

COMPETITION CLIMBING: FROM LEISURE PURSUIT TO LIFESTYLE SPORT

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Climbing as a competition sport is rapidly expanding in both participation and popularity; however, little to no research has been conducted regarding its formalization as a lifestyle sport. This study provides a brief review of the literature relating to lifestyle sport, explores the development of indoor competition climbing, discusses competition climbing as a lifestyle sport, and explores climbers' perceptions of climbing as a lifestyle sport through a content analysis of qualitative survey responses. Analysis of data collected from 607 USA Climbing members in late summer 2014 identified themes related to both the culture and long-term outcomes of the growing sport including governance, education and training, public awareness, and access. Implications for lifestyle sport management and future research are explored.

Throughout the past few decades, recreational pursuits and sports that diverge from the predominant, traditional sports models of football, soccer, basketball, and baseball have emerged in the United States. The literature refers to these non-traditional sports in a variety of ways including *informal* (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011), *extreme* (Donnelly, 2006), *whiz* (Midol, 1993), *adventure* (Breivik, 2010), *risk* (Fletcher, 2008), and *post-modern* sports (Wheaton, 2004a). Despite this differentiation in labels there seems to be a high level of similarity between the terms (Van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010; Wheaton, 2004b). For the purposes of this paper and based on the work of Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton, and Gilchrist (2005), we use the term "lifestyle sport" which encompasses many of these non-traditional sports and consists of three central concepts:

'alternative' (practiced in different ways to conventional sports and incorporating descriptions such as 'new', 'post-modern' and 'post-industrial'); 'lifestyle' (meanings related to personal factors beyond success in competition – although not denying that competition can be an element of the practice of lifestyle sports, and incorporating descriptions

such as 'action', 'wizz' and 'panic' sports); [and] 'extreme' (a label given to some aspects of practice associated with risk-taking; also associations with branding and commodifying some aspects of practice). (p. 16)

As lifestyle sports have become more prominent and gained acceptance within contemporary American culture, there is a need to better understand their development and evolution.

This article presents one of the first known works investigating the emergence of indoor competition climbing as a lifestyle sport. It provides a brief review of the literature relating to lifestyle sport, explores the history and development of indoor competition climbing, discusses the formalization of indoor competition climbing as a lifestyle sport, and explores climbers' perceptions of climbing as a lifestyle sport through a content analysis of qualitative survey responses.

LIFESTYLE SPORT

In an investigation of lifestyle sports, Tomlinson et al. (2005) noted that these activities are "characterized by a relative lack of regulation and a customary refusal by participants to follow regulatory codes" (p. 18) and are "associated with how people

look and behave, what subcultural choices and affiliations they make, [and] what forms of control they take over their lives – for example against formal bureaucracies or sports associations" (p. 2). It is this resistance to formal organization that is a hallmark of a sport being considered lifestyle rather than mainstream. Juxtaposed against classic definitions of sport that emphasize *institutionalization* and regulation (Coakley, 1998), the difference between mainstream and lifestyle sports is especially evident.

Despite resistance by many lifestyle sport participants and patrons, many of these sports are moving towards a commercial or mainstream model. This may be due in part to reduced participation of youth in mainstream sports (e.g., basketball, football, and baseball) and the increase in non-traditional sport participation (e.g., skateboarding, surfing, and BMX) (Active Marketing Group, 2009). These sports, both through voluntary media portrayals (i.e., solicited TV ads or event coverage) and coercive mainstreamization (i.e., unwanted attention by the media or aggressive marketing by sponsors), are increasingly brought out of obscurity and into the limelight (Wheaton, 2004a). Sports such as skateboarding, surfing, and park skiing are spotlighted on prime time television while athletes like Diana Nyad are featured on 60 Minutes. Indeed, the X Games broadcast rights were recently purchased for several million dollars, evidence that these once avant-garde activities are being packaged for mass production and consumption (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). These sports have transitioned from self-enriching leisure pursuits, inspired and nourished by a few passionate individuals, to commoditized activities driven by governing organizations. Elite athletes are often courted by major sponsors to represent their brands and entire film festivals have originated in response to the development of the unique cultures associated with lifestyle sports (Banff Center, 2015).

The transformation of these sports has necessitated the development of formal governing bodies that advocate on behalf of the sports for access to facilities, inclusion by the Olympics, and standardization of competition rules, certification processes, and team structures (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2005). Organizing bodies also act as liaisons

and/or buffers between athletes and key stakeholders such as spectators, sponsors, and media providers (Breivik, 2010). The growth of these governing bodies has aligned with other trends in lifestyle sport development, including what is sometimes referred to as "indoorisation." Indoorisation of a sport occurs when an outdoor pursuit (e.g., skiing, sky diving, rock climbing) moves from its traditional outdoor platform where many factors are uncontrollable to an indoor, artificial environment where various levels of control may be applied (Van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). This parallel growth likely reflects the perception that indoor renderings of lifestyle sports are easier to oversee, especially as it pertains to risk and resource management (Van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). The indoorisation of some outdoor pursuits, coupled with the support of sport organizations, also has the benefit of making those sports more accessible to users through reduced financial costs, fewer barriers to entry, clearer structures in terms of necessary training and equipment, and lower geographic distances to facilities when compared to outdoor venues (Ghimire, Green, Poudyal, & Cordell, 2014; Salome & Van Bottenburg, 2011).

A number of sports and sport organizations have emerged as a result of or in conjunction with the indoorisation of outdoor sports. For example, indoor surfing originated in the early 1980s with mechanical wave machines and evolved into "flow-boarding" which has a world championship event, governing body, and official rules and standards (Flow Tour, 2015). Another example is indoor climbing, which originated as a way to train for outdoor climbing during the off season (Attarian, 1989; March & Toft, 1979) and has since evolved into a sport in its own right (Breivik, 2010) with a formal organizational body to manage and develop facilities, host and judge competitions, provide education and training, and to advocate for the sport (USA Climbing, 2014).

