'Soulriding' and the Spirituality of Snowboarding

Abstract

This research has its genesis in the discovery of a term "soulriding" in the vocabulary of snowboarding. The discovery invited the question at the heart of the research, "What is spiritual about snowboarding?"

The nature of spirituality is widely contested, and understandings of spirituality are confused, in a range of academic disciplines and particularly within the sociology of religion. In other academic disciplines the understandings focus on either experience or identity as the primary spiritual element. Sociological understandings of religion have examined both experience and identity but have overlooked the significance of context.

This research proposes a new model of spirituality which mediates between structural and individual aspects of spirituality with two points of reference: dimension and frame. Firstly the model identifies experience, identity and context as three dimensions of spirituality. Secondly the model locates spirituality in the frame, or subjective reality, with which the individual perceives their experiences, themselves, and their environment. This model provides clarity to the discourse about spirituality without excluding understandings. The research is theorised both within sociological understandings of spirituality and within the field of social constructionism.

The model was explored through an investigation of the term 'soulriding' within snowboarding. This provided a field which is often understood as spiritual by the participants, but in which the nature of that spirituality is not clear or overtly constructed. Within the sport of snowboarding ten elements were derived, which reflect the three dimensions of context, experience and identity, and which had the potential to be framed as spiritual. Semi-structured interviews with thirty-three snowboarders from the UK and Canada examined the significance of these elements alongside understandings of 'spirituality' and 'soulriding'.

The research demonstrated that the model was effective in understanding the nature of spirituality within snowboarding, and has the potential to be used in a variety of other areas.

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The work is dedicated to the memory of the original soulrider, Craig Kelly, 1966-2003

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Chapter 1 - Introducing Soulriding and Framing

This research was engendered by my discovery of a term, 'soulriding', within the vocabulary of snowboarding. As a snowboarder and an Anglican priest, the term intrigued me. The existence of the term 'soulriding' seemed to suggest that for some snowboarders there might be a spiritual element of some kind to the sport. Like many religious people I have found the outdoors a place to encounter God. However this term suggested that the experience was not exclusive to the religious, but was more widely experienced. I connected this discovery with my interest in the term spirituality. Spirituality and the spiritual are terms with a wide currency in contemporary society. The increasing significance of these terms is matched by a decline in the popularity of religion which is of particular significance to those with a professional interest in religion. Thus I believe understanding the nature of spirituality is a significant pursuit.

In order to convey something of the 'soulriding' experience to a variety of audiences, I wrote the following fictional account. It is based on a variety of experiences I have had whilst snowboarding and on the experiences of my interviewees.

> It's a beautiful sunny day on the mountain, a couple of days after a big snowfall. It's time for a visit to the 'back-country'. With some friends you ascend the lift system to one of the high points of the resort, and then take off your board and hike for half an hour or so to access the hidden powder-fields. As you hike, you leave the crowded pistes behind, and have a growing sense of earning your way into the wilderness. At last you reach the point where you will descend, and you pause. Around you are the mountains, behind you are the crowds, in front of you field after field of untouched powder. Anticipation, excitement and a sense of peace flood through you.
>
> You look around, both at your companions and at the slope below, looking for the route that you will take. Everyone is aware of the danger of avalanche, so you check your gear and safety equipment. Then you strap on to your board, and one by one descend. Maybe you wait till last, to enjoy watching everyone else go down, to learn from what they find, and to have the freedom to go at your own pace. Maybe you go in front, so you can make the first tracks, and

spend time at stops enjoying the natural wilderness.

Sometimes, particularly at the beginning, everyone is whooping and laughing, delighted at the powder. Sometimes it all seems to go silent, and there's just you and the snow, and even the sensation of constant turning disappears. At these moments you are both completely focussed on your riding, aware of every nuance of the snow and your board, and almost detached, as if the board is guiding itself and you are just a passenger. Time stops.

Another time, you see one of your friends has found a snow covered rock to jump off. You head for it ...take off....fly .... land.... fall and roll in the powder - laughing as you get up. Nothing matters. This is what life is all about.

My research into the phenomena of soulriding has been a vehicle for me to explore what is meant by the term 'spiritual', which I see as key for understanding the context in which religious institutions exist in contemporary western society. The term is problematic, not least in the sociology of religion. There are a variety of understandings currently in use, and there is a lack of clarity on what is being meant in almost any usage of the term. The thesis became an opportunity to develop a model of spirituality appropriate to the sociology of religion and to explore that model in the context of snowboarding.

This chapter will introduce the thesis in four ways. Firstly, it will introduce the theoretical model of spirituality which I developed. This is centred on the ideas of 'frame spirituality' and of understanding spirituality as having three dimensions. I identify ten elements of snowboarding which have a form of spirituality and which illustrate the framing of spirituality and the three dimensions of spirituality. Secondly, the culture of snowboarding will be introduced in order to clarify the main context for the research. This will include a brief history of the sport, and an overview of the snowboard media which was used as a resource in the initial stages of this research. The third section is concerned with the key native term in the research, 'soulriding', giving some context to the term and the connections between snowboarding and spirituality.

Finally the structure of the main body of the thesis is explained.

1.1 The conceptual framework of the thesis

This section contains a concise introduction to the main ideas of the thesis. These will be expounded and considered in greater detail in the first four chapters of the thesis.

1.1.1 Soulriding and spirituality

Spirituality is itself a term which has been changing in meaning over the last fifty years. Related terms to spirituality permeate commonplace vocabulary, but these are often vague or ill-defined. The study of spirituality is a field which has emerged within the last two decades in a number of academic disciplines. There appears to be little inter-disciplinary awareness within these studies, with each discipline defining spirituality on its own terms. The sociology of religion has focussed its attention on the term comparatively recently, and there is little consensus on the meaning or significance of the term.

In order to study spirituality within snowboarding it was necessary to develop a theoretical framework for understanding spirituality. This framework was intended to take account of the definitions from a range of disciplines, but to be primarily sociological, and thus to contribute to the debate within the sociology of religion on the nature and value of spirituality. This was not an attempt to give a comprehensive definition of spirituality but to provide a distinctively sociological perspective on spirituality.

1.1.2 Spirituality of identity, experience, context and frames

The understandings of spirituality in the academies can be separated into two dimensions of a plane. On one axis are the spiritualities which focus outward, on

engagement with an 'other', which may be the 'divine' spirit, and on the other axis are those which focus solely on the self, or on the human spirit. I term the former the spirituality of experience, and the latter the spirituality of identity.
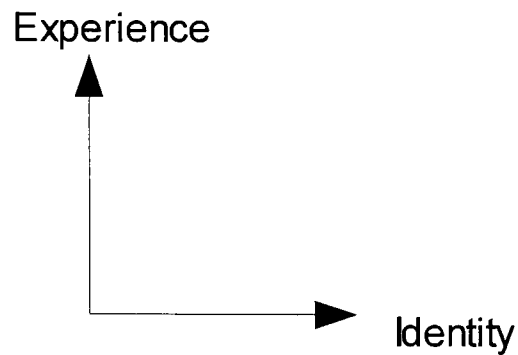
Figure 1: Two dimensions of spirituality

Both experience and identity spiritualities occur in a context, and this context is not incidental to the spirituality. I will show that understandings of the spiritual within classical sociology of religion have assumed that religion arises as an *a posteriori* result of certain experiences. I will argue that context is determinative in producing these understandings, and that certain contexts are invested *a priori* with the ability to produce spiritual experiences.

Context can affect identity either directly or indirectly. The individual may relate their identity directly to the context, for example by saying "I am a snowboarder". Experiences, which arise from contexts, may result in some change in self perception or identity. Thus context both forms a third dimension of spirituality and may be formative of experience and identity spirituality.

Experience

Context

Identity
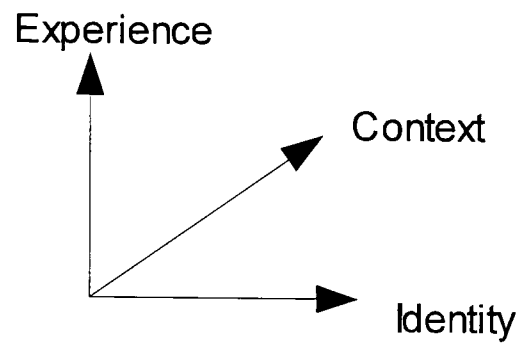
Figure 2: Three dimensions of spirituality

Furthermore, context is not neutral. Rather it is mediated by culture and interpreted by the individual. Whilst a particular element of context may have an objective existence (for example mountains), there is always a subjective aspect to that context. For this subjective aspect I use Goffman's (1974) term 'frame' to mean the subjective reality as it applies in the particular context. A frame is a lens through which we understand reality.

Frames and context are connected but not identical. For the purposes of this thesis contexts are understood as having some kind of objective existence, whether they are material or non-material. A frame is subjective, a mental contextualisation of reality. This does not mean that frames are purely individual. Frames can be shared, and examples of particular frames will be suggested in this thesis. Nature and risk are contexts, which are each framed in particular ways within society.

Within this terminology, spirituality is one frame on reality. When the spirituality frame is applied to experience, for example by someone believing that God is speaking to them, then this experience becomes spiritual. When the spirituality frame is applied to the self, for example by someone believing God wants them to live in a certain way, then this becomes identity spirituality. When the spirituality frame is applied to context,

for example when a building is socially framed as a religious building, then a context spirituality emerges. This provides an approach to understanding spirituality not by defining it, but by understanding how it is subjectively realised.

These four concepts: experience spirituality, identity spirituality, context spirituality, and frame form the theoretical basis for the thesis.

1.1.3 Ten elements of snowboarding

The investigation of soulriding was based on ten elements of snowboarding, these being risk, escape, community, lifestyle, play, flow, nature, peace, transcendence, and meaning and purpose. These ten elements were derived in the course of the pilot study for the thesis and provide examples of the three dimensions of spirituality. The elements are significant within snowboarding, and have a potential spiritual sense. These elements connect snowboarding and spirituality. The purpose of the thesis is to show how for snowboarders these elements of snowboarding fit into the theoretical framework of experience and identity spirituality, context spirituality, and frame.

