A primal thing

Related to the perceptions on the place of the natural world in the experience is a feeling of touching what has been described as a primal force or life energy. As I also touched on in the chapter on death participants most often report feeling more alive whilst participating than at any other time (Gadd & Rubenstein, 2003). Whilst it could be argued that that just signifies that 'normal' life may be un-lived it may also signify that extreme sport enables a being beyond that possible in everyday life. Certainly as indicated by the quotes above this might fit with the perceptions of those who participate.

Gadd and Rubenstein (2003) reported what seems to be a typical experience as expressed by one participant who described 'a direct tap into what I call the 'life-force' (Gadd & Rubenstein, 2003, p. 25). The concept of tapping into the life force was echoed by the B.A.S.E. jumper featured in a video on risk (Dennison, 1995). For Terwilliger (1998) this experience was reported as being 'a primal thing, too – an elemental, pure experience of life' (Terwilliger, 1998, p. 4E). Soden (2003) likened an element of the experience to an ape flying through the trees, as if the participant was in touch with a primitive aspect of being human. Kremer (2003) also noted a tapping into what she called the 'ultimate energy' (Kremer, 2003, p. 376). Jacobs (1998) described connection as a union with a universal primal awareness.

ESP 7 reflected on the experience as being 'the call of the wild' (ESP 7) which one can either ignore or answer. As I have described in other chapters the experience was often depicted as dealing with a primal force within oneself and the environment. ESP 10 spoke of connecting to a primal animal like state as if connecting to all animals. ESP 8

spoke about the power of the energy involved in the experience, an energy that comes from the environment. ESP 12 also reported feeling a powerful energy coming from the environment as well as an instinctual element as if reacting to the environment. On deeper reflection by ESP 2 the extreme sport experience was described as:

A bit of a raw instinct thing you know I've seen guys at Wymea Bay crying it was that big without even taking off on a wave (ESP 2).

ESP 6 was quite clear that the only reason he participated was to satisfy a base instinct hidden deep within.

The altered states

Gonzales (2003) reported that those who successfully return from extreme disasters describe a state that he explained as a sharpening of the senses. That is participants perceptions did not narrow with fear but seemed to open up. Jacobs (1998) also described the experience as one where fear 'became a vibratory sensation that brought forth colors of perception words cannot describe' (Jacobs, 1998, p. 10). The ensuing event released 'a heightened sense of awareness' (Jacobs, 1998, p. 10) that opened up a 'multidimensional universe' (Jacobs, 1998, p. 10).

Midol and Broyer (1995) also observed altered states and, for example, described participants feelings of leaving the 'zone of real time and enter[ing] the unreal' (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 208, [brackets mine]). Time, personal limits and personal energy were reported as taking on new meanings that transcended traditional awareness. Celsi et al. (1993) also found similar expressions of transcendence of the everyday where experiences 'become increasingly abstract and transcend normal experiences' (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 11). As already reviewed in other chapters Arnould et al. (1999) also recognised extraordinary human experiences. Specifically whilst exploring white-water rafting they reported that consumers and guides alike experienced 'transcendence and transformation' (Arnould et al., 1999, p. 40); such events were considered by Arnould et al. (1999) as spiritual or enhanced flow states.

The experience that is the extreme sport experience should not be confused with the immediate after effects of the experience. That is the essential element of the experience

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seems to be during activity most often related to those feelings of relaxation previously mentioned. Doug Scott (2003) wrote about experiencing a calm prescience' (Scott, 2003, p. xi), being more aware and a feeling of being lifted above his normal state. ESP 6 observed that:

... relaxation is part of why you do it because you are obviously hitting some sort of plane that you can't normally hit (ESP 6).

Celsi et al. (1993) established similar perceptions about relaxation and how perceptions on time were altered.

Everything seems to be in a time warp. Everything slows down. It's total concentration. To me it's completely relaxed because everything else is off your mind (wf 35 cited in Celsi et al., 1993, p. 8).

Midol and Broyer (1995) noted perceptions on time and space associated with participation.

... the sensation of being at one with the environment, and the feeling of entering an altered state of consciousness have become familiar notions. The latter are sometimes compared with the pleasure that is derived from orgasm or drugs. To achieve these peaks in performance, the individual must draw on physiological instincts that kick in when one is suddenly faced with mortal danger. The ability to call up such instincts leads to a feeling that few have experienced: Time and space are one and the same, the event seems to unfold in slow motion, and the individual can see himself or herself inaction and analyse his or her movements as if in slow motion (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 209).

Though of course I have already briefly commented on comparisons with orgasm and drug use, for Midol and Broyer (1995) such experiences are typical of those participating on the threshold of death where 'time loses its linear point of reference, personal limits are transcended, the individual has an energy not bound by the usual rules' (Midol & Broyer, 1995, p. 209). In the study by Celsi et al. (1993) participants were reported to collectively experience that:

Nothing else exists in their world but the moment itself-no sense of time, just a kind of holistic oneness that makes them feel good and somehow changed (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 11).

Schultheis (1996) described a variety of similar experiences as narrated to him by a multitude of individuals who participated in extreme sports and expressed the view that such experiences are clearly happening and important ‘hooking people into another kind of time-and-space frame’ (Schultheis, 1996, foreword).

Rhienhold Messner (1998) referred to his experiences as being beyond the traditional concepts of time and space. Perceptions on time have been considered in terms of being continually present in the ‘now’ or ‘in the moment.’ Olsen (2001) in her exploration quoted the extreme climber Lynn Hill as saying:

When you are out there on the rock you can’t be having second thoughts. This is never the time to wonder if you are doing the right thing. You have to be ‘in the moment.’ You have to concentrate totally on what you are doing (Hill cited in Olsen, 2001, p. 64).

Soden (2003) quoted a solo climber who stated:

When you’re free-soloing, you can’t afford to be distracted. You concentrate on the flow from move to move. You exist only in the present (Mike Pont cited in Soden, 2003, p. 255).

Later Soden reported that Pont experienced time slowing down and an enhanced clarity of perception. Participants in the study by Arnould et al. (1999) described a slowing down of time, a being free from time or living on river time as they connected with themselves and nature. Roberts (1994) seemed to support this argument by noting that participants report ‘it’s the only time I ever feel in the moment’ (Roberts, 1994, p. 2). A B.A.S.E. jumper who eventually misjudged a particular flight spoke of the experience in the following way:

... 28 seconds in a B.A.S.E. jump, how do you describe it, we talk about the Zen Philosophy of now living. For those seconds you are more alive than any other time in your life. The only thing I can compare it to is riding a wave in front of a tube in surfing – when time slows down, and you slip into being with life, it’s one of those experiences. Getting tubed or riding a barrel is about as close as you can get but B.A.S.E. is really a dimension beyond that. It’s putting you right in the now right now. You’re not thinking about what’s coming up next, not worrying about what went before (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

A little later the B.A.S.E. jumper observed that in the 28 seconds:

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You can see tiny things; colours, shapes, leaves and lines through the rock. I can spin over on my back and look above me at the sky which looks like its being sucked backwards away from me but at the same time swallowing me up (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b).

During this freefall flight he reported feelings of motionless as if being still whilst everything around him was moving. At its best the experience was described as leaving him 'breathless' and 'a state of intimate knowledge – they're defining moments,' a state he described as purity, 'a pure, pure, pure moment. It's the most pure thing I've ever experienced in my life' (B.A.S.E. jumper cited in Richardson, 2001b). Another B.A.S.E. jumper, Chuck Berry, also reported time slowing down and enhanced visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory sense ability (Dennison, 1995). The solo whitewater paddler, Patricia McCairen (1998) described sharpened senses taking her into another world beyond fear where time slowed down, giving the appearance of infinity.