LIFESTYLE SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

There are many components that contribute to lifestyle sport organizations and how they manage and advocate for participants. Slack and Parent (2006, p. 5) outlined five elements that characterize sport organizations. First, a sport organization is a social entity, meaning it deals with people and interactions between people. Second, it is directly involved with the sport industry unlike other organizations that are peripherally or

indirectly involved with sport (e.g., hotels that accommodate athletes or car rental companies that transport members of the organization). Third, it is goal-oriented and addresses issues that are more readily achieved through collective effort than through individual action. Fourth, sport organizations are intentional and consciously structure activities or tasks within the organizational system. Lastly, these organizations have an "identifiable boundary" such that organizational membership and its benefits are identifiable and differentiated from non-membership. Among their many roles, lifestyle sport organizations are responsible for governing or directing the institutional components of the sport, educating and certifying existing and new members, enhancing public awareness, and increasing participation by reducing constraints to participation (Hoye, Smith, Nicholson, & Stewart, 2015).

GOVERNANCE

At its core, sport governance is "the responsibility for the functioning and overall direction of the organization and is a necessary and institutionalized component of all sport codes from club level to national bodies, government agencies, sport service organizations and professional teams around the world" (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2009, p. 245). When a governing body for a particular sport is well managed and functional it provides legitimacy, structure, and continuity. This is especially pertinent for many lifestyle sports given their marginalized status when compared to more traditional sports (Hoye & Doherty, 2011; Tomlinson et al., 2005). One notable distinction between traditional sport models and lifestyle sports is the resistance of many participants to regulation and standardization often due to ideological opposition to the commercialization of their particular lifestyle sport (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011; Tomlinson et al., 2005). In spite of this resistance to organization, many lifestyle sports have formed governing bodies and/or established partnerships with mainstream organizations or outlets (e.g., media networks, government agencies). For example, snowboarding, once a symbol of resistance to traditional sport, is now prominently featured in the Olympics, signifying conformance to conventional ideals through participation in a highly popularized event (Van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). Additionally, growth and subsequent commercialization of some lifestyle sports demands that rules, regulations, or bylaws be established to monitor and manage that growth with

lifestyle sport participants often relying on newly formed governing bodies to do so (Tomlinson et al., 2005). In spite of the known challenges facing governing bodies (e.g., social and systemic resistance), they may also perform an important educative role by increasing professionalism, maintaining and disseminating sport and safety practices, and providing accreditation opportunities for individuals, coaches, programs, and facilities (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011).

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION

Education within lifestyle sports is a deeply social process occurring through the establishment of mentored relationships where sport skills, values, and norms are transferred from veteran to novice participants (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Little is known about the informal, unregulated mentoring relationships developed within lifestyle sports, including how they are formed, how they operate, or even what values, ethics, or norms they function to transmit. The lack of formal socialization processes is reflective of the anti-institutionalization attitudes characteristic of lifestyle sport participants. However, the need to establish and communicate clear safety procedures and sport practices to fledgling participants has resulted in increased acceptance of sport organizations by lifestyle sport athletes. Consequently, risk management, especially as it pertains to oversight and education of new or novice athletes, has been identified as a primary function of many lifestyle sport organizations (Tomlinson et al., 2005). The provision of safety protocols and standardized education opportunities is one way that sport organizations demonstrate their value to lifestyle sports participants. For example, in an assessment of the perceived success of parkour in the United Kingdom, sports organizers' ability to provide "managed risk" allegedly enhanced the value of, appreciation for, and youth involvement in the sport (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011). Certification structures and training modules are another area where governing bodies add value and legitimacy to lifestyle sports (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011).

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Sport organizations provide mechanisms for proactively and intentionally increasing public awareness, while controlling the sport's image/message and protecting members of the lifestyle sports they represent. These governing bodies are also responsible for increasing the sport's participation base through targeted advertising and active

recruitment, despite the reality that their values and practices often run counter to the freeform, casual nature of the lifestyle sports they represent (Tomlinson et al., 2005). For example, sport organizations counter-intuitively advertise the sports they represent as *extreme* or *risky* while at the same time serving a critical risk management function. These organizations can facilitate community outreach and engagement initiatives aimed at diversifying participation and controlling public perception of the sport (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011). Where governing bodies recognize the utility of social media networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and contemporary media outlets (e.g., YouTube and Vimeo), and use them to manage their publicity campaigns, they have the potential to expand the quantity and quality of participation at a rapid rate, as in the case of the parkour movement (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011). Parkour, a sport that encourages a unique form of engagement with and acrobatics in urban environments, was almost unheard of less than two decades ago. Now, in response to a few online videos being widely disseminated and a handful of spotlights in major blockbuster films, the sport has grown exponentially and developed a solid presence in areas such as the United Kingdom and United States (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011).

CONSTRAINTS & FACILITATORS TO PARTICIPATION

Traditionally, barriers to sport participation have been known to vary based on socio-demographic factors such as life stage, race, gender, and socio-economic status and include constraints like cost, distance, lack of awareness of the sport, lack of time, physical inability or disability, and general lack of interest (Lim et al., 2011). One of the primary barriers to entry or constraints to participation in lifestyle sport is reflected in marketing messages that reinforce sport hierarchies that exclude potential participants based on race, gender, and class characteristics (Wheaton, 2004b). Kusz (2004) argued that the "White masculine ideal" (p. 205) promoted by lifestyle sports marketing gives prominence to White, male athletes despite the reality that most lifestyle sports are embedded in equally gendered, culturally diverse populations. Beal and Wilson (2004) specifically delineate the racial disparities in lifestyle sport by pointing to skateboarding where non-White participants have historically had to work harder or compete at higher levels than their White counterparts in order to establish the same level of legitimacy or

status in and outside of the skating world. Governing bodies can help to eliminate real or perceived ethnic barriers to participation and may also reach out to new, ethnically diverse market segments by increasing access to lifestyle sport resources and decreasing the material or economic costs of participation (Gilchrist, 2010; Beal & Wilson, 2004).