The ten elements were divided into the three dimensions of experience, identity, and context. The experience group consisted of peace, flow and transcendence. These elements were those experienced whilst the snowboarder rides their snowboard, and were potentially elements of spiritual experience. The identity elements were community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose. These were part of the snowboarder's ongoing relationship with themselves, and were potentially elements of spiritual identity. The context elements were nature, escape, risk and play.

My argument will be that it is the framing of these elements which is significant in determining whether the snowboarding context, snowboarding experience and

snowboarding identity are perceived by the individual as spiritual. All ten of the elements are framed in various ways, and it is these frames which were uncovered by conducting interviews with thirty-three snowboarders.

1.2 Snowboarding

1.2.1 A brief history of snowboarding

In order to understand the culture of snowboarding it is necessary to have some understanding of how that culture has developed as the sport itself has grown. Snowboarding is generally recognised to have emerged from children standing, as opposed to sitting or lying, on toboggans (Howe 1998, Gibbins 1996). In the early 1970's a plastic toy called a 'snurfer' was sold in the USA which was marketed as an attempt to surf on snow. At least three of the pioneers of snowboarding have acknowledged that they were children who were affected by the 'snurfer' and wanted to improve on it (Howe, 1998, p9).

Early snowboards took the form of surfboards, even having fins sticking out of the bottom. The intention was to emulate surfing, but on snow. The boards were laminated wood, with no metal edges, and feet were held to the board by straps. Slowly, over the 1980's, the boards grew to resemble wide skis in the shape of skateboards, a plastic ("p-tex") base, and with metal edges. The foot holding system moved through water ski bindings to a unique snowboard binding, the design of which has remained roughly constant for over a decade. Snowboard boots are normally 'soft' padded winter boots, rather than the hard plastic of ski boots.

In the early 1980's, when the pioneers were experimenting, they were not welcomed on ski slopes as they had little control over their boards on hard packed snow. However, as the technology and techniques advanced towards the mid 1980's, boarders started to

want to access the ski slopes, and were gradually welcomed. Differences in both culture and techniques meant that an antipathy grew up between boarders and skiers which has been slow to evaporate.

By the mid 1990's snowboarding was becoming more widely accepted, but was increasingly seeing its roots in skateboarding rather than in surfing. The mountain was seen as an echo of the street, full of obstacles to be jumped over or onto. All this helped popularise snowboarding with a younger audience, even if it did not endear it to the establishment or to skiers. Snowboarding was bringing significant numbers of customers to the ski hills, not just the snowboarders, but their families. Snowboard parks were built to confine the freestyle snowboarders (those focussed on doing tricks) to particular areas. Older generations of snowboarders emerged, and the revenue of the industry increased substantially.

By the end of the 1990's snowboarding had become accepted as an Olympic sport. However, this acceptance was a matter of unease within snowboarding, with its rebellious image. This was re-enforced when the Olympic committee recognised a ski association (the F.I.S.) as the responsible body for snowboarding - when there was an existent snowboard association. As a result many of the best snowboarders in the world would not compete at the first Olympics in which they were able to. Notoriously, the first snowboard gold-medallist was disqualified after testing positive for cannabis, a performance *inhibiting* substance, but the medal was re-instated after the governing body conceded that the substance was not on its proscribed list (Miller, 1998, p103).

Snowboarding has now entered the mainstream of sport activities. It has a marketing presence in shops on most UK high streets and through magazines on the shelves of newsagents. But it has still maintained a sense of being somehow counter-cultural.

Snowboarding has an ambivalent relationship with big business and with authority structures. It is not a sport with teams and uniforms. Competitions take a variety of forms and there are no national leagues. Success in professional snowboarding can be measured in video footage or tricks developed as well as in competition placings or dollars earned. There are still a variety of groups who claim to represent snowboarding and snowboarders both at national and international levels.

1.2.2 Snowboarding and snowboarders today

Snowboarding today has three main sub-disciplines Alpine. Freestyle, and Freeride.

- **Alpine** snowboarding is racing on a snowboard, generally through slalom gates. The snowboarders use narrow snowboards with hard boots very much like ski boots.

- **Freestyle** snowboarding is all about doing tricks. These almost always involve taking jumps on the snowboard, then twisting and spinning with the snowboard. This is generally done on the obstacles in specially constructed snowboard parks. The snowboarders will have soft boots, and often use shorter boards.

- **Freeride** snowboarding is about cruising around the whole mountain, and is what most snowboarders do most of the time in the mountains. At the higher levels it is about riding powder (the "holy grail" of snowboarding) and pushing the limits of where you can go – the steeper the slope and deeper the snow the better. Freeriders do look for jumps and opportunities to try various moves, but the move is part of the flow of moving down the mountain.

Snowboarding is reaching an increasingly wide group of participants. It currently accounts for around 40% of alpine sports participants. The readership of one snowboard magazine has an average age of 26, and 92% are between 15 and 34

("Document snowboard" media pack, 2004) The same source gives a gender spread of 22% female, 78% male. An industry survey (Mintel, 2001) suggested that the participation in extreme sports, including snowboarding, was dominated by socio-economic groups ABC. This reflects the costs of both equipment and access to slopes. Here snowboarding contrasts with skateboarding which requires a minimal outlay for a board and little or no expense for access.

Snowboarding has an appeal beyond the immediate participants. Alongside surfing and skateboarding it is seen as a 'cool' sport and has a 'lifestyle' appeal which has lead to snowboard style garments being popular fashion wear. Many high street chain stores sell snowboard brands but not snowboard hardware.

1.2.3 Snowboard cultural elements

Snowboard culture may be identified through particular products and environments. The products include magazines, books, videos, snowboard specific products and brands and product brochures. Environments include venues for snowboarding, both dry slopes and indoor snow slopes, and particular events, such as the various snowboard shows around the UK in the autumn. There are also a variety of web sites which function as interactive communities as well as information broadcasters. Most of these resource points are self-consciously youth orientated, however, it also has to be noted that the range of 'youth' culture in this context now extends to the age of 30 if not older.

Snowboarding is often described as a 'lifestyle' sport. It is "defined by not just the sport itself but also by an emphasis on clothing and footwear, particular codes of behaviour, music, specific language and 'in' words" (Mintel, 2001). The elements identified above each make a contribution to this lifestyle. For some snowboarders the lifestyle is their main locus of identity, it *is* their lifestyle, whereas for most it is a *part* of their lifestyle.

a culture which they drop into and out of.

i) Magazines and books

The UK currently has four snowboard magazines which are widely available, *Snowboard UK, White Lines, Document, and Onboard.* There are also imported magazines, notably *Transworld Snowboarding* from the USA. Circulation for two magazines, *Snowboard UK* and *Document*, is claimed to be around 30,000 copies each per issue (of which there are about 6 per year) (*Document* media pack, 2004). Each of these is sold in high street newsagents such as W.H.Smiths. The magazines are high quality, glossy products which cost around £5. Both advertising and editorial content focuses on photographs of snowboarders, re-enforcing a cult of personality by which the industry often attempts to differentiate its products (Howe, 1998, p23). Magazines differentiate themselves to some extent by the type of snowboarder they try to appeal to. *White Lines* has aimed for the younger market, by focussing more on freestyle snowboarding. *Document* has aimed at an older clientèle, including more freeriding snowboarding and even occasional articles with philosophical or health themes. These magazines are significant in informing the context frames which their readers hold.

A variety of books have been published on snowboarding. These have included serious studies of snowboard culture, careful books for beginners, and a variety of texts which have attempted to make money from the popularity of snowboarding. The later provide a useful indication of the hype surrounding snowboarding, and how publishers among others see snowboarding as a potential source of revenue from an undiscerning public.

ii) Videos

Snowboard videos are produced both by snowboard companies and by independent film makers. The content is mainly short clips of snowboarders doing tricks or of particular

'runs'. These are normally organised by giving each of the main snowboarders in a video their own section, which will be accompanied by music. This media is now the most significant way in which professional snowboarders earn their sponsorship from the snowboard companies (Howe, 1998, p140). This has moved snowboarders away from engagement with the competition circuit and into location shooting for videos. This in turn has been a major factor in determining the type of snowboarding which average snowboarders aim to emulate.

Another significant feature of the videos is the 'slam section' a sequence of shots of the snowboarders falling rather than successfully landing their trick. This gives a strong impression of the dangers the snowboarders take on.

iii) Web sites and communities

For many years the main web sites have been broadcast sites from the manufacturers (for example Burton) and magazines, notably *Transworld Snowboarding*. There has also been a number of fan sites for particular groups, for example the *Fresh and Tasty* web site for female snowboarders. The main interactive groups have included the public forum, rec.skiing.snowboard and a variety of email mailing lists. UK sites have included Snowserve, which hosted a mailing list, (now defunct) and The Boarder (now called "Snowboard club UK"), which particularly focuses on the UK dry slope and indoor snow slope scenes. However, with improved internet access and cheaper storage, there has been a growth in message boards and interactive web sites. This has been particularly driven by various commercial groups attempting to become the main portal site for snowboarders looking for information and community.

iv) Product

Snowboard product takes two main forms, the hardware directly needed to ride with,

and clothing. Both of these forms combine changing fashion and function. In particular snowboards have plenty of space for graphic designs, and these are used to re-enforce cultural values. For example, in the mid 1990's there was a fashion for snowboards produced with guns depicted on them. The style of snowboard clothing is attractive to many, particularly younger people (Mintel, 2003). The clothes made by snowboard companies will often not be used for snowboarding, as the appeal of the sport means that many wish to be associated with it who do not actually ride.