Interview participants observed similar altered perceptions. For example ESP 8 related perceptions as time 'slowing down' and allowing a greater perception of the environment:

... on every B.A.S.E. jump you will experience something interesting in that your awareness of one second expands enormously so what we would normally perceive in one second is very little compared to what you perceive in one second on a B.A.S.E. jump (ESP 8).

On requesting further clarification ESP 8 continued by observing that:

... your mind ... so you can deal with everything that you have to ... slows things down so when you're doing it it feels like its in slow motion whereas when you watch it back on footage you look and go wow ... you know that's over in like a blip (clicks fingers) but when you're doing it you know you can see the tiny little creases in the rock and different colours in the sky and you're totally aware of where your body is in space and how its moving and ... its very surreal (ESP 8).

ESP 1 noted a similar perception about increased clarity:

So for that feeling of free fall the trial wall is a classic example because there's a big focus on your skill on all the manoeuvres you're doing on keeping yourself

alive there that feeling is really good too so there's an inner relaxation calm of being in a wonderful place you know in free fall just screaming past these rocks and being in control and all that sort of stuff but there's also this I guess this heightened awareness you really (**word missing**) clarity clarity is another description because in free fall at (**place name**) I quite like to go full speed head down because I can actually look at the wall and I can actually see the definition like detail the rock and the clarity it's really weird the awareness level picks up and that's another part of it (ESP 1).

ESP 1 also maintained that despite his partner not liking it when he jumps she 'loves it after I jump because my energy levels go up a lot and there's the flow on effect of that' (ESP 1). ESP 9 described the state as both senses and intuition being fully alive, awake and aware. For ESP 10, a solo expeditioner, the state was described as returning to an animal nature where:

Things reel in slow motion and certainly my senses are never anything like a sharp as they are in those situations ... you see things with incredible clarity and all your senses have an awareness an alertness that you never gave them credit for in the past ... you realise that your senses are not working to their full capacity or even coming close to it until you are in such a situation (ESP 10).

Thus perceptions about normal views on reality seem to be changed; the extreme sport experience seems to be a medium for altered perceptions on space, time and a clarity or enhanced state of sensual awareness and abilities to act. Time as 'normally' perceived seems to drop away and perceptions of time as being lost or slowing are experienced. Senses seem to grasp or take in more detail. Thus as established in the previous chapter, the extreme sport focus is perhaps not akin to tunnel vision. The focus required seems to be open as opposed to that assumed when associated with adrenalin.

I think the more experienced you become you know your mind is clearer ... I've had situations where I've had tunnel vision and it cuts your brain off as well where you can't control it you know you've got (**word missing**) overload ... I nearly died actually in California on one of my early jumps where I got tunnel vision (ESP 5).

ESP 4 expressed a similar perception:

I like to see the rock come by but I'm also fully aware of everything else that is going around me ... it's almost the opposite of tunnel vision (ESP 4).

ESP 4 described a particular experience that seems to capture this aspect well:

There was a waterfall it was about a hundred and twenty feet high and it was kind of multi-stage but no stopping on the way down in the Italian Alps in 92 and I can remember just focusing on the only thing I need to do is to get through the whirlpool in the middle ... It actually spun me around once and spat me out and then after that I knew I was gonna make it to the bottom of the pool and I could react to whatever happened ... The next step was an overhanging cliff and the boat was pushed in so far underneath it I couldn't be upright because there was only enough space for a boat so that flipped me to upside down and I thought okay I'm upside down now I'll put my arms across my face and slide down on the elbow pads because I knew I had elbow pads on and every little step was the right step and as it capsized I remember seeing the last cliff face which was under cut as well and I thought I'm gonna stick my left elbow out further than my right elbow and scrape that down the rock which will initiate the boat into a right hand turn while I'm upside down and they're the things that you could never describe to somebody you know when you capsize on an eddy line or something and you're aware you are being spun around you're pretty well aware which way you are gonna be pointing when you come up and you'll do a leaning forward roll or a leaning back roll depending on whether the last part of the stroke you need to do is pulling water forward or pulling water back and you'll kind of go down spin around in the whirlpool once and then carve out into the eddy as if you haven't capsized and it's that kind of heightened sense of awareness running a fall that means I don't like to think about it too much beforehand in case it clutters that pure reactivity to what's happening on the way down a look from the bottom will show very quickly the only route down a fall and it doesn't matter how many people say "what about that line or what about that line" pretty well your first shot is your best one and then it's just reactions after that (ESP 4).

ESP 7 put it this way:

... all cocks open you know full flow sort of stuff and so its incredibly incredibly intense and mostly because if something goes wrong in a B.A.S.E. jump you have to do something about it extremely quickly so you're at this level of alertness that you're not in a normal life ... umm ... you've got like every every central nervous system receptor sort of ready to fire in case you've got to deal with a malfunction and in dealing with a malfunction you've only got seconds to sort it out or you die (ESP 7).

Booth (2003) quoted legendary surfer Bill Hamilton:

I became aware of the total correlation of man, surfboard and wave. This discovery had a profound effect on my surfing, and sent me one step further into a new dimension-the flow ... I would surf with my mind open, reacting to the situation

as it appeared, and utilising whatever manoeuvre it took to get to the next experience (Hamilton cited in Booth, 2003, p. 323).

In summary then the experience that is the extreme sport experience seems to include an altered state of being that changes perceptions about reality with regards to time and the ability of human senses to process and action information. It seems that the relationship to time changes in two ways, the first that a participant gets lost in the experience. The second change in relationship to time seems to be that the participant is able to fit more into a moment, or in other words participants are able to sense and do more in every moment of time. Perhaps as a result of the everyday public perception of times slows down or perhaps as one's everyday capabilities are enhanced. This of course leads the discussion neatly on to the other altered state, that of an enhanced sensory and physical capabilities that are 'remembered.'

ESP 2 considered that the feeling of surfing was recalled as an intense bodily sensation even when talking about it, but perhaps not to the same intensity as during the experience. For ESP 2 surfing a barrel did not include sounds or sights but seemed to be about an altered state of consciousness whereby even pain may not be felt:

I think it's like a state of consciousness where perhaps you know if someone hits you you know when you see someone get hit and you go "OOHH" but if you get hit it's just like a numbness you know it's something in there because I mean once you pull into a barrel it's just like a little realm that you're in (ESP 2).

ESP 2 further clarified the experience as the most intense sensation that could be felt. For ESP 8 such altered states are:

... very intoxicating ... and its also ... it's also important in changing ... in just becoming more aware that we are not what we are in our everyday life in our everyday life we are not particularly challenged or pushed or ... there is no necessity to reach those places in ourselves that are hard to reach and that are uncomfortable ... uncomfortable to get there but infinitely worthwhile ... am I making sense (ESP 8).

Todhunter (2000) reflected on moments of insight that were reported to encompass a great deal more than in anything else that could be done, a level of insight that was worth dying for, a state of grace. Todhunter (2000) wrote that Dan Osman a climber who often faced the real possibility of death was reported to have experienced life as a

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celebration of being alive and for breathing, where his senses were extremely enhanced. Further by repeatedly facing death he reached an awareness of life far beyond that generally appreciated (Todhunter, 2000). For Celsi et al. (1993) such experiences signified transcendence into the realm of the sacred.