Mastering the techniques of a lifestyle sport can take years of practice and participation. Likewise, appropriating the culture of a particular lifestyle sport—including the equipment, clothing, materials, and language—can require a significant investment on the part of sport organizations (Wheaton, 2004b). Statuses and norms created within lifestyle sports often result in implicit and sometimes explicit exclusivity that can be difficult to penetrate or transcend. This was evident in Wheaton's (2004b) investigation of windsurfers where subcultures were created within and around the sport that elevated and encouraged certain athletes, based on somewhat arbitrary competency criteria and class distinctions, and discouraged participation by athletes or prospective athletes of lower skill levels or classes. In her investigation and development of the sport culture construct, Wheaton (2007) also pointed out that many lifestyle sports have fluid subcultures and that concerned groups (such as sport organizations) need to be cognizant of these dynamic sport subcultures and more intentional about constructing lifestyle sport identities, cultures, and norms.

The broad roles of lifestyle sport organizations, from governance to reducing constraints, are evidenced across a variety of lifestyle sports. The next section examines the growth of indoor competition climbing through this lens of indoor competition climbing.

CLIMBING AS LIFESTYLE SPORT

We can trace the evolution of climbing from its early form as a recreational and leisure pursuit with hemp ropes and wood-handled ice axes to its modern configuration with purpose-built climbing gyms and ultra-light equipment. The historic roots of climbing are intertwined with other lifestyle sports such as hiking and mountaineering. As mentioned earlier lifestyle sports are known for their lack of organization, routine, and structure. Within this backdrop of unpredictability, climbing has been differentiated into a variety of sub-sports including bouldering, top-roping, sport climbing (also known as lead climbing), traditional climbing, multi-pitch, indoor speed climbing, and ice climbing

(Breivik, 2010; Eng, 2010; Gaines & Martin, 2014; Selters, 2012). Table 1 summarizes the common sub-sports within the climbing world. It is also worth noting that in regard to climbing, as with many lifestyle sports, there is frequent debate as to what constitutes a sub-sport versus a primary sport and disparities in how these subcategories are defined (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Of these multiple forms of climbing, indoor competition climbing has adopted characteristics that resemble more traditional sport models (e.g., basketball, football, and tennis). As a result, indoor competition climbing has experienced rapid expansion and acceptance as an organized sport compared to other varieties of climbing and will, therefore, be the focus of this paper.

Indoor competition climbing typically takes place in purpose built facilities and consists of three primary sub-sports: bouldering, sport (or lead) climbing, and speed climbing (USA Climbing, 2014). USA Climbing (USAC), founded in 1998, serves as the governing body for all competition climbing in the United States and is recognized as such by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC), and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). USA Climbing serves in this capacity for both youth (19 years old and younger) and adult (20 years old and over) climbers (USA Climbing, 2014). In early 2015 USAC absorbed the Collegiate Climbing Series (CCS) as well as the American Bouldering Series (USA Climbing, 2015) to create a more unified system of competition climbing in the United States.

USAC competitions take place at the local, regional, and national levels. Advancement to the next level (e.g., from the regional to the national level) requires a high placement at a competition; typically, the top five competitors in one or more sub-sport advance. These competitors are then invited to participate in higher levels of the sport due to their success in prior competitions both nationally and internationally. For USAC competitors to win an event, they must complete the most difficult climbing problems in the most efficient way possible (e.g., completing a bouldering route in only one try without falling off route) in comparison to their fellow competitors.

There is limited evidence regarding competition climbing and its transition from a leisure pursuit to a lifestyle sport. As such, the purpose of this study was to understand how the lifestyle sport of competition climbing could be improved

TABLE 1. Common Climbing Sub-Sport Descriptions

Sport (or Sub-Sport)	Description
Bouldering	Both indoor and outdoor climbing where the climber does not use ropes or harnesses to protect themselves from a fall. These routes are often no longer than 10 meters. Climbers often use padding to protect themselves in the event of a fall.
Ice Climbing	A form of climbing (primarily outdoor, except in the case of simulated ice and holds) where the climber can be top roped, lead climbing, and/or traditional climbing (with the use of ice screws) on ice that may have been formed artificially or naturally.
Indoor Speed Climbing	Primarily indoor climbing taking place on a standardized purpose built wall where climbers (top-rope belayed) race each other to the top with the goal being the fastest climber.
Multi-Pitch Climbing	A form of climbing (primarily outdoors, except in the case of simulated environments and situations) where the climbing is more than one length of a typical climbing rope (also known as pitch, typically 50 – 70 meters). This style of climbing may include both traditional and sport climbing, and in certain cases multiple days where the climbing party uses portable shelters.
Top Roping	Both indoor and outdoor climbing where the rope is pre-established from anchors at the top of a climb. One end of the rope is attached to the climber, while the other end goes down to a partner who is attached through a piece of belay equipment.
Traditional Climbing	Primarily outdoor climbing often considered more challenging than sport and top roped climbing, where the climber pulls the rope behind them as they ascend the wall/pitch and places equipment (typically non-permanent) to protect themselves from a fall. This style of climbing may also incorporate fixed pieces of equipment if a climber's safety dictates it.
Sport (Lead) Climbing	A form of climbing (both indoor and outdoor) more challenging than top roped climbing where the climber pulls the rope behind them as they ascend the wall/pitch and protect themselves from a fall by clipping to fixed pieces of equipment (often referred to as hangers or bolts).

Note: This list does not include aiding, outdoor speed, mixed, soloing, free base climbing, etc. For a further explanation of these and related terms see Eng, 2010; Gaines & Martin, 2014; Selters, 2012.

and what strengths – at an organizational and participant level – could further grow the sport and enhance the participant experience.