1.2.4 Gender in snowboarding

Snowboarding is generally conceived as a sport for young men. Much of the snowboarding shown on TV and the images in other media fit into this conception. The 2001 Mintel report on extreme sports identified that 25% of likely participants and 35% of possible participants in snowboarding were women (Mintel, 2001, p49). In her book on snowboard culture, Howe includes a chapter on the history of women as professional snowboarders (Howe, 1998, p118). Howe notes a growth in the media presence of women in the mid-1990's and suggests that women now have similar opportunities to men, with little distinction made on the basis of gender. This means that, whilst competitions are gender separate, the TV, video and magazine shoots which dominate the snowboarding market allow men an advantage because their greater strength allows them to achieve higher tricks. This fits into the wider issue of women's participation in "extreme sports". The Mintel report (2001, p50) noted that for a wide range of these sports, men were significantly more likely to participate than women.

1.3 Spirituality and Soulriding within Snowboarding

I have described above the main media within snowboarding. This section will examine

the use of the term soulriding, and general references to spirituality, within the snowboard media. The connection between snowboarding and spirituality initially seems unlikely to both snowboarding outsiders and many within snowboarding. This understanding is premised on particular perceptions of both snowboarding and of spirituality. If snowboarding includes a form of spirituality, then it is a very different form to those normally recognised. However, there is a term within snowboarding which suggests that some view the sport as a form of spirituality. Within the vocabulary of snowboarding, alongside terms for different tricks like "McTwist" and "Method" and types of snow like "Death Cookies" and "Sierra Cement", is the term "Soulriding" and its derivatives. It is not widely used, having an occasional presence in the media. However, there is sufficient presence for this to be a widely recognised term.

The presence of this term suggested that snowboarding may have some self-awareness as a spiritual activity. As with other colloquial terms, the meaning is not precise or defined. In a single media source, it was used to refer to a professional snowboarder who has eschewed the competition circuit in order to ride where and when he wanted to; it was used of a snowboarder who had given up his job in the city to live in a mobile home in the parking area of a remote ski resort; it was used of an older man who snowboarded in 2000 dressed in gear from the 1980's (Miller, 1998, p62). It is a term which seems aspirational and respectful to those who were in some way highly committed to their riding. It identifies authenticity. It is located in freeriding rather than other types of snowboarding, and is particularly associated with riding powder snow. It is a term used by snowboarders about snowboarders, and has not made it into the parts of the snowboard vocabulary which are available to non-snowboarders.

The existence of the term "Soulriding" provides a particular reason to examine

snowboarding for an awareness of the sport as a vehicle for spirituality. It is a term which bends spiritual/religious vocabulary to the culture of the sport. This is not to say that the term definitively includes spirituality within the compass of snowboarding. Before I undertook this study, it was possible that the term had a particular and non-religious connotation, just as the use of "cool" does not generally refer to the temperature, but does have a framed meaning. However, initial research in the pilot study showed that the prevalent sense around the usage of soulriding appeared to be one with a potentially spiritual meaning.

There were three main sources of media information which provided background to the research. Magazines and videos form one group. These are jointly characterised by a short-term focus and highly visual approach. Secondly, there are a number of types of books about and referring to snowboarding, including fact and fiction. Finally, there have been new media including computer games which simulate snowboarding, and internet references to the sport.

1.3.1 Magazines and videos

Little information from magazines or videos was directly applicable to the research. A careful search of the back catalogue of the magazines available in this country did not reveal a single use of the term 'soulride'. The references which were of significance to this research tended to be more indirect and came in a variety of forms. There were references to God in titles of articles, there were references to spirituality within articles, there was editorial content which reflected some spirituality.

Onboard magazine had a number of articles with references to God. Two issues used titles with God in them "Riding in God's country" (*Onboard*, Issue 39) and "The land of the Gods" (*Onboard*, Issue 40) One interesting unascribed quote accompanied a

photograph, "Many ways lead to God, one is over the mountains" (*Onboard*, Issue19, p58). The article referred to above, "The land of the Gods", contained the following

> The subjective nature of winter sports inspire feelings that only the individual can make sense of. Only in the mountains, where we can literally rise above the crowds and complexity, increasing the clarity with which we observe ourselves, our surroundings and our relationships with the creative force of the universe, can we feel truly alive. (*Onboard*, Issue 40, p76)

Document magazine published a calendar for 2002 which had a photograph and inspirational quote for each month. The sources of these quotes included Nelson Mandela and the Buddha. The format of the photograph and inspirational quote was repeated in the front few pages of each issue. Another article was based on asking professional snowboarders a series of 20 questions. The fifteenth question was "Do you believe in God?" (*Document*, Issue 3, p76ff). Finally, the editorial content reflected a thoughtful and committed approach to life. One such editorial contained the statement "Snowboarding is what keeps you a happy, balanced, complete person" (Document, Issue 9, p20). A magazine editor whom I interviewed stated that he saw it as part of the role of the magazine to be "inspirational".

There is little time for these types of reflective thoughts in snowboard videos. The content is almost exclusively short sequences of snowboarders doing tricks or riding difficult terrain. However, there are three features of these videos which are significant for this research. The first is the title of the videos, these are presumably intended to give an indication of the content in some cultural/ subcultural coded form, and to attract buyers in a competitive market. Among the titles are those with a spiritual referent. for example "Transcendence" in 2005. Secondly, alongside the visual images of

snowboarding are pop songs, which set an atmosphere for the visuals. One particular video section used a song which appears to have been written by and for snowboarders "White powder heaven", the lyrics explicitly compared snowboarding with both drugs and a spiritual "high" ("Exploding Snow",1995) Finally most videos contain a 'slam section', incorporating footage of the snowboarders in the video crashing and/or hurting themselves. This to enforce the sense of snowboarding as an 'extreme' activity, along with acting as a warning to those who wish to attempt some of the tricks shown. It creates a bond of identity between all snowboarders who are trying new tricks, or riding new terrain and who fall. This makes snowboarders aware that falling is a part of the sport, and that serious injury is a real possibility. Thus snowboarding is framed as a sport in which mortality and frailty are addressed directly through the risks encountered.

The media which have been examined have occasional references to spirituality, some of which are more oblique than others. The magazine evidence suggest that spirituality, whilst it is not at the core of much of the material about snowboarding, does not cause any offence, and is seen as a valuable occasional addition to the culture. Some editors see their magazine as a place where statements with a spiritual nature can be made.

1.3.2 Snowboard books

There are two types of books which are relevant to this research. The first are factual books about snowboarding, particularly those which describe the culture of snowboarding in some way. The second are fictional books including some which explicitly connect snowboarding and spirituality.

Two books which attempt to give a cultural background to snowboarding each contain a short reference to soulriding. Howe's book *Sick* is intended to be a serious chronology and description of snowboarding. It is subtitled "A cultural history of snowboarding".

In it Craig Kelly, one of the best known snowboarders, is described as "the 'soulrider' type" whose "mystique has been built around his appreciation for powder and backcountry riding" (Howe, 1998, p79). In Miller's *Ultimate Snowboarding*, which is a more popular presentation, one highlighted quote is "Snowboarding is a soul sport" (Miller, 1998, p17). It is interesting that in neither case is the term given any further definition or explanation. The context of the Howe quote suggests that soulriding is something to do with back-country riding, but there is no further information.

Two books which link snowboarding and Buddhism have been written by Rama-Dr Frederick Lenz, *Surfing the Hymalayas* (1994) and *Snowboarding to Nirvana* (1997). In each of them the author prefaces the book with a claim that these are fictionalised accounts which are based on real life experiences. In each book the snowboarding content is small, but there are factual errors within the accounts which suggest that Lenz's knowledge of snowboarding is at best second-hand. I would suggest that these books are fully, rather than partially, works of fiction, and that their intent is to exploit the popularity of snowboarding. Irrespective of the claims Lenz is making in the books, their existence poses the question of why someone should attempt to connect snowboarding and spirituality in this way, and the fact that a second book was printed suggests that a significant market was found for the first.

The factual books give a concrete referent to the term soulriding in the snowboard world. However, the actual content of the term is not defined. The popularity of the books by Lenz suggests that the market has an interest in the connection between snowboarding and spirituality, that there is some credibility in the claims of snowboarding to be a vehicle for the spiritual.

1.3.3 New media

In this section I will be considering commercial output of some kind rather than individual contributions which may be found on personal web pages or newsgroups. The significant items are a computer game called *Soulride* published in 2000, a network called the "soul sports network" and a tour being promoted in 2004/5 called the "Soulride tour".

The game *Soulride* claims: " Whether you are a freestyler or freerider you will find your groove with Soulride." (www.Soulride.com, 2001) The game enables players to explore a whole mountain, modelled on real mountains, rather than to go down a track, as most similar games allow. The game is not a conventional racing game but is more intended to enable the player to explore environments. When contacted, the company said that the name was "based on the idea that authentic snowboarding, or in fact authenticity generally as a quality of life, is based on the motivations of the individual. We wanted to reinforce the idea of pursuing the activity for the sake of the activity itself." (J.Lewis, producer - Slingshot Game Technology, personal communication, 16/10/01)

A snowboard company called Winterstick, which has one of the longest pedigrees in the snowboard business, promoted a "Soulride tour" in 2004/5. The web site said

> What was once a sport filled with karma and credibility has now become a media-driven fashion show where stylish logos matter more than performance and quality. For many snowboarders it is hard to see through the fog and find the quality, performance, and soul that were the foundation of snowboarding (www.winterstick.com/soul.php).

Here again the concept of 'soul' seems to be something which can be exploited for commercial gain, but is itself vague and undefined. There is obviously some kind of appeal to a golden era in the past, and thus the company may be trying to attract older snowboarders.

These three examples of the use of soul and soulriding by companies on the internet show the concept as having validity and perceived appeal within the technology aware community. Again there is a very open understanding of what the terms refer to.

It needs to be acknowledged that the references to soulriding above are not numerically substantial. There is one reference in one type of media, another reference in another type. The books on snowboard culture each have a single oblique reference to the idea of soul or soulriding. I am not suggesting that 'soulriding' is a major facet of snowboarding. However, the references are significant. What they show is that the concept of 'soulriding' has a presence in snowboard culture and that a number of people are making some kind of connection between spirituality and snowboarding.