Floating and flying

As has been implied by some of the quotes from participants in the previous chapter, On Freedom, there seems to be still another type of freedom that points to the ineffable. For some the experience is a holistic freedom as flying or floating 'You float like a bird out there. You can go as high as 18,000 ft. and go for 200 miles. That's magic' (Carr cited in Dowell et al., 1999, p. 30). Thus, perhaps contrary to the thesis laid out by Soden (2003) falling does not seem to be the focus. In fact Soden (2003) quoted a B.A.S.E. jumper as experiencing feelings of flying as if on a bubble with just the wind holding him back.

Celsi et al. (1993) also found that participants experienced feelings akin to flying. Celsi et al. continued by describing typical sensations of floating, lying on a cushion of air and describing these sensations as more like flying. That is perhaps contrary to what might be expected the freefall element in parachute sports is not akin to a roller coaster ride where participants might perhaps scream and shout.

Outsiders imagine free-fall to be the scream inducing gut wrenching acceleration felt on a roller coaster. However, sky divers describe the experience of free-fall as having little sensation of falling (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 8).

Accordingly the essence of the experience is during the freefall where the parachute was presented as just a means to descend safely.

Participants of parachute sports interviewed for this study spoke of similar sensations:

... the purest and most natural form of human flight. No aircraft, no motors, no man made devices. Just my body and mind freefalling through space (ESP 1).

So I go down there now and I still get that funny feeling of I say "claustrophobia" because I can't think of another way of describing it but it's confined but I actually like that now I enjoy it I get to the edge and deep breaths deep breaths

relax relax go through my mind about all the jumps I do a few wind tests so skit over the edge to see what the wind is doing make sure everything is okay in terms of that now deep breath ready set go for the first half a second it's just like your heart is in your throat sort of feeling and then it's just total relaxation it's really weird the feeling of free fall I think I'm going back to my childhood ... I need a bloody psychologist here I'm going back to my childhood and that dream of flight and to me I mentioned in there to me it's the purest form of flight there's just my body and gravity and that's it ... I mean okay we're not staying up there like the birds but you can actually move your body around you can fly you are in free fall sort of thing and it's the closest way that I could ever satisfy that childhood dream (ESP 1).

And then if everything is going fine like the track position is feeling really good it's just relaxation relaxation relaxation if I talk to my body a bit bang I'll go into concentration mode get the overlines and the rudders working properly get back into a perfect balance and fly away from that wall (ESP 1).

For ESP 1 the experience was considered different to skydiving and the nearest definition of such an experience he could find was that the experience is 'pretty awe inspiring' (ESP 1). ESP 8 expressed the feeling of stepping of the mountain and flying like a bird.

Still, perhaps one might expect that the act of jumping off a cliff could trigger a sensation of floating or flying and in itself this is nothing special, but participants in other activities describe similar experiences. For example, surfers interviewed for this study have experienced a sensation of being free described as weightlessness.

... well you can imagine a wave that breaks two hundred metres there can be a stage along that line not necessarily a particular spot where you've pulled off certain manoeuvres you're in the position and you just stand there and you enjoy the moment and perhaps that's what they're doing you're just literally flying along the wave with the air blowing up the face of the wave, under your board it's almost making you weightless sometimes flying against your body and it's just a, it's just a sense of being and you don't want to do anything (ESP 12).

Reinhold Messner the great pioneer of solo climbing described being as free as a bird and blissful feelings as if an air balloon was carrying him (Messner, 1998). Todhunter (2000) wrote about the experiences of an extreme caver who reportedly 'moved through a cave as if he was floating' (Todhunter, 2000, p. 60). The extreme skier, Andrea Binning, quoted by McCallum above immediately pre-empted her reflections on freedom and thinking with a description of freedom as floating:

The feeling of putting in a good run, of being out there in the mountains. It's awesome. You feel like you're floating. You're kind of weightless. You feel like you can do anything, kind of indestructible, you just feel so good ... (Binning cited in McCallum, 2001).

Even the extreme kayaker interviewed for this thesis noted that:

The feeling of flying is very natural yeah to me it is but I'm flying very much from one hit to the next one rock or one lump of water to the next (ESP 4).

In Summary it would seem that at some point during the experience beginning with the commitment to undertake the activity a participant metaphorically leaves this world for another. During this experience senses are immensely enhanced and physical potentials are realised (often described as being like a particular animal). Such experiences are often spoken about as transcending human capabilities but also seem to be more about connecting with an inner power. The experience is often described as relaxing and peaceful. A participant experiences 'being powerful' that is said to be 'alive' as if a primal element of their being is in direct contact to a universal life force. The experience involves becoming part of, or merging with a natural environment to an extent that for at least one participant the concept of a separate 'I' identity disappears. During this experience participants also invariably note feeling conscious or more fully aware of other 'non-material' potentials not experienced in other parts of their lives.

A phenomenological perspective

As argued in section 1 on phenomenology and highlighted again at the beginning of this chapter certain experiences may be beyond words (West, 1998). Still further, rather than making an assumption that some experiences are just in a state of prereflective awareness awaiting reflection and clarification in the phenomenological sense it may also be that some experiences are inevitably of a different nature, may in fact be ineffable (Ryba, 2002; Tymieniecka, 1988; Valle & Mohs, 1998). According to Zimmerman (1986) Heidegger definitely recognised that some experiences were ineffable. Husserl also seemed to have recognised this as a potential when he indicated that the phenomenological reduction could only be understood by those who had experienced the process (Hanna, 1993b; Spiegelberg, 1982). Husserl even directly claimed that the 'true

self or transcendental ego was beyond description and that the phenomenological intuition was ‘too profound to be grasped by intellect and too powerful to be expressed in language’ (Hanna, 1993a, p. 49). Reflecting on the connotations of this possibility Valle and Mohs (1998) observed that whilst a majority of experiences comfortably fit within the normal prereflective-awareness and reflective-awareness co-constituted reference, others are somehow outside of this realm:

Some experiences and certain types of awareness, however, do not seem to be captured or illuminated by phenomenological reflection on descriptions of our conceptually recognised experiences and/or our prereflective felt-sense of things. Often referred to as transpersonal, transcendent, sacred or spiritual experience, these type of awareness are not really experience in the way we normally use the word, nor are they the same as our prereflective sensibilities (Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 98).

Valle and Mohs (1998) considered the transcendent awareness to be somehow prior to the prereflective state. Phenomenological explorations into such experiences are often required to accept such possibilities and as such also accept that the relationship between intentionality and consciousness takes on a different perspective. As Davis (2002) reminds us:

“the map is not the territory”
 “don’t settle for eating the menu”
 (Davis, 2002, p. 1).

Consciousness is no longer a consciousness of something, an object that is not itself but somehow deeply interrelated, consciousness is both without a subject and without an object (Valle & Mohs, 1998). Valle and Mohs (1998) developed the term ‘transintentionality’ to address such issues where the:

... separateness of perceiver and that which is perceived has dissolved, a reality not of (or in some way beyond) time, space, and causation as we normally know them (Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 102).

One field of research that has rigorously explored such ineffable experiences are the transpersonal studies, it is perhaps here that we will find the most enlightening phenomenological descriptions of related experiences. This is not to suggest or imply that the field of transpersonal studies is somehow uniform in its understanding of the phe-

nomenological structure of transpersonal experiences as this is clearly not the case. Daniels (2002b), for instance, undertook to compare seven different descriptions of the transpersonal Self. Descriptions and understandings of the transpersonal realm range from a parsimonious differentiation between the material or 'skin encapsulated egos' (Watts cited in Walsh, 2000, p. 5) and the non-egoic core (Washburn, 1994, 1995) to the more sophisticated four stage developmental structure of Wilber (Wilber, 1995, 1996, 2000). Understandings of the structure of such experiences include those that consider the importance of an inner 'real self' (e.g. Maslow, 1971) or those that determine archetypal, universal consciousness (M. Daniels, 2002a, 2002b; Jung, 1964) to those that consider only one Self but understood *as if* there were a Higher and lower Self (Assagioli, 1993). Still they all seem to be mind or consciousness based.