METHODS

In late summer 2014, USA Climbing conducted an online survey to better understand its growing membership. Following the completion of data collection, the research team approached USAC with an interest in conducting a study that would both serve the interests of USAC and contribute to the current body of climbing research. The research agenda was executed in two phases: phase one

consisted of independent data collection carried out by USAC during the summer of 2014, and phase two consisted of data analysis conducted by the research team in the fall of 2014. Consequently, the study was commissioned by an emergent climbing organization concerned with developing its brand and understanding its membership and organizational interests, while the role of handling and describing the data was filled by the non-affiliate research team.

INSTRUMENT AND PARTICIPANTS

Respondents were recruited via social media (Facebook) and email (through USAC's member list) and responses

anonymized. These strategies resulted in 2114 unique viewings (Facebook) and openings (email). A total of 703 respondents started the survey and 607 completed the entire 27 question survey, indicating a 28.7% response rate. An incentive to complete the survey was provided in the form of entry in a raffle to win free climbing equipment. The survey collected information concerning demographics, climbing equipment sponsors and brands, and short answer questions relating to climbing behavior and culture. This study is mostly concerned with responses to a single question: "What is missing from the sport of climbing?" Other data points were excluded due to ambiguous question wording, poor fit with the research question, or because they did not reveal information that would meaningfully contribute to the body of scientific research. Respondents' ages spanned from 8 to 66 years old ($M = 31.42$ years of age, $SD = 14.68$ years) with a fairly even split between genders (48.5% female). Respondents reported an average of 3.6 persons per household ($SD = 1.46$, range = 1 – 11). Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported an annual household income of \$50,000 – \$99,999, with the ranges of \$49,999 or less (22.9%) and \$100,000 – \$149,999 (22.7%) representing the next largest groups.

Respondents were asked questions about their level of climbing involvement. Respondents who identified themselves as climbers reported an average of 3.47 years climbing experience ($SD = 1.48$, range 1 – 5+ years) and reported climbing an average of 2.95 days per week ($SD = 1.23$). Climbers were more likely to report climbing indoors (74%), with 4.5% climbing mainly outdoors and 21.4% climbing both indoors and outside. Climbers reported an average of 1.82 ($SD = 1.01$, range = 1 - 5) climbers per household who climb at least weekly.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study investigated 607 short answer responses to the question, "What is the sport of climbing missing?" Using constant comparative analysis and a phenomenological approach, the researchers independently coded the qualitative responses on two occasions, using highlights to tag keywords and develop separate themes from the data (Buzan & Buzan, 1995). Independent, open and axial coding was conducted to identify initial themes followed by collaborative coding to identify patterns or trends. This allowed the researchers to arrive at four main themes with two to four subthemes

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, the researchers compared the final, agreed upon themes with the original data to verify the representativeness of the final themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Responses that were not of sufficient quality to warrant coding were dropped after agreement between the raters, examples of dropped responses included those that were unreadable, incomplete, or grammatically difficult to follow or interpret. Data was not coded by frequency of response (i.e. divided by percentages) due to many responses falling under multiple themes.

A number of trustworthiness procedures were followed. Confirmability was established using an audit trail (see Table 2), indicating the transition between open, axial, and selective themes and their relation to the research questions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). NVivo (version 10.0) was used to conduct content analysis and validate the selected themes. Resultant word counts indicated the themes identified through independent, open coding were the most frequently cited, thereby justifying their selection. Confirmability was established through reflexivity among the

investigators who were involved in the study design and analysis. In order to be reflexive or transparent, Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommended that researchers fully disclose biases held and decisions made throughout the interpretive process. Data credibility was established using an informal type of member checking: themes, subthemes, and preliminary interpretations of the themes and subthemes were presented to leaders of USAC to verify that language, meanings, and patterns were interpreted correctly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP AND BIAS

Bias is inherent in any study. The very nature of research questions lend themselves to bias. For example, by asking what is missing from climbing, there is a bias or assumption that something is missing, with which some respondents disagreed. The research team was comprised of climbers experienced in both indoor and outdoor climbing environments. This experience facilitated the team's understanding of climbing culture and terminology and may have allowed for

some bias. We sought to minimize bias through sound methodological approaches, checks within the research team, and transparency and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, while bias exists, themes were uncovered and interpreted according to a phenomenological approach that acknowledged and embraced bias as part of the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative coding procedures and confirmatory content analysis were utilized to develop four primary themes relating to (1) governance, (2) education, (3) public awareness, and (4) constraints. Major findings supporting the emergence of these themes are identified and discussed in the following sections. Each theme is defined using representative respondent quotes and discussed utilizing relevant literature.

GOVERNANCE

Respondents seemed especially aware of and interested in the transition of

TABLE 2: Coding, Content Analysis, and Research Questions by Research Phase

Stage 1: Initial Open Coding and Content Analysis

1A. Certification & Training	2A. Culture	3A. Olympics	4A. Money
1A. Leadership	2A. Outdoors & Crags	3B. Visibility	4A. Expensive
1A. Organization	2A. Competitive	3B. Exposure	4A. Financial Support
1A. Professional	2A. Dirt-bag	3B. Publicity	4A. Affordability
1B. Routes	2B. Stewardship	3B. News	4A. Cost
1B. Events	2B. Responsibility	3B. Media& Coverage	4B. Location
1B. Competitions	2B. Safety & Accidents	3B. Promotion	4B. Time
1B. Bouldering	2B. Respect	3B. Awareness	4B. Travel
1C. Consistency	2C. Mentorship	3C. Recognition	4B. Far
1C. Rules	2C. Beginners & Newbies	3C. Popularity	4B. Facilities/Gyms
1C. Official	2C. Coaches	3C. Mainstream	4C. Dangerous
1C. Judges	2C. Education & Instruction	3C. Spectators	4C. Extreme
1D. Brands	2D. Teams	3C. Legitimacy	4D. Access/Accessibility
1D. Funding	2D. Scouts	3C. Acknowledgement	4D. Diversity
1D. Sponsorship & Advertising	2D. High School/College		4D. Disabilities
1D. Business	2D. Scholarships		