1.3.4 Soul sports and soulriding

The "Soul Sports" network is the name and internet site for a group of professional snowboarders. It serves mainly as a promotion tool for these snowboarders. The web site contains information about the snowboarders and events, and a discussion forum (www.soulsports.co.uk). It is not made explicit why the web site has the title 'soulsport'.

The soul sports website contains no description of what is involved in a 'soul sport', however there is a list of potential 'soul sports'. The list comprises of snowboarding, skiing, surfing, mountain biking, BMX biking, and skateboarding. These sports have a

number of things in common which might suggest why they are seen as 'soul sports'.
They are all individual sports rather than team sports, and are not played against
someone. The sports are thus not intrinsically competitive, rather the participants are
attempting to improve their own performance and ability. Competitions mostly happen
by judging the exercise of athletic, gymnastic and aesthetic skill exercised by the
participants. Stunts and tricks are a significant part of the sport as are the speed, height
or other physical extent of any manoeuvrer. The sports all use non-powered vehicles
over particular types of terrain, and this terrain is often directly or indirectly 'natural'
terrain. Finally these are generally 'lifestyle' sports, a term which will be explored in
more detail in section 8.3.

Three of the sports identified in the list are also the sports in which the term "soulriding"
exists. The term originates in surfing, and may be traced as far back as 1971. Kampion
claims the term is used for purists who preferred surfing to be simple and gadget free
(Kampion, 1997, p125). The term is also used in mountain biking, and in
skateboarding, although in the later it has an ironic sense of imitating surfing. In none of
these instances is there a clear definition of what is included in the compass of
soulriding.

1.3.5 The meaning of Soulriding

The discussion of this section has demonstrated that there is no single clear
understanding of soulriding either within or more generally. So far a number of
different understandings have been mentioned and it is the purpose of this section to
examine those different understandings in more depth and to consider the complications
involved in the term. The areas of meaning identified so far have included soulriding
as snowboarding which is authentic, individual, simple, autotelic, self-competitive, or

spiritual. These will each be addressed in turn.

Authenticity is a popular discourse in contemporary society, as identified by Giddens (1991, p79). Soulriding as authenticity feeds into that discourse, suggesting that there are forms of snowboarding, and of life, which are less authentic. This was echoed in one of my pilot interviews (see section 5.5) where the respondent contrasted soulriding with what he called "techriding".

Snowboarding as an *individual* sport has many dimensions. The sources above have indicated a counter-cultural dimension to snowboarding, living in a way that avoids materialism. This is an association with an alternative lifestyle to that of the majority. Soulriding can mean riding on one's own, sole-riding, with no needs to satisfy but one's own.

Simple snowboarding is a variant on the previous theme. For some it means making snowboarding as 'natural' as possible, not following trends in clothing or equipment. Others take this further and eschew the ski-resort for the greater simplicity of snowboarding in the wilderness where there are no ski lifts.

Autotelic snowboarding means doing the activity for its own sake. This may be a variant on 'authentic' snowboarding, however it introduces a particular focus on the individual's experience of the sport. For snowboarding to be autotelic the activity itself must always be in focus and no peripheral benefits.

Self-competitive snowboarding places the emphasis on the development of the snowboarder, always striving to improve, overcoming limitations to achieve new levels of performance. This is to use snowboarding as a means of self expression and self discipline.

Each of the above understandings might be interpreted as a form of identity spirituality. The autotelic and simple snowboarding might be understood as forms of experience spirituality. Thus spirituality might be seen as a meta-term for all of those understandings of soulriding.

The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that soulriding exists as a term within snowboarding as well as within related sports. The etymology of the term suggests that there may be some spiritual content, although as in soul music and soul food, the nature of that spirituality may be historical or cultural rather than contemporary. The history of the term, rooted in surfing, echoes snowboarding's own historical connection with surfing. However that historical link is now a weak link, snowboarding has a strong identity of its own and the term soulriding has endured and presumably developed. Soulriding has no clear sub-cultural referent of its own. It is not associated with a particular minority group within snowboarding. While the term is existent, it is a marginal term with a range of possible meanings possibly suggested above.

The marginality of the term creates the opportunity for snowboarders to read into the term what they wish. It is something of an empty symbol which can come to stand for a significant but non-attributed aspect of snowboarding. It also creates the opportunity for various cultures, both national cultures and other sub-cultures, to have different understandings of the term. Thus both actors and structures can shape and re-shape this term. The malleability of the term can be seen in an article in the most high profile and enduring snowboard magazine "Transworld snowboarding" (2009, vol 22, p138). A set of cartoons picture various 'types' of snowboarders. The comment under one picture reads that the snowboarder is "only into soulriding, whatever the hell that is".

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is intended to answer the question "What is spiritual about snowboarding?" The thesis can be divided into two parts. The first part answers the question "How do we understand the spiritual?' The four chapters immediately following the introduction are primarily theoretical. They are concerned with establishing a sociological model of spirituality. The second part answers the question "How does this understanding of spirituality apply in the case of snowboarding and soulriding?" Chapters six to nine contain analysis of the interview data. In these chapters the validity of the model of spirituality will be considered. The conclusion sums up the argument of the thesis under a heading derived from the interviews "It's special, but is it spiritual?" As will become clear, this quotation encapsulates the issue of the thesis.

1.4.1 Frames and the theory of spirituality in snowboarding

Chapters 2 and 3 derive from existing theory the four main terms used in the thesis. These are experience or identity spirituality, and context and frame as features of spirituality. This is then developed in chapter 4 by identifying background theory to the ten elements of snowboarding which form the approach to the main terms. Chapter 5 discusses the methodology for the thesis.

Chapter 2 examines the term 'spirituality'. Four academic disciplines are used to show a variety of contemporary definitions of the term, and some of the agendas which are driving those definitions. The disciplines used are education, religious studies, psychology of sport and sociology of religion. These four provide clear examples of the models of spirituality being widely used and how they have evolved. In the first three disciplines it is possible to see a convergence of understandings of spirituality. Analysis

of these four disciplines brings out the two types of spirituality referred to above, experience or identity spirituality. Within the education academy a definition is in place which focuses on the human spirit, and which is universal. In contrast, the religious studies academy uses a definition which locates spirituality as a sub-discipline of religion, and which connects spirituality explicitly and exclusively with religious faith. Within the psychology of sport this has developed a sub-discipline of the 'spirituality of sport' which is has a strong focus on how spirituality can be a resource to athletes. Finally, examination of the sociology of religion shows how consideration of spirituality forms part of a contested discourse around the process of secularisation. There is no clear understanding of spirituality within the sociology of religion academy, although the field is now attempting to remedy the situation.

The significance of context is identified in chapter 3 by looking at some of the classic theorists of religion within the social sciences. The three theorists of primary concern are James, Durkheim and Weber, writing in the early twentieth century. Each of these has written substantively on religion; their theories have been significant and they have been followed in the approaches they have taken by other notable theorists. Both Durkheim and Weber have followed James' shift in the study of religion from the object (for example "God") to the subject (in other words humanity). They have each taken this mystical experience and used it in different ways in their analysis. Both James and Durkheim explicitly identify contextual elements of the mystical experience, but then overlook them in their subsequent analysis. I will suggest that the context elements are significant as enablers of both experience and identity spirituality.

Chapter 3 continues by showing how context, and in particular subjective context, forms our perception of reality. I will draw on both Berger and Luckmann's work "*The*

Social Construction of Reality" (1966) and Goffmann's *"Frame Analysis"* (1974) to give a simple and powerful central understanding, that of the frame. Spirituality, according to this understanding, is a frame within which we perceive reality. This frame is the product of both structures and individuals. This understanding provides a distinctively sociological way of looking at spirituality. It also echoes James' work by being a subjective turn in the definition of "spirituality".

Chapter 4 initially considers the relationship between experience, and identity spirituality and context, and suggests that these form three dimensions of spirituality. The chapter continues to examine the theoretical background to the ten elements of snowboarding used to analyse the perspective of spirituality as frame. This is organised by each of the dimensions.

The context elements (nature, risk, play, freedom and escape) are those which provide the environment which may frame the snowboarding experience as spiritual. These elements are frequently overlooked in approaches to religion. Durkheim's description of mystical experiences provides a significant resource for this part of the thesis. It is argued that contexts are not objective but mediated in that they are cultural conceptions. Nature forms the most obvious of these contexts and MacFarlane's (2003) work on cultural approaches to the mountain environment establishes the mediated approach to context. Risk is a doubly subjective element, both in that the existence of risk is a perception, and in that we have cultural approaches to risky activities. Giddens's ((1991) and Goffman's (1967) work on risk are both significant here. Play may be framed as an activity dividing children and adults, as an educational activity, and following Huizinger (1938), as the essence of humanity. Finally freedom and escape are considered as elements which emerge from the 'otherness' of the mountain

environment. This in turn builds on ideas from the nature and play elements as well as directly from Durkheim's understandings of religion.

The experience elements are flow, peace and transcendence. The theoretical background for these comes from Csikzentmihalyi's work on flow (1975). Flow is a term which can mean simply a rhythmic or fluid activity, or can have a more intense sense of being "in the flow". Csikzentmihalyi's characteristics of the flow experience are discussed in detail and their connection to snowboarding made explicit.

The identity elements are community, lifestyle, and meaning and purpose. In approaching these elements as facets of identity the connection is made between identity and spirituality. Community is discussed with particular reference to Bauman's (2000) work on cloakroom communities and Maffisoli's (1996) ideas on modern tribalism. Lifestyle is particularly connected to issues of identity and meaning by Giddens (1991) and these form a significant part of Giddens' "reflexive project of the self".