Then there are the comprehensive approaches to the transpersonal based on extensive research which recognise the self as inner core, divine and universal (Grof, 1993). Grof identified three distinct domains for transpersonal experiences. The first, an 'extension of consciousness *within* ordinary space-time reality' (Grof, 1993, p. 12) includes identification with others and the physical world. The second, '*beyond* space-time reality' (Grof, 1993, p. 12) might include shamanic journeying, mythical archetypes and formless consciousness. The third includes those experiences such as UFO encounters and magic. It would seem that the second description most closely resembles the extreme sport experience.

Still such theories have also been criticised for being patriarchal and androcentric (Wright, 1998). Wright (1998) posited that such theories most often relegate the spiritual experiences of indigenous peoples to a category of primitive or lower mysticism. For Wright (1998) to ignore or dismiss the indigenous ways of knowing is insufficient. Thus, such transpersonal or spiritual understandings should also include other process that involve our emotions, our bodies and the natural world, for example the wholistic concepts of shamanic journeying. Perhaps then in the extreme sport experience we have the seed of a notion of an ideal set up for a journey into the transpersonal.

However, within the basic structure of the transpersonal 'realities' lies a warning most succinctly drawn out by Daniels (2001). As phenomenology insists, even when exploring the ineffable, care should be taken to ensure the bracketing of preconceptions and

beliefs. In this way the experience can be fully described. Transpersonal studies to date, even those explicitly attempting phenomenology, seem to have based their descriptions on metaphysical or spiritual assumptions (Daniels, 2001). We must be careful to avoid such a trap whilst still avoiding the trap of psychologism (Daniels, 2001).

Still, phenomenologically if an element of the extreme sport experience is indeed to be considered as transpersonal then the phenomenological descriptions as outlined by participants should relate, at least in part, to the structure of transpersonal experience in general. Valle (1989; 1998) and Valle and Mohs (1998) posit eight basic qualities of a transpersonal experience:

1. The experience has a transformative power that is realised in a change in habits, inclinations, effects of emotions, preferences and understanding of life.
2. The experience involves a 'letting go' or surrendering of the sense of control of the outcome of an action and the loss of fear that immediately follows.
3. Time is experienced as different from the every-day linear concept. There is a sense of stillness and a sense that time might be standing still. Thought patterns are entirely present, neither past nor future oriented.
4. A dissolution of perceiver and perceived, there is often no sense of 'I.'
5. A deep sense of peace, stillness.
6. Flashes of insight as intuitive senses that might seem to come from an external source.
7. 'An all-pervading aura of love and contentment for all that exists' (Valle & Mohs, 1998, p. 100). Perhaps experienced as an intense inner energy, a desire to 'let it be' or total peace of mind.
8. The typical sense of space is altered to induce a radical extension of the normal perceptions of body-space.

Later Valle and Mohs (1998) maintained that such experiences are often encased in a vehicle such as a near death experience or sexual experience and involve intense emotions (painful or pleasant) and passions often beyond those normally felt. The experience is also triggered by being in the present moment with an acute awareness of authenticity often characterised by an enhanced mental alertness. In this instance the passions are not the normal attachment based passions but a total passion about all as-

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pects of life without clinging, described as a constant 'letting go' whilst still maintaining a stillness of mind (Valle & Mohs, 1998). Haimerl and Valentine (2001) reported the most common phenomenological description as being relaxation. Such a relaxation is not a dull relaxation but an alert, receptive relaxation. Perceptions on time and space are altered as the experience is held constantly in the 'now' (Valle & Mohs, 1998). Varela (1999) describes this now moment as more than a temporal structure where objects pass transitorily. It would seem that the present now 'has a lived quality as well: it is a space we dwell in' (Varela, 1999, p. 119). In the extreme sport experience there seems to be a perception of an extended now and the ensuing extended space.

The experience often involves a deep connection to nature accompanied by an absence of fear and a connection to an inner and higher self or power. As noted such experiences often involve a sense of surrender or letting go of the need to predict and control. Valle and Mohs (1998) also observed that the sense of spirituality, deep knowing, unconditional love, gratefulness and blessedness seem to be interwoven which often emerge as a sense of complete well-being and an understanding of reality at odds with the every-day perceptions. There is also a deep sense of rebirth or self-transformation with an ensuing loss of judgemental attitudes and a deeper ability to engage with life. The experience is also defined by its ineffability. Such is the phenomenological description of transpersonal experiences as outline by Valle and Mohs (1998).

Daniels (2002a) made further clarifications on some elements noting that transpersonal identity is beyond that which is traditionally considered to be the existential or authentic self. At the same time the process is developmental and as such the authentic self would most likely be realised on the journey. Hisamatsu (cited in M. Daniels, 2002b) referred to this sense of, or awakening to an Original self as the essential point of freedom. Such awakenings might happen from an external trigger or internal teacher.

Husserl's (1977) transcendental phenomenology might also provide some insight into the nature of the extreme sport experience. Firstly, the transcendent nature of the phenomenological reduction implies that the ego is beyond the possibility of further reduction (Hanna, 1993b). Husserl's attempts of a description resulted in a negative description (Hanna, 1993a). Secondly that as Husserl (cited in Hanna, 1993b) deemed, human beings experience both unity and separateness; unity in the sense of transcenden-

tal empathy and separateness in the sense of individual core boundaries (Hanna, 1993b). Thirdly that the process of transcendental reduction needs to be experienced to be understood (Hanna, 1993a; Spiegelberg, 1982). Further Tymieniecka's (1988) explorations into the movement of the soul are resplendent with the notion of connections to the life-force.

Still, whilst much of the above might neatly describe the experience that is the extreme sport experience it is important to note that a glaring omission seems to be the heightened abilities described by participants, the ability to 'see' and 'do' beyond that normally experienced. Even Barnes's (2003) description of deep meditation did not include such awarenesses. Perhaps this is as a direct result of research and theory being based on the phenomenology of consciousness and not bodily descriptions, though Barnes did approach this topic. Perhaps, also, this omission is an indication that whilst the extreme sport experience undoubtedly shares some similarities with transpersonal descriptions they may not be the same experience.

Hedwig Conrad-Martius (cited in Bello, 2002) in her extensive phenomenological exploration of nature described a reality she termed trans-physical. Bello (2002) defined her understanding of the term as:

These powers are not beyond nature and therefore not meta-physical, but rather internal conditions of nature that, nevertheless, cannot be reduced to a purely physical level (Bello, 2002, p. 227).

Perspectives from the wisdom traditions

According to Campbell (1973) the ineffable experience is part of Buddhist philosophy. That is Buddhism recognises that some experiences are beyond the power of language to fully describe (Shaner, 1985). Language only becomes useful when communication is between those having shared the experience. Often such experiences are characterised by seemingly greater-than-human powers and enhanced sense ability that are eventually revealed to have come from within (Barendregt, 1988). Often such experiences are characterised by feelings of unity and different perceptions of time and space as well as those already established Zen descriptions of walking on air or riding the wind in initial enlightenment; perhaps similar to floating and flying? (Watts, 2003). For Watts (2003)

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such experiences abound for those feeling 'at home in 'the Void'' (Watts, 2003, p. I). For Chihara (1989) this realisation of authenticity is often characterised by initial 'freedom from and transcendence of ordinary time and space' (Chihara, 1989, p. 211). Research has shown that in the deeply relaxed meditative state time seems to slow down as physical abilities speed up (Chihara, 1989).