Stage 2: Secondary Axial Coding and Theme Development

1A. Governance: Professionalism and Certification	2A. Education: Acculturation	3A. Public Awareness: Olympics	4A. Access: Cost
1B. Governance: Competition Fidelity	2B. Education: Stewardship	3B. Public Awareness: Visibility	4B. Access: Location
1C. Governance: Standardization	2C. Education: Mentorship	3C. Public Awareness: Recognition	4C. Access: Perceived Risk
1D. Governance: Funding	2D. Education: Supportive Academic Structures		4D. Access: Demographics

Stage 3: Research Questions

RQ1: Role and structure of governing bodies?	RQ 2: How is knowledge/culture transmitted in the organization?	RQ 3: How to facilitate the transition from fringe to mainstream?	RQ 4: What are the constraints to sport participation?
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the sport of climbing from a fringe, lifestyle sport to a mainstream sport with institutional structures. Moreover, they were aware of the role of governance in making that transition successful. Coerver and Beyers (2013) indicated that for an organization to remain viable it needed to consistently evaluate and improve its governance structure and capabilities. Governance refers to the system that guides how an organization is steered and regulated, and describes both structure and strategies for governing (Hoye et al., 2015). Governance becomes increasingly important as sport organizations transition from volunteer driven entities to professional, incorporated institutions that serve a more informed clientele and operate in a more urbane marketplace (Ferkins et al., 2009). Despite lifestyle athletes' general reluctance to embrace mainstreamization, respondents in this study specifically called for sport organizations to take a more active role in governing standardization practices, professionalization and certification, and fidelity at competitions. This suggests that as lifestyle sports grow there may need to be give-and-take on the part of athletes to sacrifice some elements of their sport identity to preserve other aspects and to ensure that sport culture and competition maintain their integrity.

Standardization. Part of the transition from a lifestyle sport to a mainstream sport is the establishment and formalization of standards of practice with a shift from inexperienced volunteers to certified judges, referees, or coaches (Larkin, Cottingham, & Pate, 2014). While competition exists and is a key component in lifestyle sports, it is often individually driven. As the sport of climbing grows and the number of competitors increases it will become more difficult for individual athletes to regulate and agree upon competition structures and standards. The desire for external or organizational regulation was apparent as one climber expressed the need for the following:

Control and regulation to make things consistent. I don't like judges that are parents and do things differently between them.

Other respondents wanted to see similar forms of standardization extend into their local gyms, indicating again and again the need for consistency. One respondent recommended the following change:

Consistent methods and practices from one gym to the next. It would be

nice if you knew what to expect when travelling to a new gym.

Ultimately respondents were concerned with fairness and consistency in rules and regulations between gyms and competitions. Rules and regulations that lack clarity, change, or whose implementation is variable at best, create ambiguity within sport organizations that can be a source of dissatisfaction and conflict. Additionally, lack of standardization can become an issue of risk management as described by the following respondent:

Many people climbing learn gym climbing and learn how to climb outside from a guy who learned it from a guy and there are so many bad practices/accidents waiting to happen. There are more than one way to do many climbing tasks but there is always a proper way. Even simple stuff like belaying is done dangerously.

Streamlining and standardizing rules, regulations, training procedures, and even promotion models are indicators of governance that assist sport organizations in establishing legitimacy and reducing ambiguity.

Professionalism and Certification. Organizational culture improves when negative member experiences are reduced and positive member experiences are fostered. Professionalism not only affects an organization's culture and brand, but also impacts member experiences (Colquitt, LePine, & Wesson, 2014). Survey respondent experiences were specifically impacted by a lack of professionalism at competitions and events. Concerns usually surrounded event offerings (e.g. food options, sponsorship, and alternate activities) or the quality and scope of broadcasting. This respondent statement parallels these findings:

Professionalism in broadcasting – the competitions that I've watched online are typically covered by a couple of guys who talk like climbers talking to climbers, not broadcasters talking to average people. They also seem to be lacking in overall sports broadcasting skills.

The lack of professionalism and experience of broadcasters and likely other staff increases negative member experiences that discourage potential market entrants and continued membership, decreasing the organization's

potential for growth. Respondents also indicated a lack of professionalism surrounding the number and quality of coaches. To them, the sport still feels like a parent or volunteer run organization lacking the certification process and staff support that are typical of mainstream sports. The following respondent statements capture this idea:

There is a paucity of quality coaches for the kids, especially in the eastern half of the country.

As a coach, we need more coaching development. Both in terms of providing coaches training and certification as well as trying to make research into climbing specific training happen and more.

Finally, some respondents called for adjustments in the governance structure of the organization recommending improvements to communication, clarity in leadership, and a shift towards a business model of running the organization. These recommendations run counter to many lifestyle sports principles but support the organizational leadership literature. As organizations evolve, staff need to adopt skills requisite to run the organization or new staff need to be hired to fill changing roles (Colquitt et al., 2014).

EDUCATION

The need for acculturation pathways, stewardship education, mentorship, and supportive academic structures emerged as key subthemes under the global theme of education. From an organizational culture standpoint, education refers to how values, culture, and knowledge are transferred between the organization and its members, between members within the organization, and between the organization and outsiders. Specifically, from an ideational perspective, education reflects the development and meanings associated with organizational stories, myths, and traditions (Frontiera, 2010).

Acculturation. The effort by organizational leaders and the majority of members to legitimize and grow the sport of climbing has not been fully embraced by all climbers. Some, who cling to climbing's historical position as a lifestyle sport, argue that by making the sport more mainstream, it will lose the inherent qualities that make it great. A few respondents passionately declared their feelings about the change in climbing culture:

Climbing is becoming too mainstream. Some argue that it is a good thing.