The final chapter in the theoretical section is concerned with methodology and method. After a brief consideration of the theoretical positions adopted at the start of the research, the chapter considers questions of the way the research was structured to ensure the validity of the results, the theoretical approach to interviews, and the basic analytical approach to interviews. The chapter then considers the three pilot interviews and their contribution to the structure of the research. The next three sections examine particular issues within the interview process, sampling, terminology, and ethics. The process of data analysis used here is then explained. Finally the chapter considers the significance of the author in this research, particularly in the light of my personal attachment to the issues as both a snowboarder and priest.

1.4.2 Analysis

The first three analytical chapters explore the ten elements of snowboarding from the perspectives of the interviewees. This is intended to reveal the understandings which the snowboarders bring to each of the elements. A thematic approach is used which extracts comments from the interviews which illuminate the theoretical approach derived in the first half of the thesis. Basic statistical information from the interviews is also used where appropriate.

The context chapter (chapter 6) shows how the dimension of context is significant for almost all the interviewees and how it contributes to the construction of snowboarding as a spiritual activity. The experience chapter (chapter 7) includes the responses in which the interviewees were most explicit about the spirituality within snowboarding. The identity chapter (chapter 8) demonstrates how this dimension is recognised as highly significant for the interviewees, but is not framed as explicitly spiritual. This is in contrast to a number of the prevailing understandings of spirituality in a number of disciplines.

The final analytical chapter (chapter 9) deals with the interview material which is specifically on spirituality and on soulriding. These two are approached in different ways. The soulriding section uses the thematic approach with statistical support, as in the previous three chapters. The spirituality section uses a narrative approach to four interviews which are considered in depth. This is intended to give a whole sense of how the four interviewees understood spirituality within snowboarding. The four interviewees reflect four different perspectives, which demonstrate the framing of spirituality. Two interviewees consider snowboarding to be spiritual for them, two do not. Two interviewees demonstrate a frame which potentially competes with that of

snowboarding as spiritual.

1.4.3 Conclusion

The conclusion will summarise the argument of the thesis in a concise format. This is encapsulated in the phrase "It's special, but is it spiritual?", a comment from one of the interviewees. I will consider the significance of framing experience, identity, and context as spiritual. I will also detail both the particular contribution of this thesis to sociological understandings of spirituality and the issues raised by the research as it currently stands. Finally the conclusion considers the validity of the research, particularly noting issues of circularity, and identifies further opportunities for research suggested by the work within this thesis.

1.4.4 The thesis argument in summary

The research is addressing what is spiritual about soulriding (a form of snowboarding). To address this means firstly having some sense of what spirituality means

Chapters 2 and 3 identify the following

- Spirituality is significant but confused discourse in academia and especially in the sociology of religion

- Experience and identity are recognised dimensions of spirituality

- Context has been overlooked in sociology of religion but is determinative in the experiences analysed

- Context is itself framed in culture

- Thus spirituality has three dimensions - context, experience. identity

- All three dimensions are culturally framed.

Chpater 4 and 5 begin to apply this theory in the context of snowboarding

- The test case is "soulriding" - a possible form of spirituality within snowboarding.

- It identifies elements of snowboarding within each of the three dimensions which may be understood as spiritual. This happened through pilot study and is supported by theorists.

- The main research consisted of interviews snowboarders which were intended to elicit a range of responses to the elements.

Chapters 6 to 9 move to analysis of the interview data itself to establish whether the data validates the model.

Chapter 2 - Contemporary understandings of spirituality

This chapter starts the main argument of the thesis. In the first chapter the context of snowboarding and snowboard culture was introduced. I showed that the term soulriding was an existent but little-used concept within that culture. In this chapter I will examine some contemporary understandings of spirituality. The intent of this examination is to establish the need for a particularly sociological understanding of spirituality.

A primary issue for analysing a spirituality of snowboarding is the nature of spirituality. Spirituality is a confused and contested term in both the various academies and in popular culture, and there are a wide range of definitions of spirituality circulating even within a single discipline. It is not the aim here to contrast every definition, or even to examine every discipline's use of the term spirituality. One general attempt at this is made by Holmes (2007, p23). He identifies seven academic disciplines which are studying spirituality, those being psychology, healthcare, religion, anthropology, education, sociology, and business.

The initial intention here is to identify how experience and identity spirituality emerge by considering the use of the term 'spirituality' in four disciplines. The first three of these provide a background to consideration of spirituality within the fourth, the sociology of religion. A section on education (section 2.1) gives a recent history of the change in usage from a religious term to one which mainly focuses on spirituality. This is contrasted by religious studies (section 2.2), which regards spirituality as the preserve of those disciplines associated with religion, and which mainly focuses on the experience spirituality. The emerging discipline of spirituality and sport (section 2.3),

mainly located within the psychology of sport, is a final obvious field to consider within this thesis. It provides a useful model, that of 'flow', for understanding the snowboarding experience.

Having established two of the main terms for this thesis, the current understandings of spirituality within the sociology of religion are examined. This discipline shows a lack of coherence of understandings of spirituality, possibly resulting from the lack of attention that spirituality has received within the discipline until recently. The consideration of the term 'spirituality' within the sociology of religion will also take account of the relationship between the terms religion and spirituality as they both change in meaning. From this I will identify possible relationships between the terms, in order to clarify what might be meant by spirituality within this context and to show the ambivalence of each term. This provides the platform for using classical theorisation of religion to discuss spirituality, which is done in chapter 3.

2.1 Spirituality in Education

The 1944 Education Act required both that the school day begin with a "collective act of worship" (p20) and that "religious instruction shall be given in every.... school." (p21) The 1988 Education Reform Act losened the requirement for collective Christian worship and introduced the expectation of "the spiritual, moral, cultural and physical development of pupils" (p1). The Act set up the national curriculum and inspections which included the spiritual component so educators started to address what exactly spiritual development within pupils meant. The answers to this came in the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority's report *Spiritual and Moral development* (SCAA,1995). This report states:

> The potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not

confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith. To limit spiritual development in this way would be to exclude from its scope the majority of pupils in our schools who do not come from overtly religious backgrounds. The term needs to be seen as applying to something fundamental in the human condition. (SCAA 1995, page P)

Spiritual development is said to include: beliefs; awe,wonder and mystery; feelings of transcendence; the search for meaning and purpose; self-knowledge; relationships; creativity; feelings and emotions (SCAA 1995, page P,Q). In 1996 the SCAA held a conference on these themes which widened further the definitions of spirituality. Their conclusion was:

Delegates' views of what constitutes spirituality included:
- the essence of being human, involving the ability to surpass the boundaries of the physical and material;
- development of the inner life, insight and vision;
- an inclination to believe in ideals and possibilities that transcend our experience of the world;
- a response to God, the 'other' or the 'ultimate';
- a propensity to foster human attributes, such as love, faithfulness and goodness, that could not be classed as 'physical';
- the inner world of creativity and imagination;
- the quest for meaning in life, for truth and ultimate values;
- the sense of identity and self-worth which enables us to value others

(SCAA, 1996, p6)

The Government's agenda in promoting spirituality is twofold. Firstly spirituality is part of a package of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is intended to train "good human beings", decrease immoral behaviours and values, and promote good citizenship (OFSTED, 2004, p6). Education is to do more than enable academic achievement, it is to shape society and culture. In doing this religion is an obvious

source of development. However, the pluralist nature of UK society makes the term 'religion' contentious, so, as in 1944, 'spiritual' is used, because the term is amenable to a number of interpretations. The SCAA conference gave eight options and did not purport to be an exclusive list.

This multifaceted approach to the 'spiritual' does not eliminate the problems, because the schools are required to deliver "spiritual development". The term may be wide enough to encompass a plethora of interpretations, but the issue became that of a school satisfying the inspectors. The 2004 OFSTED report acknowledged these issues and came to the following definition:

> Spiritual development is the development of the non-material element of a human being which animates and sustains us and, depending on our point of view, either ends or continues in some form when we die. It is about the development of a sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning and purpose. It is about the development of a pupil's 'spirit'. Some people may call it the development of a pupil's 'soul'; others as the development of 'personality' or 'character'. (OFSTED, 2004, p12).

In other words, for UK educationalists the spiritual is concerned with the interior life, with identity, and with the non-material aspects of life.

A number of features should be noted. Firstly, there is the enforced inclusivity of the SCAA definition – everyone is spiritual by this understanding. This is necessary because without this presumption, spirituality would have no place on the curriculum. However, adopting this understanding is to take a position on the nature of spirituality. Secondly, the definition which the SCAA arrived at might be said not to be about

spirituality but simply about psychology, or about our attitudes and values. To this view the word spirituality might be seen as a dissociated symbol, which the government is required to use for historical and political reasons, and which they are filling with meanings not otherwise implicitly connected with the word spiritual. Thirdly, a wide set of meanings are attached to the term spiritual by a range of people. These meanings are vague but refer to culturally positive concepts. Thus the word spiritual is one which appears to have positive connotations, but is flexible enough to be used in a range of ways. Fourthly, in these definitions we can clearly see general ideas of spirituality eclipsing the use of the term religion. Finally it is significant that these understandings of spirituality form the basis for the education of all children in the state school sector. Children, their teachers and their parents are all directly affected by this understanding. Thus the SCAA may truly be said to define, that is to establish, what spirituality means within the educational sector in a way which affects the general population.

Rawle and Greene (2002) have investigated the actual perceptions of spirituality of student teachers and teachers. Their conclusion was that " spirituality is seen as a set of guiding principles for life" (2002, p4). These principles may come from religion, morals and values, relationships, or philosophy and awareness. When they asked if their interviewees had had a spiritual experience, around 55% had not. Overall they observed a "confusion" as to what spiritual development means. This is echoed by Watson (2003) who identifies 44 articles in the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* giving an account of spirituality over 7 years. Her survey re-enforces that sense that, whilst most agree that spirituality is common to humanity, there are "multiple meanings" of spirituality and that these definitions stretch well beyond the religious (2003, p12). Thus there are still varied understandings of spirituality both in schools and in academia. What is significant is not particular definitions, but the trends

and the range of understandings.