Campbell (1973) showed that the most powerful elements within many wisdom traditions are essentially ineffable. A point echoed by the great Christian mystic Meister Eckhart (cited in Caputo, 1978). Such experiences are often accompanied by feelings of bliss, peace, enhanced perceptions and unity that can be found at the very 'ground of our being' (Campbell, 1973, p. 151). Watts (2003) also describes the release of seemingly superhuman powers, altered perceptions of time, unity and states of profoundly peaceful stillness in Hinduism, Zen and Taoism. He describes such states as letting go of the mind and attaining an awakened or enlightened state.

Further discourses

The concept of extraordinary experience has been loosely related to activities resembling extreme sports. For example river rafting, was deemed to trigger positive extraordinary experiences such as 'absorption and integration, personal control, joy and valuing, and spontaneous letting be of the process' (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 39). An element of perceived fear and reduced safety developed *communitas* and personal growth that was enhanced by a feeling of communion with nature. Extraordinary experience is an unusual event 'characterised by high levels of emotional intensity and experience' (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 25). Still whilst the descriptions might be similar the important trigger would seem to be interpersonal interaction, whereas a majority of extreme participation is, due to its nature, a solo activity.

Murphy and White (1995; 1978) quoted a number of extraordinary experiences as expressed by extreme sport related participants in their amalgamations of transcendent experiences in sport. For example the climber and mathematics professor who considered the role of intuition, being in the zone and levitation whilst climbing. In fact it would seem that extraordinary or transcendent experiences in sport are numerous. Murphy and White (1995) have categorised these as mystical sensations (acute well being,

peace/calm and stillness, detachment, freedom, floating/flying and weightlessness, ecstasy, power/control, being in the present, instinctive action and surrender, mystery and awe, feelings of immortality, unity), altered perception (of size and field, time perception, extrasensory perception, out-of-body experiences, awareness of the 'Other') and extraordinary feats (exceptional energy, energy reaching out or psychokinesis, the invisible barrier, mind over matter). They also note the prevalence of sport and spirituality and training for mind/body efficiency.

White (1993), the instigator of the term 'exceptional human experience' (White, 1993, p. 46) which parallel William James's (cited in W. Braud, 2001) concept of 'white crows', theorised that such experiences might be related to life threatening or near death events. Flaherty (1999) indicated that such events are often associated with the sense that time has slowed; this sensation is considered to be an a priori temporal structure that Flaherty termed protracted duration. For White (1993) these experiences are also considered to be community based but not just community based as a connection to the environment and one's inner self (or uniting one's many selves) is also prevalent. As we have seen the extreme sport experience seems to involve both.

Frick (1990) has shown that certain experiences that unify past present and future into one moment of 'now' where feelings of unity and harmony with the environment epitomise growth transformations. White (1993) observed that for the experience to transform the person experiencing must accept the new transcended view of self and integrate it into life, in this way life is transformed. Perhaps this is what is happening when participants continue to participate, the experience is experienced each time but a participants struggles to integrate such an experience into their every-day-life? White quoted the feminist poet Adrienne Rich to illustrate her point:

Like divers, we ourselves must make the jump
 That sets the taut board bounding underfoot
 Clean as an axe blade driven in a stump;
 But afterward what makes the body shoot
 Into its pure and irresistible curve
 Is a force beyond all bodily powers.
 So action takes velocity with a verve
 Swifter, more sure than any will of ours
 (The Springboard by Rich cited in White, 1993, p. 52)

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The essence being that some exceptional experiences are transforming should we choose to accept the experience as such. As White (1993) wrote 'it only costs "not less than everything." But whatever that "everything" is to you, it will be given back a hundredfold' (White, 1993, p. 55).

Certain mystical experiences also seem to present similar phenomenological structures. For example, Tart and Smith (1998) report that cosmic consciousness is ineffable, involves unity and inner peace, is transient and experienced as a period where time slows down. However, in this case perception seems to fade and there was no description of enhanced physical prowess. The Shamanic practices also utilise altered states of consciousness that cross the primal boundary between civilized perceptions and wilderness (Herman, 1997; Krippner & Combs, 2002). Such experiences are characterised by ecstasy, ineffability and animal-like powers (Herman, 1997). For Glendinning (1994) such states are considered non-ordinary but relatively common when deeply connected to the more-than-human world. Shanon (2002) also observed intense experiences that included the merge of inner and outer worlds, the slowing of time when under the influence of the shamanic substance, Ayahuasca. Austin (2000) reported dissolutions of self-in-time and self-in-space through disciplined participation of Kensho which resulted in deep personal transformations. Deikman (2000) wrote that being alone and meditating in the wilderness instigated a state where 'the stones and leaves appeared more intricately patterned, the colours brighter' (Deikman, 2000, p. 76). The experience was described as being more vivid and rich and essentially more 'primitive' in nature resulting from a shift away from the need to control and towards a more receptive, accepting mode. For Tart (1986) the return from an acquired nature to a basic nature releases our human capacity for experiencing altered states of consciousness. Thus, as Brockelman (1997) suggested it might not be about moving into non-ordinary states but removing the haze and mist from ordinary states.

Summary

This chapter attempted to synthesise a description of the ineffable element of the extreme sport experience. Though, of course, to attempt to describe the indescribable immediately reduces the intensity and power of such an experience to defined, bound entities. As such I admit to doing violence to what is an all encompassing and powerful

concern. As Campbell (1973) so insightfully revealed often attempts to clarify certain events result in the experience being lost; or perhaps worse still being obliterated. Or as van Manen deemed 'in the act of naming we cannot help but kill the things that we name' (van Manen, 2002a, p. 239). Still, beyond the world of words is a distant shore that I have attempted to make explicit and outline some of the characteristics involved; characteristics that seem to point to a state outside of normal perception. Senses are enhanced, time slows down and the separateness of inner and outer worlds seem to dissolve evoking a glimpse into another world of multidimensional possibilities.

Post-amble

Thus we near the end of Section 3 and move towards a more explicit phenomenological description. However before summing up there is perhaps one essential area of theory that needs to be considered more closely. I have positioned this critique as part of the post amble as much of the descriptive evidence covers areas from all four chapters. Essentially, researchers and theorists alike studying optimum human experiences in a variety of contexts have, it could be argued, noticed similar inner states; such states are variously described as peak experiences, peak performance and flow (Privette, 1981, 1983). Indeed I have spoken at many conferences and without exception one of these has been posited as explaining the extreme sport experience and as the reader has no doubt observed I have touched on one or other throughout this section. On the surface these states present compelling evidence to support the notion that the extreme sport experience is just a prime example of such concepts, as such I would be failing in my duty to fully explore the extreme sport experience if peak experiences, peak performance and flow were not critiqued further.

Peak experiences, peak performance and flow have similar and overlapping characteristics (Privette, 1983). However, for Privette (1983) the central differences were defined as peak experience being intense joy, peak performance being superior functioning and flow being an intrinsically rewarding experience. The nature of all three constructs describes positive subjective experiences. Whilst all three experiences might take place on one single event it is clear that each describes distinct phenomenological experiences (Privette, 1983).

Csikszentmihalyi (1988; 2000) presented flow as a theory developed from a considerable study into those experiences that he described as intrinsic, or in other words those experiences that do not require extrinsic elements for participation. Other terms used to describe such experiences are 'in the Zone' (Young & Pain, 1999) and 'fun' (Jackson, 1995, 1996; Kimiecik & Harris, 1996). Csikszentmihalyi (1988; 2000) focused on those autotelic activities, personalities and experiences that aided his exploration into the notion of Flow. The 'Deep Flow' or 'Deep Play' of climbing was for Csikszentmihalyi (1975) 'an outstanding example of a particular class of flow activities' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 74).