More mainstream brings more sponsors, more money, more flash. But this is NOT climbing. Nothing compares to the feeling of being in a boulder field working a project. Out there, there are no big name sponsors flashing their stuff. Only climbing.

As to ethics, too much emphasis is placed on numbers and seeming cool by climbing hard numbers. More emphasis should be placed on enjoying the sport and nature. Having non climbers understand that climbing is not just an activity, but a life style and can be shared with the entire family and friends for many years.

While most respondents called for increases in corporate sponsorship and organizational structural models that mirror other mainstream sports, a few questioned whether or not the sport has strayed too far from its roots and wondered how this shift could change the quality of the climbing experience. These disparate views regarding the sport's competition focus, parental involvement, and awareness of and attitudes towards climbing's roots reflect cultural ambiguities highlighted in the organizational culture and lifestyle sport literature (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Wheaton, 2007). Organizational leaders need to be aware of these conflicting ideologies and ensure a unified message about the sport is being disseminated to the public, their members, and future market segments. Of great importance is the organization's ability to understand, shape, and transmit its cultural myths, stories, and message to the rising generation of climbers (Frontiera, 2010).

Stewardship. Respondents indicated that respect and stewardship needs to be a part of USA Climbing's acculturation process moving forward. As the sport has increased in popularity, it has attracted new participants who are disconnected from the sport's origin and mission. Missing in the sport is a consistent, clearly communicated message, especially to youth, regarding respect for other climbers, the history and culture of climbing, and appropriate treatment of the outdoor climbing environment often referred to in other sports as the etiquette of the sport. The divergence in terminology here may be indicative of the emergent state of indoor competition climbing in that it has yet to fully adopt traditional sport vernacular and instead retains language associated with outdoor climbing. The retained interest in environmental stewardship and sport etiquette may reflect respondents' desire to maintain certain lifestyle sport traits while

embracing aspects of mainstreamization. Regardless of the language used or underlying motive, this sentiment that stewardship education is imperative is embodied in the following respondent perspective:

With the growth of mega-gyms and growing number of people entering the sport, stewardship education for youth climbers is lacking. USAC could have a big impact on youth to become good ambassadors of the sport to promote responsible climbing practices.

This idea was echoed by others who feel the new generation of climbers' need education about their role as stewards of the sport and its culture:

So many advocates are immature substance abusers who just want to escape society. I think we should be trying to reshape society, educating them to the value of outdoors time. And new areas need to be thoughtfully developed to be user friendly and so land owners/managers see that we aren't just going to make a mess.

This respondent also draws attention to the challenge faced by growing sport organizations who are managing new stakeholders. As the sport of climbing grows and outdoors use increases, organizational leaders will have to further navigate relationships with land managers, community leaders, and other new stakeholders. Also implied in the comments above are issues of sustainability, rooted in the sport of climbing's connection to nature based settings. Sustainability, a sport and tourism buzzword, is a growing concern for organizational leaders who are increasingly scrutinized as to how they manage not only their people and profits, but the planet as well (Barker, Barker-Ruchti, Wals, & Tinning, 2014; Schubring & Thiel, 2014).

Mentorship. Mentoring is an important dimension of many member-based sport organizations (Reade, Rodgers, & Spriggs, 2008). As respondents in this study discussed their feelings about organizational culture, safety, stewardship and skill building, they consistently discussed the need for and importance of mentors in transmitting those values. With so many new entrants to the sport, including both youth and adults, respondents perceived a need for strong mentors to guide each other. One respondent shared:

It's missing a lot of interaction between beginners and veterans – especially in

the gym. The mentoring that happens in other sports is not as present in the sport of climbing.

Other respondents suggested that mentoring would provide a way to connect new climbers to local outdoor resources, to socially supportive climbing networks, and would help facilitate a responsible shift from the gym to the outdoors. The theme of shifting from gym to crag (where crag refers to outdoor or natural climbing edifices), was recurring and embodied well in these respondent's perspectives on mentoring:

A better network of connecting people to climb outdoor areas. Entry into finding and exploring outdoor areas is hard, connecting people as "peer guides" would really bridge that gap.

Proper safety instruction and risk management (such as an intro to climbing class) for those that have never climbed. Some sort of gym to crag intro class as an example. I've heard too many stories of newbies getting hurt and injured because they went outside, but didn't have proper instruction.

Some respondents were especially concerned that "newbies" (i.e., new entrants) to the sport do not practice safe climbing, imposing risks on themselves and sending a message to prospective climbers that the sport is dangerous or poorly managed. From a risk management perspective, governing bodies should take great care to ensure that safe climbing principles are being taught and transmitted through multiple channels such as mentors, coaches, members, and organizational messages. How risk is perceived and managed is a large part of an organization's culture and reflective of its leadership.

Supportive Academic Structures. Many respondents indicated the need for greater organizational involvement within the public education system in the form of climbing scholarships, high school level and collegiate climbing teams, and organized climbing competitions hosted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Here, respondents regularly compared the sport of climbing to mainstream sports that have a deep and long term presence in the U.S. school system:

I think it should have scholarships like traditional college sports.

It's missing scholarship opportunities with colleges.

In my opinion, climbers have yet to be taken seriously. I am a senior in high school beginning the college search. I wish that I knew that colleges would begin to take climbing as a legitimate sport.