The contrast between the 1995 SCAA report on spiritual development and the 2004 OFSTED report shows a decreasing emphasis on the religious element in spiritual development. In the former beliefs are explicitly included, although not given to be the exclusive understanding of spiritual development. "The potential for spiritual development is open to everyone and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs or conversion to a particular faith." (SCAA, 1995, page P). In the latter they are peripheral, referred to obliquely as concerning beliefs about death and the existence of the "soul", and thus an option in two places. From this observation it would appear that spirituality as currently intended by UK authorities does not require any reference to religion or belief systems. It is about an internal life which need not have any external reference or experience.

As suggested in section 1.1.2, identity and experience may be thought of as two dimensions of a plane on which many definitions and understandings of spirituality will place themselves. On one axis, identity, there is the sense of spirituality referring purely to the human spirit and to the non-material elements of human existence. On the other axis is a spirituality which is focussed on experience of the 'other', whether this is understood as God, a higher power or the ultimate reality. The analysis above shows the education has adopted an increasing emphasis on the identity dimension, and a decreasing emphasis on the experience dimension.

2.2 Religious studies

In contrast to the educationalist's open and inclusive understanding of spirituality, the dominant religious studies understanding is essentially that spirituality is a sub-set of their field of study. (Here I use the term religious studies to encompass the variety of

disciplines which directly study religion, including comparative religion, theology, the history of religion and the philosophy of religion, but excluding the Sociology of Religion which I address later). This view of the ownership of spirituality by religious studies is clearly expressed in *The Study of Spirituality* (Jones et al, 1986). Here the development of spirituality is mapped from a term which referred to clergy; to one which included "ascetic and mystical theology"; to one which meant the religious practices for those escaping the theological vicissitudes of the mid 20th century. The latter change is given a date – a conference in August 1967 whose papers were published as *Spirituality for Today* (Jones et al, 1986, pxxv). The understandings used are clearly experience understandings of spirituality. Spirituality is about prayer and the life of faith, and is primarily located in the Christian religion. The book deals exclusively with spirituality expressed within religious frameworks. The similarly authoritative *Islamic Spirituality* (Nasr, 1985) deals with the use of the term in the Islamic tradition. The resulting explanations are again exclusively concerned with the religious field. Whilst these books are each 20 years old, they reflect the current orthodoxy within religious studies. Sheldrake (1999), whilst arguing ostensibly for spirituality to be a separate discipline, is content to define spirituality as "the whole of life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God".

Both Gilliat Ray, and Rose, in separate surveys, reflect this perspective. Gilliat Ray dismisses much of what is described as spirituality within nursing as "psycho-social states of emotional well-being" (2003, p338). Further on in her assessment she states "Religion is about much more than dogmatic tenets of faith and routinised practices and true spirituality is deeply connected to the wisdom and traditions of faiths" (2003, p345). Thus Gilliat Ray is placing spirituality in the realm of religious experience and not of identity. Rose (2001) conducted a survey with religious leaders from a variety of

traditions. He concluded that whilst spirituality did not necessarily require a religion, it should include "continued reverential experience", and "maintained effort regarding practice" (2001, p204). These requirements bring the understanding of spirituality very close to that of religion.

2.3 Sport and spirituality

The connection between spirituality and sport is made in two ways. Historians of sport note the connections between sport and religion which go back to ancient times. In more recent times this connection has been reformed explicitly within the discipline of the spirituality of sports. Each of these will be examined here.

2.3.1 Sports and religion

The history of the relationship between religion and sport has roots in pagan religions, in which sports played a significant role (Baker, 2007, p6ff) . The Olympic games were themselves a religious festival (Baker, 2007, p9) celebrating "warrior skills". The connection continued through medieval times, when for example, ball games were a traditional part of Easter festivities throughout Europe. However, the puritans disdained the pagan and Roman Catholic connotations of sport. They attempted to suppress sports as obstructions to holy living (Baker, 2007, p16), but were less than wholly successful, and a dialogue continued throughout early modernity.

Modern sports emerged in the 1800, alongside "muscular Christianity" in both Europe and America. Muscular Christianity became particularly linked with the YMCA in England and the USA. In the USA especially, the links between religion and organized sport have strengthened through the twentieth century. Sport was a way for religious communities to assert themselves and to find identity and affirmation (Baker, 2007, p131). Sport also became a way for religious organisations to recruit new members

(Baker, 2007, p194). However, the connections are more than superficial. Chaplains are commonplace additions to the staff of professional sport teams, prayer meetings are held before matches, and athletes will frequently make religious gestures when starting a match, or after a success. Religion is seen as a resource which can provide the edge to win (Baker, 2007, p249), and it can also provide additional support and motivation when times are tough.

2.3.2 The spirituality of sport

This spirituality is a growing field within the psychology of sport. Three strands of thought on spirituality have emerged from this field. There is a consideration of the relationship between the spectator and the sport, there is the ethics of sport, and there is the effect of spirituality on the athlete.

In a recent essay, and while primarily talking about football spectators, Robinson (2007) argues that sport has a number of spiritual elements. Among other spiritual virtues it is a "ground of faith", a "spiritual community which points beyond itself to significant life meaning", it embodies pleasure, it enables engagement and hence risk, it is linked to well-being and it links communities (2007, p57). When Robinson uses the word 'faith' he is referring to having a sense of hope, the hope which propels football supporters to think that this might at last be the year that their club succeeds. This shared hope is crucial in creating the "spiritual community". Such a spiritual community is also one which shares values and aspirations, notably the "Olympic ideals". This in turn forms the basis for linking sport communities, both those with a particular sport and those across different sports.

Watson and White argue that the "win at all cost" mentality has changed the nature of competitive sport (2007, p75). This lack of ethical standards is not just visible in the

use of performance enhancing drugs, and in bending or breaking the rules, but in the exploitation of athletes for the benefit of the team. They identify spirituality as a growing resource to encourage higher standards.

Nesti (2007) focuses on the spirit as a phenomenon of existential psychology. He identifies the work of Csikszentmihalyi on flow and of Gallwey in the "inner game" (2007, p130) leading to spiritual experiences. This is an undervalued aspect of sport in his opinion. However, Nesti identifies the major connection between spirituality and sport as being through the spirituality of suffering, pain, anxiety, and courage. These aspects are of significant interest to both athletes and coaches as they seek to maximize their performance.

All three of the strands above locate the spirituality of sport primarily within the identity dimension of spirituality. It is the engagement of spectators in a hopeful community, the use of a religion and spirituality to build a team and extract better performances from athletes, and the internal resources of each athlete to overcome challenges.

2.3.3 The flow experience in sport

The study of 'flow' provides significant insight to understanding how snowboarding can be a spiritual experience. The academic study of flow is the work of Csikszentmihalyi, initially reported in his book *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975). The study formed the basis for Csikszentmihalyi's PhD in 1965, and has continued to be his life's work. He is currently based at Clairmont Graduate University, California. Although Csikszentmihalyi's first degree was in psychology, his work on flow was supervised within an interdisciplinary team including anthropologists and sociologists (2000. pxiii). This work continues to form a significant paradigm for psychologists working with athletes and the general population (for example Tenenbaum, Fogarty, & Jackson,

1999). Flow is described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) as an 'autotelic experience', "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement"(p36). Csikszentmihalyi connects his theory with Maslow's (1970) work on 'peak experiences', and developing understandings on play and on the "optimum arousal hypothesis" (1992, p5). Roof (1999, p178) explicitly connects those who have superficially sacred experiences, but neither religious nor spiritual identity, with Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow.

Csikszentmihalyi based his work on interviews with over two hundred people who were involved in a wide range of activities from sports to games to work activities. including chess players, rock climbers, dancers and surgeons. These interviews give the individual's perception of their activity, using a questionnaire to derive statistical data for analysis. As a result of these interviews he identified six elements of the flow experience. These elements will be described and connected to snowboarding in section 4.4.1.

2.4 Sociology of Religion

2.4.1 Disciplinary diversity and lack of coherence

UK sociology of religion seems to be a latecomer to serious consideration of spirituality (Holmes, 2007, p34). Whilst serious studies on mainstream understandings of spirituality exist from sociologists in the US, including those by Fuller (2001), Roof (1999), and Wuthnow (1998), it is notable that there is currently no comparable study of mainstream spirituality from UK sociology of religion. There was step forward in this regard when the 2004 BSA sociology of religion conference took spirituality as its theme, and 12 of the papers were published as *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Flanagan and Jupp, 2007). In contrast. by that time the education focussed *International Journal of*

Children's Spirituality was on its ninth year.

Within the sociology of religion there is significantly less coherence concerning spirituality than in any other discipline examined here. The papers at the 2004 conference demonstrate a range of views rather than any emerging orthodoxy. The term 'spirituality' is claimed to be vague, "elusive" (Flanagan, 2007, p11) or "a kind of religious and cultural Rorschach test" (Lynch, 2007, p7). Holmes comments that "as spirituality grows it seems to increasingly defy efforts to treat it as a single discipline with a single definition"(2007, p24).

One notable feature of the study of spirituality is the varying accounts of the history of the term. The 2004 BSA conference reflects this with two papers which give different accounts of the history of spirituality (Holmes, 2007, p23 and Giordan, 2007, p161). It is also clear that a range of assumptions are made by those studying spirituality about changes in usage of the term through time and in different countries and cultures.

Sociologists of Religion can be seen to hold definitions on various places on the spiritual experience or identity graph. Stark et al (2005, p7) demonstrate a focus in the experience when they claim that "all forms of spirituality assume the existence of the supernatural and assume that benefits can be gained from supernatural sources." Given this understanding it is unsurprising that they can state that "Much that is called spirituality these days is not religion, but magic."(2005, p7). Versteeg (2007, p107) recognises a purely identity spirituality when he discusses spirituality as "finding a personal direction and a way of life". Mason (2004) incorporates an identity element when he defines spirituality as "a conscious way of life (ie worldview, ethos, and set of practices) based on a transcendent referent". He recognises that this definition does not include every possible meaning of spirituality. Mason also makes a distinction between

lexical and stipulative definitions of spirituality. He criticises attempts to understand and define spirituality through examining the use of the term. He suggests that a stipulative definition, with a strong connection to at least one family of meanings, is more appropriate for research purposes.