Whilst Csikszentmihalyi (1975) did not specifically explore the extreme aspect of climbing many of the transcripts reported expressed strikingly similar opinions (See table. 2).

These initial precepts were refined to include nine flow categories; challenge-skill balance, merging of action and awareness, clear goals, unambiguous feedback, concentration on the task at hand, paradox of control, loss of self-consciousness, transformation of time and an autotelic experience (Jackson, 1996). However, on closer inspection of those writing about the notion of flow it would seem that there are some fundamental differences to the extreme sport experience. It may be of course that a discussion with Csikszentmihalyi might reveal further similarities but I only have the writings to critique. For example one of the major elements of flow is the importance of the participant controlling her environment (Jackson, 1995), yet as we have seen extreme sport participants talk about the experience involving a letting go of control. Equally a positive attitude is essential for flow to be experienced (Jackson, 1995), yet as we have seen extreme sport participants often report feelings that do not equate with positive attitudes:

... there's always that nagging doubt probably more of the nagging doubt than there should be I sometimes wish I had a more positive mental attitude because it wouldn't make any difference to whether I ran the fall or I didn't but I'd like to feel positive on the way down rather than feeling negative (ESP 4).

The Everest guide Pemba Nuru Sherpa expressed the feeling as 'I felt only 5 per cent hope getting back alive and 95 per cent certainty I would die' (Sherpa, 2003, p. 88). Extreme sport participants speak about the importance of being alone not of being dependent (no matter how egalitarian) on others. Enhanced sense and physical abilities also do not seem to be involved in flow. Flow is most often accompanied by time flying not slowing down. These examples and others lead me to the same conclusion that Winstead (1996) made; that is, whilst extreme sport participants may experience flow, flow is not the extreme sport experience.

Table 2. Deep-flow experiences in Rock Climbing (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, 1975, pp. 96-97).

<i>Normative Life</i>	<i>Rock Climbing Life</i>
Informational noise: distraction and confusion of attention	One-pointedness of mind
Nebulosity of limits, demands, motivation, decisions, feedbacks	Clarity and manageability of limits, demands, decisions, feedbacks
Severing of action and awareness	Merging of action and awareness
Hidden, unpredictable dangers: unmanageable fears	Obvious danger subject to evaluation and control
Anxiety, worry, confusion	Happiness, health, vision
Slavery to the clock; life lived in spurts	Time out of time: timelessness
Carrot-and-stick preoccupation with exotelic, extrinsic material and social reward; orientation towards ends	Process orientation; concern for autotelic, intrinsic rewards; conquest of the useless
Dualism of mind and body	Integration of mind and body
Lack of self-understanding; false self-consciousness; wars between the selves	Understanding of the true self, self-integration
Miscommunication with others; masks, statuses, and roles in an egalitarian order; false independence or misplaced dependency	Direct and immediate communication with others in an egalitarian order; true and welcomed dependency on others
Confusion about man's place in nature or the universe; isolation from the natural order; destruction of the earth	Sense of man's place in the universe; oneness with nature; congruence of psychological and environmental ecology
Superficiality of concerns; thinness of meaning in the flatland	Dimension of depth "up there"; encounter with ultimate concerns

Peak experiences and peak performance, whilst being similar in description to flow can be best described as ‘overlapping but with unique characteristics’ (Jackson, 1996, p. 77). For Jackson (1996) peak performance ‘denotes a standard of accomplishment rather than a psychological state’ (Jackson, 1996, p. 76). Peak experience may have a closer relationship to flow but does not necessarily involve flow. Panzarella (1980) maintained that peak experiences were closely related to those people who are considered to be self-actualized and as we have seen in chapter IX extreme sport participation may have a close link to self-actualization. Maslow (1977) considered peak experiences to be almost mystical in nature and epitomized as ‘a “little death” and a rebirth in various senses’ (Maslow, 1977, p. XV).

Lipscombe (1999) reported on the experiences of veteran skydiver’s and theorised in terms of the peak experience phenomenon as defined by Maslow (1967). Essentially Lipscombe (1999) found that eight of nineteen peak experience characteristics (see table 3), as defined by Maslow (1967), were identified as important by all participants. These were; total attention, rich perception, awe or reverence of the experience, fusion of dichotomies, fusion of the individual, experience or object unification, ego transcendence and the experience as intrinsically perfect. As Lipscombe (1999) pointed out, for peak experience to happen perhaps only three of the original characteristics are required in an experience. As such experiences reported by veteran skydivers could be classified as a ‘peak experience’ in terms of Maslow’s theory.

For Lipscombe (1999) intense emotional and cognitive experiences sometimes referred to as mystical, peak or magic moments often result from what they considered to be peak performance. Such experiences are often characterised by feelings of ‘acute well-being, peace, calm and stillness, detachment, uniqueness, freedom, floating, flying and weightlessness, ecstasy, being in the present, immersed in the moment, immortality, unity, altered perceptions of time and space, self-validation, and awareness of other’ (Lipscombe, 1999, p. 269). Many of which are strikingly similar to the experiences documented in this study.

However Lipscombe (1999) highlighted four important characteristics that related to the skydiving experience but not to peak experience. The first of these was that the feeling had a lasting effect; a common thread in the extreme sport experience. Still further, the

extreme sport experience transforms a participant. This would be in contrast to Maslow's definition where peak experiences in athletic events are considered fleeting (Lipscombe, 1999; Ravizza, 1977). The second was a high expectation that the experience would be repeated with each new jump, again common in the extreme sport experience. This was also in contrast to Maslow's theory which postulated a once in a lifetime or at least very rare happening for the peak experience (Maslow, 1971). Though Davis, Lockwood and Wright (1991) did consider that peak experiences might be more common than previously accepted. The third new category noted that the single most important factor for continued participation was the experience itself, again similar to the extreme sport experience. The fourth new characteristic of social considerations tended to be of secondary importance, once again common in the extreme sport experience to an extent that the 'alone' nature of the experience is an important element.

Equally, peak experiences are not the sole property of extreme sports. Triggers from numerous contexts including academia, music, visual arts, wild animals, nature and other athletic events (DeMares, 1998, 2000; DeMares & Krycka, 1998; Lipscombe, 1999; Panzarella, 1980). Perhaps as with flow the extreme sport experience includes peak experiences (perhaps as a combination trigger of nature and athletics) but is not necessarily confined by the concept of peak experience as typically described. Perhaps also the notion of peak experience is broad and poorly recognised.

Peak performance describes behaviour that is in some way superior to habitual behaviour (Privette, 1983). For Privette (1983) this is considered to be 'the prototype of superior use of human potential' (Privette, 1983, p. 1362). In its essence peak performance describes a high level of functioning often considered to be optimal. A typical example might be the maximising of abilities in a death crisis or the upper limits of athletic expertise. As with peak experience and flow peak performance can happen in any activity either consistently or as a one-off experience (Privette, 1983). Once again it may be that peak performance is experienced in the extreme sport experience but does not encapsulate the experience per se. Peak performance has not been specifically related to extreme sport experience.

Table 3. Maslow's nineteen characterisations of the peak-experience (adapted from Lipscombe, 1999, p. 270).