How this model would look for climbers is yet to be determined. In an investigation of another emerging sport, wheelchair basketball, Larkin et al. (2014) noted:

Benefits for a sport to be recognized as an NCAA activity include increased worldwide awareness and the potential for growth to become a mainstream sport. Considering such advantages, it is no wonder that athletic directors, participants, promoters, marketers, and other stakeholders of developing sports aspire earnestly for the coveted NCAA championship status or even emerging status. (p. 168)

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Current research indicates that public awareness is an important gauge of organizational legitimacy (McDougle, 2014). In the context of sport, *legitimacy* has been defined as the popular acceptance of the sport (Halgin, 2006). In this study respondents indicated that sponsorship and legitimacy were equivalent. Here a respondent professes the importance of a "big" sponsor:

Climbing is a widely unknown and misunderstood sport to the general public. Most people don't know competitive climbing exists. It would be amazing for it to be on real TV, not just live streams. Funding for US team athlete would also encourage the country's best to attend more world cups. This requires bigger sponsors which we don't have.

Another respondent mentioned the importance of establishing legitimacy through a corporate sponsorship blend that could lead to climbing's inclusion as an Olympic sport:

More corporate sponsorships - an official airline (that would help with airfares to Divisional, National and World/Pan Am comps); an official hotel chain (ditto with room rates); an official rental car company (ditto). Major corporate sponsorship might help with the bid to become an Olympic sport as well.

Inclusion in the Olympics was a prominent theme in this data set. Given

USAC's partnership with both the USOC and IOC, this is an authentic and reasonable goal and in line with the desires of competition climbing's membership.

CONSTRAINTS

As organizational leaders think about growing their membership and diversifying their markets, the issue of constraints that may limit climbing participation becomes pronounced. Climbing and outdoor adventure sports in the United States have traditionally and anecdotally been middle class, White endeavors (White & Bustman, 2010). If an organization's goal is to make their brand image more inclusive and increase or diversify their membership, they need to identify and reduce constraints to participation. When asked what was missing from the sport of climbing, respondents identified a number of factors that impede climbing participation: location, cost, perceptions of risk, and demographic factors.

Location. Some respondents felt climbing teams, coaches, and facilities were too distant, especially in flatland areas where natural climbing surfaces were either inaccessible or non-existent. Some respondents took this idea further indicating that access to "quality" gyms was even more limited. In addition to limited gym access, respondents expressed concerns about the travel distance and costs associated with attendance at regional, divisional, or national competitions. The travel time created by the distance to competitions took time away from other life activities such as work and school.

Most gyms are expensive and some hard to get to, so only those with enough money and transportation can participate.

More rock gyms for better access to indoor climbing more opportunities for outdoor climbing for youth whose parents don't climb.

Financial Cost. Respondents expressed that high competition and travel costs kept even the most experienced climbers from competing. High costs were associated with gyms as well. In order for climbing participation and legitimacy to increase, then removing barriers to participation needs to be a key priority (Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011). Additionally sponsorship came up in connection with a variety of different themes but especially when discussed as a means to reduce costs of travel and participation for competition climbers. The

challenge of affordability was captured in these respondents' answers:

I think the biggest hardship is the financial cost of traveling. It would be great if more companies sponsored the kids going to worlds to help offset the cost to parents. It is a huge sacrifice for many.

All the comps are soooo expensive. Even though we have a good income we have chosen not to attend certain comps because of the cost.

Perceived Risk. A few respondents indicated that the public's perception of risk may be a barrier to entry into the sport. This idea was conveyed in the following statement:

I think we're missing a whole group of people who are afraid of heights and aren't aware of the amount of safety precautions taken when climbing.

Managing real and perceived risk and maintaining safe spaces is a major issue facing adventure sport industries. Educating the public about the real versus perceived risks may help the industry grow and transition. In doing so, organizational leaders need to be wary of excluding existing or potential thrill seeking members who are drawn to the sport because of its inherent, exhilarating, albeit risky properties. Controlling the narrative about levels of risk in the sport is especially challenging when high-profile climbers are spotlighted performing technical free solo climbs or tragic accidents monopolize media coverage. The dilemma here is that these high-profile, exciting acts simultaneously invite and exclude participation depending on the demographic being targeted by the organization.

Participant Homogeneity. One of the primary issues of access that surfaced was the lack of diversity in the sport, despite the location of many climbing gyms in urban, ethnically heterogeneous areas. This finding is congruent with many studies of traditionally outdoor sports which indicate a lack of ethnic minority representation in these sports (see Floyd & Gramman, 1993; Ghirmire, Green, Poudyal, & Cordell, 2014). Respondents felt that underprivileged or low income groups and a majority of racial groups were underserved and underrepresented. The following three quotes articulate the problem and opportunity well:

Where I climb, it is mostly upper-middle class white people and very little of any other ethnicity. We need to figure out how to make climbing available to everyone.

Diversity and representation of LGBT, race, disabilities, and other. I don't know any famous transgendered or gay climbers. Even black climbers are scarce within the professional community.

Accessibility to the underprivileged. Representation by various races.

While great strides toward diversity and equity are being made in other sports, the climbing community still has a long way to go. Almost 20 years ago Harris (1997) noted that outdoor, adventure recreation continued to be a predominately White endeavor. Based on this study, one has to wonder what has changed. Deeper questions about ethnic and racial barriers to climbing need to be considered by researchers and organizational heads moving forward. While issues related to cost and location can more easily be removed or reduced, barriers associated with race are less clear and less easily addressed (Gómez, 2002).

LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of the study was the data format. The research team had access to anonymous data only with no mechanism for follow up with survey respondents. Furthermore, establishing credibility and transferability of the data was problematic as the data was derived from a secondary source. However, with over 600 responses in a qualitative data format, the themes were well defined. Another limitation of this study relates to the nature of the data collection. Data were collected as part of a market analysis conducted by USAC without academic research in mind. Response choices for some questions were structured in a manner that made it difficult to analyze. For example, "How many years have you been climbing?" had response categories ranging from 1 year to 5+. Clearly, more categories would have provided better insight into climbing history.

IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study examined the transformation of climbing as a lifestyle sport and fringe activity to an organized and highly structured sport aimed at

mainstreamization. Indoor competition climbing provides an excellent opportunity to understand both the evolution of lifestyle sports and the development of sport organizations. USAC is encountering many of the same organizational challenges that emerging and developing lifestyle sport organizations typically encounter (Larkin et al., 2014). It is clear that enhanced organizational leadership and oversight has led to a higher level of recognition for the sport of climbing. The path laid down by competition climbing's organizing bodies has provided excellent role modeling for lifestyle sports including trail running, mountain biking, and adventure racing to enhance both their organizations and user experiences. As these sports seek or otherwise evolve toward formalization they may experience issues similar to those experienced by USAC.

A significant portion of respondents expressed a desire for competition climbing to become recognized as a legitimate sport. Legitimacy was defined in a number of ways but was most often characterized by the presence of more and larger sponsors at competitions and the inclusion of the sport into the Olympics. The benefits to both sponsors and competition participants are promising. With the quick growth of competition climbing, sponsors could position themselves as "the" brand for competition climbing. These sponsorships could enhance their brand awareness in other adventure sports, influence user preferences and emotional commitment or brand loyalty based on their partnership with USAC, and enhance sales of the sponsor's product (Chien, Cornwell, & Pappu, 2011). Formalized competition climbing is already moving in this direction with a few big-brand sponsors for larger regional and national competitions. The legitimacy of having larger sponsors also provides a promising mechanism for acceptance of competition climbing into other formal sports governing bodies such as the NCAA and the Olympics (Larkin et al., 2014). Enhanced primary school and college/university partnerships will help to broaden both the appeal of competition climbing and expand USACs organizational footprint and clout much like wheelchair basketball has been able to accomplish through its university sport clubs and NCAA recognition. These partnerships have the potential additional benefit of building foundational climbing knowledge for a newer generation of climbers

While not a major theme, this study alluded to the potential environmental costs of the growth of organized climbing. For many climbers, climbing indoors has a

natural progression to climbing outdoors (Eng, 2010). Given its rapid growth, along with the growth of other adventure sports (Breivik, 2010), the potential for environmental degradation around outdoor climbing areas is high. Environmental stewardship and education should be a central focus of climbing organizations and may be a way of allowing subgroups within the sport to maintain elements of their lifestyle sport identity as other aspects of the sport become more mainstream. Other member-based associations have been very successful in creating such environmental stewardship and education programs (Browne, Garst, & Bialeschki, 2011). Furthermore, this progression from indoor to outdoor climbing carries the potential for increased climbing-related injuries as indoor climbing facilities typically possess higher levels of control in the areas of risk management and monitoring. Simply put, climbers accustomed to climbing indoors may be ill-prepared for climbing on natural rock surfaces and routes. Levels of training required to successfully climb indoors are substantially lower than those needed outdoors, thus there is a need for transitional education for indoor climbers as they embark into outdoor climbing. This should include safety, stewardship, and etiquette training. A potential side effect of competition climbing's growth is the subsequent strain on indoor facilities. Survey respondents frequently mentioned the difficulty they experienced traveling to climbing facilities. The sport of competition climbing, and its corresponding governing body USAC, is in position organizationally to make recommendations to facility owners and manufacturers on areas in need of gyms or gym capacity based off these responses.

Given competition climbing's youth centric roots, it is in excellent position to further contribute to positive youth development through participation and potential competition. Sports organized with positive outcomes in mind provide a variety of developmental benefits to youth, including increased physical health (Merkel, 2013), enhanced self-esteem, and the development of prosocial behaviors (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). Sports have also been shown to enhance both academic and cognitive skills (Bailey, 2006).

An area highlighted by the survey results indicated that at both the organizational and volunteer level, training and coaching are inconsistent. This result parallels the findings of Larkin et al.'s (2014) study of the growth of wheelchair basketball which identified similar inconsistencies regarding coaches and

volunteers. Developing a blueprint of coaching and mentoring strategies in the context of competition climbing is a promising area for future research and should not neglect to pull from the wide body of existing sport research on the topic.

Another area illuminated by this study relates to the constraints perceived and experienced by respondents. Many respondents mentioned the financial barriers associated with climbing participation including competition fees, travel expenses, and gym memberships. This economic constraint could have the unintended consequence of limiting climbing to only the most privileged participants, which in the United States often has the unintended side effect of excluding racial minorities (Gómez, 2002). The lack of ethnic and racial diversity in climbing is problematic as it mirrors the homogenous nature of other adventure sport recreation activities – a disturbing trend that reflects a failure to engage a large percentage of the population (Ghimire et al., 2014; Wheaton, 2004b). This shortcoming is only further demonstrated given that many climbing gyms are underutilized by minority groups despite being located in diverse urban areas. While a known constraint to participation for ethnic and racial minorities is often simply that there are no other persons of their group participating, further exploration of racial and ethnic related constraints is needed (Ghimire et al., 2014; Gómez, 2006). The anticipated growth of outdoor climbing as a result of indoor climbing participation may prove to be an area ripe for investigation of both ethnic constraint negotiation and enhancing ethnic and racial minority participation in the sport, and perhaps adventure sport in general.

Climbing as a sport is at a crossroads. A small group of respondents indicated they felt climbing was moving, undesirably so, away from its roots as a fringe activity to one with more mainstream appeal. This viewpoint counters the reaction of many respondents who indicated the need for climbing to, in fact, become more mainstream. These results indicate a need for USAC to communicate with the population it serves more clearly what its goals for the sport of climbing are, a finding that has implications for other lifestyle sports seeking to find the balance between their non-institutional roots and the need for governance as their sport grows in popularity and participation.

Climbing as sport provides an excellent case study for research of emerging lifestyle sport organizations and their membership. Based on the results of

this study, considerations for future research should include potential economic and health benefits of competition climbing, constraint negotiation within adventure sports, role of the family within adventure sports, and governing organizational influences on these constructs. This study helps to provide context for the transformation of climbing from a fringe activity and lifestyle sport to an emerging mainstream sport by illuminating opportunities for further development.

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