Wuthnow identifies two types of spirituality when he suggests a move in the US from a "spirituality of habitation", by which he appears to intend a settled, accepting, even passive form of spirituality, to a "spirituality of seeking", a more active, demanding and individualised form (1998, p3ff). In doing this he is not suggesting either of the two is superior, they are simply different. Wuthnow's thesis is that a shift is happening from the security of the spirituality of habitation to the less constraining spirituality of seeking. Wuthnow connects this shift with the wider changes taking place in society, and with the search for identity. Roof is in broad agreement with Wuthnow's thesis, terming it a "quest spirituality" in a quest culture. He defines spirituality as encompassing "a source of values and meaning beyond oneself, a way of understanding, inner awareness, and personal integration" (1999, p35). This highlights the dynamic issue in spirituality, questioning whether spirituality, and identity, is an end or a process.

2.4.2 Spirituality and Religion

The relationship between 'spirituality' and 'religion' provides a further level of complication for sociologists of religion which is not present in the disciplines discussed above. Educationalists are clear that they should only engage with religion in particular circumstances and with the help of specialists such as teachers of religious studies. However, education has been able to define spirituality in a way which requires all teachers to engage with it. In religious studies there is no doubt that spirituality is properly a subset of religion. Thus religious studies can study both religion and

spirituality. Sociology of religion is addressing a decline in religious adherence in Europe and elsewhere (Davie, 2002), alongside a rise of interest in spirituality. Sociologists of religion are engaged in analysing the trajectories of these phenomena. Given the difficulties in clearly identifying the nature of spirituality it is not surprising that distinguishing between religion and spirituality is an issue.

Roof (1999, p172ff) suggests that a quadrant based on the acceptance of spiritual and religious identities provides a significant insight into spirituality in contemporary American society. He distinguishes between religious identity, concerned with an institutional affiliation, and a spiritual identity, concerned with an internal, experiential awareness. Roof identifies those who have a spiritual identity but not a religious identity to include both those suspicious of religious institutions, and those who are religious "tourists". Roof includes 'fundamentalists' and 'traditionalists' with "lifeless" religion as "dogmatists". Finally, he redefines the concept of 'secularists' as those who have superficially sacred experiences, but neither religious nor spiritual identity. This is a significant redefinition of secularists and appears to leave no space for those who reject the validity of sacred experience.

		Spiritual *Yes*	**identity** *No*
Religious	*Yes*	Believers	Dogmatists
identity	*No*	Tourists	Secularists

Fig 1 Religious and spiritual identities (paraphrased from Roof, 1999, p178)

There is a consensus on the existence in the USA of a significant group who are "spiritual but not religious". Fuller (2001, p1) claims that the most of the 40% of

Americans who have no contact with religion still view themselves as spiritual. Flory and Miller suggest that "spirituality has become decoupled from religion"(2007, p201ff) within the American context.

A British approach to the relationship between spirituality and religion is found in the "Kendal project" of Woodhead and Heelas, (2005). This was intended to test the thesis that "subjective-life spirituality" was overtaking "life-as religion"(2005, p12). The Kendal project included wide range of activities in the 'holistic milieu' which it used as a measure of the subjective-life spiritualities. These were contrasted with church and other conventional religious attendance.

The Kendal project has attracted a good deal of attention for the wide scope of its research. However, it illustrates a problematic trend in the UK sociology of religion, that of contrasting traditional religions with the new spiritualit*ies* (2005, p8). The claim made is that these movements are significant for the wider understandings of spirituality, however, there seems to be a confusion of terms. To talk of *The Spiritual Revolution* (Woodhead and Heelas, 2005) and *The New Spirituality* (Lynch, 2007) suggests that it is the wider 'spirituality' that is under discussion, rather than the much narrower 'spiritualities' (or new age religions) which are being considered.

One attempt to engage with the wider understandings of spirituality and religion comes in a survey by Savage et al (2006), which examined the world view of 15-25 year-olds in the UK. In their research they make an explicit stipulative distinction between what they term formative and transformative spiritualities (2006, p12). Formative spirituality is "an inherent potential within the human condition, thus inherent in a world view." It "focuses on an individual's sense of relationality". However, this may not be recognised or be of any significance to the individual. In contrast, "transformative

spirituality involves the individual in deliberate practices ...which aim to foster mindfulness of the Other". Transformative spirituality is conceived as a sub-set of formative spirituality which develops beyond it. The practices may be part of traditional religion or in the 'holistic mileau' (p13). These understandings highlight the distinctions I have drawn above between the secular definitions in education and healthcare, into which 'formative' spirituality would fit, and the religious definitions which fit as 'transformative' spirituality.

The results of their survey take them to the conclusion that

> The world view we found among our young people was secularised in the sense that any institutionally based religious awareness, or ideas of a spiritual or supernatural reality, were not given much salience or social significance. We believe we found a coherent narrative that underpins our young people's world view 'This world, and all life in it, is meaningful as it is.' We have coined the phrase 'Happy midi-narrative' to describe the storyline of our young people's world view. (Savage et al, 2006, p37).

Thus Savage et al are suggesting that the whole religious enterprise (in the widest sense) is generally irrelevant to the young people whom they interviewed. The 'spirituality' they encountered in their respondents was the formative spirituality, with little interest in transformative spirituality.

The diverse views of spirituality identified above within sociology of religion are not in themselves problematic, indeed they reflect the changing understandings of the term in both the mainstream and the academies. Sociology of religion is bringing in new insights as it attempts to grasp what is going on in this field of study. However, the lack

of clarity with which the term "spirituality" is being used can be problematic. The model of frame spirituality attempts to bring such clarity within a sociological set of assumptions.

2.4.3 Spirituality and Religion as terms in transition

It is clear from the analyses above that the term 'spirituality' is changing its meaning. To take the religious studies history, whereas 100 years ago spirituality referred to the clergy, and 50 years ago spirituality additionally referred to the religious practices of the pious, spirituality now has a much wider set of meanings. What is not so obvious is that the related term religion is also changing, if not in its central meaning then at least in its nuances. The whole field of religion has been affected by the well-known process of secularisation which has involved a decline in religious practice, a perception of conflict between religion and science, and highly publicised failures of religious institutions. These have been accompanied by three phenomena which have been less widely considered as affecting understandings of religion. Firstly, pluralism has become a much more notable facet of life in the UK over the last 50 years, and so there has been a much wider recognition of the existence and potential relevance of other religions. This has been accompanied by a determination to have equal opportunities for those of all minority groups including races, creeds, genders, sexualities. Some of the overtly Christian aspects of UK public life have been toned down, and other faiths included. Secondly, there have been significant conflicts which may be seen as religious, for example in Northern Ireland and the Al Qa'ida conflict. Thus religion is identified as being a potentially divisive force. Thirdly, as Tacey points out (2004, p114). religion appears to be saying 'no' to sexuality when sexuality is a major key to personal identity in European society.

Thus the religious sphere has become increasingly privatised and religion is seen as a problematic area. The various truth claims are often assumed to merely reflect 'different paths up the mountain' - irrespective of the integrity of such a concept. Religion is seen as being a matter for the expert and the committed, and may be becoming a pejorative term, associated with a number of negative attitudes such as dogmatic intransigence and anti-intellectualism. This accords with Guest's (2007, p181) comments on religion "picking up negative connotations of the hierarchical and the patriarchal."

I would suggest three possibilities for the developing relationship between the terms 'religion' and 'spirituality'. These need not be seen as mutually exclusive possibilities, although logically they appear to be so, but as various options within the societal discourse. The options are not intended to be comprehensive, but indicate three possibilities each of which I believe to have some validity.

The first possibility is that spirituality replaces religion. The argument outlined immediately above suggests that religion is becoming a term which will fade from the popular vocabulary except in a pejorative or specialist sense. For all current positive uses of the term religion, the term spirituality will come to be used.

The second possibility is that spirituality becomes the superset of religion. This is effectively a refinement of the argument above. It follows the trajectory of the term spirituality from a subset of religion, referring to the practices of the pious, to being the general term for spiritual experience. Religion in contrast becomes the term for those who are very spiritual and who wish to engage with a religious tradition. This possibility assumes that religion in western society continues to be an occupation for a small percentage of the population.

The final option is that spirituality and religion complement each other. This model suggests that both religion and spirituality continue to be viewed positively, somewhat in accordance with Roof's analysis above.

One aspect of the relationship between these terms does seem to be emerging clearly. Whilst the two may share a considerable overlap in the perceived referent of their object, there is a significant distinction in their primary subject, as Guest suggests

> The spiritual is associated with the personal, the intimate, the interior and the experiential, contrasted with 'religion', which is associated with the official, the external and the institutional. (2007, p181).

This understanding places the individual and the institutional as the two sides of a dichotomy. Experience is located with the individual. Religion is located as an institution, a structure. The place of community is not made clear. I believe this distinction has evidence in each of the disciplines I have examined, and offers a useful understanding for contemporary usage of the terms religion and spirituality.

This section has shown the difficulties of distinguishing between the terms religion and spirituality in current and historical usage. Whilst there are good reasons for applying the understanding Guest suggests in contemporary usage, I believe that the historical analysis suggests that even as late as the 1980's the term religion was used for that which we might now use the term spirituality, and in some fields they may still be used as synonyms.

Overall, this chapter has shown that there are various understandings of spirituality in various academies, some focussing on the identity dimension, some on the experience dimension. These understandings serve their discipline by reflecting the needs and

context of the discipline in which they are situated. However, within the Sociology of Religion there is an ambiguity about the relationship between spirituality and religion, as well as about the meaning of the term 'spirituality'. This lack of clarity is problematic, especially in communication within the discipline and across the boundaries of the discipline. Given the close and ambiguous relationship between spirituality and religion identified above it is worth looking at sociological treatments of religion to identify understandings of religion which illuminate our contemporary understanding of spirituality.