<i>Characterisations</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
Experience/object unification	Total harmony
Total attention	Complete absorption in the experience
Nature of the object in itself	Feeling of insignificance
Rich perception	Lost in the experience
Awe, reverence of the experience	The most blissful moment, ecstasy
Unity of the world	Feeling the world is unified
Abstract perception	Transcend the present situation
Fusion of dichotomies	The person and the experience merge
Feeling Godlike	Fullest potential/total control
Non-classifying perception	A new kind of viewing
Ego transcendence	They are the activity
Self-justifying moment	The experience as an end in itself
No consciousness of time and space	Lack of spatio-temporal consciousness
Experience is intrinsically perfect	Everything is perfect, beautiful, lasting
Awareness of the absolute	The ultimate truth is experienced
Effortlessness	No conscious deliberation in executing skills
Loss of fear	Momentary loss of psychological defences
Unique being of the individual	Experiences the totality of one's unique self
Fusion of the individual	Feeling integrated or together

In summary peak experience involves a joyful event without superior behaviour and can be differentiated from the other two by the inclusion of mystical or transpersonal qualities. Peak performance involves superior behaviours but not necessarily accompanied by joy or enjoyment. Peak performance includes:

... an holistic experience of clear focus on self and valued object in transaction. The clarity of focus, the strong sense of self, and the awareness of the transaction share importance with the value and focus on the central object the self is not lost (Privette, 1983, p. 1364).

An event that is exclusively considered flow involves joy but is generally at a lower level of performance, flow is essentially fun (Privette, 1983). Thus combined it could be argued that the constructs of peak performance, peak experience and flow encompass much of the extreme sport experience. However, there is still the question of heightened sensory ability and the unexplained physical performance that does not clearly fit into any category.

Thus it would seem that whilst some differences still remain in each of the experiences reviewed it might be that a combination or at least a combined effort presents compelling evidence to succinctly pigeon hole the extreme sport experience. However, one overriding implicit message from the above experiences is that such experiences are somehow super or trans human. That is each experience points the way to some type of experience beyond those every-day-human-experiences. Yet, if we are to accept the metaphors of participants when they describe sure-footedness of a mountain lion or mountain goat, flying like a bird and perhaps experiencing enhanced senses as if taking on the capabilities of animals, there might be another aspect to the experience. It might be that in fact the extreme sport experience is at least partially about releasing animal capabilities already held deep within our beings. Perhaps the experience of having no thoughts, of shutting of the peculiarly human trait of endless cognition enables a participant to release those animal capabilities that our minds keep safely locked behind closed doors. In the following chapter I draw this journey of words together and posit the phenomenological structure of the extreme sport experience. For now let us return to our post-amble.

So what can we learn from this section. Firstly, I believe, that the extreme sport experience is a transformative experience as distinct from an experience that might transform. Secondly that the experience enforces a deep internal and 'wholistic' resourcefulness whereby a participant 'discovers' their inner capabilities (emotional, physical, mental and spiritual). Thirdly that the powerful aspect of the experience involves, freedom, deep relaxation, enhanced sensory and physical abilities. Fourthly that the experience touches something that cannot be effectively described but is experienced as being an ultimate celebration and experience of life and living.

being, becoming, freedom and the ineffable

The Phenomenological Essence

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Like the empty sky it has no boundaries
Yet it is right in this place, ever profound and clear.

When you seek to know it, you cannot see it.

You cannot take hold of it,

But you cannot lose it.

In not being able to get it, you get it.

When you are silent, it speaks;

When you speak, it is silent.

The great gate is open to bestow alms,

And no crowd is blocking the way.

(cheng-tao Ke cited in M. Daniels, 2002a, p. 22)

☯

Transcendence

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To this point in our journey we have traced the extreme sport experience through a multitude of pre-reflective 'naïve' perceptions to reveal a more apt set of pre-phenomenological themes. Importantly, findings have established that explanations focusing on risk-taking, the death wish, or the notion of 'No Fear' only expose, at best, a superficial understanding of the extreme sport experience. Instead participants emphasise risk reduction, feelings of intense fear and a deep desire to celebrate living and life. Yet it is also clear that extreme sport participation has the potential to take life. In essence death, not injury, is the most likely result of a mismanaged accident or mistake. Death and fear, it would seem, open up a channel to experiences that many would consider worth dying for. In section 3 we exposed the experience as one of deep inner transformations, self-integration, inner freedom and a moment that evokes the ineffable. Participants describe complete relaxation, altered states, the slowing of time, increased sensory, physical and mental capacities and a world beyond the typical. The aim of this chapter is to reconfigure these findings by positing an understanding that gets back to the thing itself. That is, the phenomenological structure.

Recalling our discussion on the philosophical and methodological qualities of phenomenology we found that van Manen (1990; 1997b) suggested actualising the phenomenological description in terms of lived time, lived space, lived other and lived body. Though, as Barnes (2003) recognised not all experiences fit precisely within van Manen's (1990) intentions for these structures and as such might be about timelessness, emptiness and connectedness. Holding on to the caveat extrapolated by Barnes (2003) this final chapter then brings the previous chapters together by exploring the descriptions in terms of other, time, space and body. I do not intend to suggest that the event can in anyway be precisely divided in such a way as indeed all phenomenological notions are indelibly joined. However, by considering the experience in such terms we might effectively arrive at the phenomenological structure of the extreme sport experience. As is perhaps indicated by the chapter title and hinted at throughout section 3 the final analysis points towards the extreme sport experience as an experience of transcendence.

First, a re-organisation of the dialogue previously discussed in order to contextualise and present the findings in an appropriate time-line. In essence the experience can be

considered as a set of five phases; preparation, approach, activity, immediate post-activity and post-activity. The details of which are:

Preparation

This stage encompasses the years of preparation essential for obtaining the technical, environmental and mental skills required to minimise the potential of negative outcomes.

Approach

This stage describes the experience of preparing for the immediate intended activity; for example, walking to the jump site in B.A.S.E. jumping or paddling to the waterfall before descent. This phase is characterised by:

1. Intense emotions most often defined as fear.
2. Reading the environment.
3. Internal questioning and even doubt.

Activity

There would seem to be two elements to this phase; the initial commitment and the activity in flow. The first element is best described by those moments immediately after the decision to jump or catch a particular wave has been made. That is when the participant is moving towards the edge of the cliff in the pre-jump run or paddling ready to catch the wave. This initial element ends when the jumper is airborne or the surfer has caught the wave. The second element is then in flow. The first element, initial commitment, is characterised by:

1. Fear dropping away.
2. Mental chatter dropping away.
3. Letting go of the need to control or surrendering to the experience.
4. An internal focus or listening and trusting the inner voice.

The second element, active flow is characterised by:

1. Momentary primordial, authentic awareness as if coming home.
2. A release or freedom from the 'material-world.'
3. Feelings that the specific Natural world is alive and a teacher and greater than the human participant.
4. Complete absorption in the experience.

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5. A glimpse of the Ineffable (full experience beyond the describable)
6. Full sensual enhancement.
7. Effortlessness and feelings of floating, flying or weightlessness.
8. Time slowing down as participants describe being in the moment or totally present.
9. Altered perceptions of space as if entering a different world or universe.
10. Bliss, peace, calm, stillness, silence.
11. Unity, harmony or intimacy with the specific natural world and connecting to an experience considered to be the 'life-force.'

Immediate post-activity

In this phase the skier has reached the bottom or the Mountaineer has passed the danger zone and the body is awash with sensations. This phase might last hours or days. This phase is characterised by:

1. Intense positive emotions such as elation or ecstasy.
2. Enhanced feelings of personal energy.

Post-activity

The final phase might not come into play for some time after the event but is directly attributed to be part of the complete extreme sport experience. This phase is characterised by:

1. Transformation of view on life and self knowledge combined with humility.
2. Acute wellbeing.
3. Enhanced eco-centricity.

So returning to van Manen's (1990) assertion that a phenomenological description should involve lived other, time, space and body the following paragraphs explore the phases as evidence for transcendence but perhaps not quite as van Manen would have intended.

Lived other

Where as for van Manen (1990; 1997b) the other is explicitly human centric Merleau-Ponty pointed to alterity within self-hood and with nature (Johnson & Smith, 1990). Zimmerman (1992) also reminds us that otherness can be nature. Such relationships to otherness point to opposites, lost parts of ourselves or that which is always beyond. A

return from the dialectic alienated view of the natural world to an embracement restores interconnectedness and reciprocity (Langer, 1990) and recognises that which is alien and beyond and re-establishes intimacy and humility. Thus the natural world is perhaps a genuine other beyond the human centric view and the extreme sport experience in relation to alterity is, initially, an experience of a genuine intimate relationship with that which is beyond that in reciprocity reveals that which is within. In Zimmerman's (1992) terms extreme sport participation restores the 'squirrel self' (Zimmerman, 1992, p. 269) which in turn restores our true humanity. Within the moment we have termed 'active flow' that which is beyond becomes an experience of integration of self-as-other and natural-world-as-other that reveals a belonging to the world as it is calling towards the primordial Being. That is repositioning the other from over-there to merge with the here (Langer, 1990); to move beyond the mental/material, internal/external duality and experience connectedness. Such a momentary integration passes beyond a naïve understanding of the relationship between self and natural world to a new eco-centric understanding.

Lived time

The notion of lived time (temporality) is located in past, present and future (Husserl, 1964; Varela, 1999). Though beyond a mathematical abstract time (Bollnow, 1961). In phenomenological language all events are connected. In these terms the extreme sport experience is in one sense a moving towards an experience and transformation. A future oriented activity that is bound by past experiences and training. However, during that moment that we have defined as active flow we see the relationship to time changing. That is time loses its traditional, linear systematic process as defined by the external and changes shape. The interval moment that is present (Le Poidevin, 2000) is suddenly stretched, time is said to have slowed down or presented perception in slow motion. Past and future slip by as expected in the mundane attitude but the now of time seems to hover for a while and immediate past and future slip more sedately. However, this is not as a response to boredom as proposed by van Manen (1990; 1997b) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) but an experience of living in a short moment of eternity, that is a moment that seems to have moved beyond the mould of past, present and future and stuck in the present. Still, it must be stressed that time itself has not altered on its course for as the video camera will adequately demonstrate what is perceived to be an age in experiential

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time, happens in an instant of worldly time. In other terms the mundane flow of consciousness is temporarily interrupted and replaced with a slower flow of consciousness.

Lived space

Lived space is defined as felt space (van Manen, 1997b). Such an experience is greater than the space of measurements and as such not readily verbally explored (Bollnow, 1961). On the surface the extreme sport experience is about conventional conditions of space as outdoor space. On one level the experience is about natural landscapes and aesthetic valuation. However, the extreme sport experience would seem to be beyond this. Lived space would seem to be about moving beyond the predictable and into adventure that is experienced as a returning home to inner space (Bollnow, 1961). The experience is both about dwelling in the security of inner space and stepping into the ineffable void, abyss and danger of external space. At some point in the experience boundaries dissolve as attachment to the physical body is lost and both inner and outer space seem to be experienced as one space where the material merges with the non-material; the initially perceived life-force of the external fuses with the initially perceived life-force of the internal to become one life-force. An experience that Davis (1999) recognised as perhaps stemming from intimacy with self and a death-rebirth event.

Lived body

Corporeality or lived body describes the notion that we are always bodily in the world. That is the world is always experienced through our bodies (van Manen, 1990, 1997b). In the extreme sport experience it would seem that the experience is one of beyond the everyday but still on the same continuum. That is, the egoic structures of fear and mentality are suspended. A person is able to look into what has been described as their authentic self (Heidegger, 1996; Zimmerman, 1986) or soul (Rothberg, 1986; Tymieniecka, 1988). Sense ability and physical prowess are enhanced and even extended. Bodily energy is enhanced and wellbeing taken forward to the future. However, whilst this in itself demonstrates an expansion of the conventional it would seem that the experience is also about moving beyond the bodily experience as conventional through body experience as primal and into unity and harmony. As if the boundary role of skin disappears or merges with the external. That is experience moves beyond 'human' ex-

perience to be released into openness for 'raw', primordial experience uncluttered by thought and emotion.

Accepting these arguments indicates that the extreme sport experience is both about external extremes and inner extremes. The participant, or perhaps we should adapt White's (1993) term 'the outlier,' by preparing and actively participating in externally extreme environments is also 'given' the opportunity or presented with the 'gift' of being open to venture into the inner extremes. At some stage the external and the internal are momentarily experienced as one; the closed system that is man's perception of self is released to openness and what is inside rushes out as what is outside rushes in; the external and internal are in harmony, are essentially integrated. Integration transforms as awareness is expanded and previously assumed boundaries dissolve. Thus the traditional phenomenological notions of lived time, space, other and body are expanded and perhaps even transcended?

Transcendence

Transcendence is traditionally described as 'going out of the self towards that which is beyond it' (Sugarman, 2002). However, whilst this is often considered in terms of social transcendence (Dreher, 2003), Hanna (1993a; 1993b) reminds us that transcendence in the phenomenological sense is also about moving beyond the psychological ego and into the transcendental ego or true self. A state where core boundaries interpenetrate (Hanna, 1993b); a state that cannot be reached by rational efforts (Ramsay, 1998). In essence transcendence is the ability to go beyond self imposed limitations (Tymieniecka, 1988); beyond the domain of the psychological and cognitive (Shanon, 2002). For James (1971) this is described as a MORE that is both within and without. Whilst much of the above could describe transitory and momentary experiences, Daniels (2001) writes that transcendence might also be a longer term phenomenon, termed transformation.

Maslow (1971) identified 35 phenomenological meanings of transcendence that he summarised as:

Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than as means, to

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oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature and to the cosmos (Maslow, 1971, p. 279).

Within his descriptions are such transcendent happenings as the slowing down of time, letting be, surpassing ones limitations, accepting death, absorption, integration of dichotomies, loss of self-consciousness to name but a few. As we have already considered Valle (cited in Anderson et al., 1996) succinctly described moments of transcendent awareness as including stillness and peace, absence of I-ness, transformed sense of space, intuitive seeing and the ever present. All experiences that Valle considered outside of the usual description of intentionality and perception. Barnes (2003) echoes these perceptions claiming that such experiences are outside of cognitive understanding and beyond the sense of body.

Thus the extreme sport taken to its essence is transcendence; firstly, transcendence of self as a momentary peek into a participants own essence, core or true self. Secondly, transcendence as beyond or more than the naïve perceptions of existence in a material world or as Barnes (2003) found in meditation the essence of the 'experience' is, in part, somehow outside of the mundane or material world. Thirdly, transcendence as transformation of a previous understanding of self and one's place in the world akin to the trigger described by Braud (2001) in other non-ordinary transcendent experiences. Or the deep inner transformations that accompany death-rebirth experiences or death acceptance as recognised by Marshall (2002).

Whilst such a thesis undoubtedly opens up new scope for research and understanding of the extreme sport experience I believe the significance of this thesis reaches far beyond extreme sports. For me a number of particular examples stand out; the descriptions of instant and deep positive transformations; the descriptions of a more intimate relationship to nature and the descriptions of connecting to a deep inner self. However, what is more exciting and perhaps most important are the descriptions outlined in chapters X and XI, descriptions that offer a peek into a deeper human potential. Descriptions that perhaps test our own perceptions of reality but if we can but stop, listen and open ourselves to other potentials, point to something MORE and yet available to us all. Descriptions that allude to a deeper learning of what it means to be human.

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