Chapter 3 - 'Frame' as a sociological model of spirituality

The previous chapter initiated the argument of the thesis by establishing the need for a clear and sociological approach to spirituality. This chapter will develop a new model of spirituality which is particularly sociological, that of frame spirituality. This model is developed from the insights of classical sociology of religion which identify the significance of context. These are combined with the constructionism of Berger and Luckmann (1966), and the term 'frame' from Goffman's (1974) work.

The work of three early social scientists re-enforces the ideas of experience and identity as dimensions of spirituality and introduces the significance of context. The first to be considered is William James, whose work "The Varieties of Religious Experience" (1902) is still considered as formative. He investigated religion in the subject, rather than the object, and in doing so draws attention to first the mystical experience (and thus to experience spirituality) and then, almost incidentally, to the context of the religious experience. James' work was recognised by most of those who followed him, including Durkheim, and Weber. Durkheim also saw the mystical experience as the source of religion, and noted but subsequently overlooked the significance of context in the accounts of religious celebrations which he analysed. Thus although he saw religion as primarily social, he locates the source of religion in an experience form of spirituality. Weber makes an even more explicit step from seeing the root of religion in the ecstatic experience, but its end in the psychological function of providing a theodicy and a promise of salvation, both of which are identity forms of spirituality.

The concept of 'context' is transformed into the final concept for this thesis, that of 'frame', through the final set of theorists. Berger and Luckmann, in the *Social*

Construction of Reality (1966), expanded on the understanding that context is not objective, but subjective, and that subjectivity is a balance between the perspective of the individual and that of wider groups. Goffman (1974) uses the term 'primary frameworks', or simply 'frames', in a way that appears to refer to the 'social constructions' of Berger and Luckmann. The term 'frame' has the advantage of being a simple, clear and malleable metaphor, and it is this understanding which is the final basis for the thesis.

3.1 Spirituality and religion in classical sociology of religion

In this section I will discuss a variety of theories of religion in order to establish what insights the theories give into the nature of spirituality. A central theme of social science approaches to religion has been the attempt to identify the 'essence' of religion (Paley 2006). Theorists observe a number of phenomena, note a variety of elements within the phenomena, then identify one central 'essence'. Thus they assert that some elements are of more consequence than others. This difference between the search for the essence of religion and the identification of elements of religion is a key one. I will suggest that in searching for an essence, significant elements have been noted but overlooked. This section will focus on three classic accounts of religion, those of James, Durkheim, and Weber. These three account for the major strands of positive approaches to religion within the social sciences. Each has devoted a significant body of work to the study of religion, and each has been followed in his approach by other theorists.

3.1.1 James – the shift from object to subject

James is the archetype of the social-psychological approaches to religion. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) formed a platform for those who followed, as has been

seen. In particular it

> "brought about something of a Copernican revolution by looking at religion not as it appeared in the object (God or the universe or revelation) but as it appeared in the subject (the believing, doubting, praying, and experiencing person)." (anonymous preface, James, 1902/2002, pvii)

James gives a definition of religion at the start of his work and goes on to defend and expound it. He defined religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine." (James, 1902/2002, p38). Thus James first step is to examine the subjective experiences of individuals when considering religion. It is not surprising that a psychologist would want to study experiences, however James is affirming of these as "realities in the completest sense of the term" (1902/2002, p542). This fits well into the subjectivity of contemporary culture, and particularly of modern spirituality, and is in stark contrast to the perceived sterile rationalism of institutional religion.

James second step is to find "that common quality which we can meet nowhere else" (1902/2002, p52). James suggests that this "religious feeling" is the abandonment to "be as nothing in the floods and waterspouts of God."(1902/2002, p55). This is the "mystic state of consciousness", which James says forms the root and centre of personal religious experience. (1902/2002, p413). James characterises these experiences as primarily ineffable and noetic, and secondarily transient and passive (1902/2002, p414). Thus the nature of the mystic experience is that it is beyond common experience to such an extent that words will not suffice to communicate it, and it is of huge significance for the person who experiences it. It is not an experience that is under the control of the

mystic, and the experience is fleeting. James locates this assessment of the common quality in a variety of sources, both personal and literary, but not in his own experiences, for he claims himself an outsider to religious experience.

In his survey of literary mystical experiences, having examined the mystic states produced by intoxicants and anaesthetics, James draws attention to context. "Certain aspects of nature seem to have a peculiar power of awakening such mystical moods. Most of the striking cases which I have collected have occurred out of doors." (1902/2002, p429) The stars, the ocean and a generalised "out of doors" are each seen as the prompt for an unexpected experience. This is explained as a "cosmic consciousness" which involves an intellectual enlightenment, a state of moral exaltation, and a sense of immortality (1902/2002, p434). James' thought develops from this "cosmic consciousness" to the disciplined cultivation of mystical experience in various religions. For James these are a continuum from the accidental to the deliberate.

Finally James recognises the significance of these experiences. Life is premised on a dependence on the universe and requires sacrifice and surrender. "Religion thus makes easy and felicitous what in any case is necessary. It becomes an essential organ of our life"(1902/2002, p59). Thus religion gives us that larger context which we need. The transient experience becomes the basis for ongoing existence. It is rationalised into frameworks which sustain and inform the non-mystical parts of life.

James's descriptions identify a number of contexts in which the experiences occur, both those which are artificial intoxicants and those which are natural. However, James does not consider the mental aspects of the contexts. For example he describes drunkenness as standing "in the place of symphony concerts and of literature" (1902/2002, p421). This may be the occasional experience, but it is not that which is generally reported.

thus some other factor is necessary to elevate the experience of alcohol to a mystical one. Similarly the natural environment has the power to awaken mystic moods, given particular mental propensity and contextualisation. There is also an inherent circularity within these contextualisations, as James notes. The mystical experiences form the basis for religion which provides a mental context for our lives.

It is worth noting Maslow's development of James' work at this point. Maslow was trying to demonstrate that spiritual experiences do not need supernatural explanation, and that they are within the jurisdiction of science (1970, p4). Maslow theorised that there is a common, "peak experience" upon which religions are based (1970, p20), and that the religions themselves are attempts to communicate the peak-experience (1970, p24). Maslow neither attempts to define the 'peak experience', nor does he produce any kind of evidence that such a thing exists. He simply asserts that "The essence, the universal nucleus of every known high religion... has been the private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer."(1970, p19) He believes that these are "that which is common to all places and times" (1970, p73). Maslow affirms James's conception of mystic experience as the core of religion, but suggests that religious institutions interpret these experiences for the benefit of "non-peakers". (1964, p24) Maslow suggests that non-peakers are those who are for some reason afraid of peak experiences, not that they do not have them. Further he suggests that the "each 'peaker' discovers, develops, and retains his own religion" (p28).

James' work was also used by Durkheim, although for the purposes of this thesis it is more appropriate to start with Durkheim's definition of religion.

3.1.2 Durkheim – overlooking context

Durkheim's definition of religion in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* states that

> "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them". (1915/1965, p62)

In terms of this definition spiritual elements might include conceptions of the sacred, practices regarding the sacred, and the creation of communities through adherence to these beliefs and practices. For Durkheim the most significant function of the sacred is to unify the community. However, he also acknowledges the significance of religious experience in the formation of religion.

Setting aside the various arguments about the validity of Durkheim's clear distinction between sacred and profane (eg Pals, 1996, p116; Fenton, 1984, p204), there remains a sense in which some elements of culture are held to be special, distinct, and sacred for some if not for all. Churches are widely held to be sacred places, even by those of different religion or no religion. But the nature of sacred is open to extension, not just to places of worship for those of various religions, but to other places and contexts which are special. Thus sports stadiums, or particular natural features, become sacred. Furthermore sacredness is not just attached to places, but to objects and people, particularly those objects and people associated with religion. Context is not limited to geography, but is created by a variety of associations.

Durkheim's argument is that the function of the sacred is to create a community, and that the sacred is the representation of that community. As Fenton points out. this is a

circular argument which fails to account for the cause of religion (1984, p207).

However, Durkheim's point about the connection between the sacred and a community stands. There is an interrelation between those who hold something to be sacred and the sacred object itself. A community emerges with distinctive beliefs and practices regarding that which is sacred, and hence with regard to all elements of life, for a sacred/profane distinction affects understandings of the profane as well as the sacred. In other words, the existence of the sacred shapes the whole culture of the community with its values, norms, symbols, languages and artifacts. Thus the attitudes towards the sacred shape the attitudes of the community in a much wider sphere than the 'purely' religious.

Later in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim describes what is frequently referred to as the "collective effervescence". For Durkheim this experience is formative of religion. He says "we allow that religious beliefs rest on a specific experience" (1915/1965, p465) and "out of this effervescence itself that the religious impulse seems to be born" (1915/1965, p250). Durkheim connects this ecstatic experience with James's analysis of the source of religious experience (1915/1965, p465). Although Durkheim took issue with James's focus on the individual aspects of religion, as Jones (2003, p107) points out, this experience is portrayed by Durkheim as being overwhelming and highly formative for both the individual and the community.

One under-recognised feature of Durkheim's analysis is his awareness of the context of the experiences which he asserts create the "effervescent social environments" which give birth to the religious idea (1915/1965, p250). Durkheim notes that these activities "generally take place at night". One ceremony he describes takes place over "several days". On the fourth day a mound is built with a design upon it. The community,

incorporating various segments of the tribe, gathers. There is sexual intercourse and singing and "a scene of wildest excitement. While fires were lighted on all sides, making the whiteness of the gum trees stand out sharply against the surrounding darkness" (1915/1965, p250). The participants sing, sway and make noises until the arrival of dawn, when they destroy the mound. Durkheim goes on to say

> One can readily conceive how, when arrived at this state of exaltation, a man does not recognize himself any longer....It seems to him that he has become a new being: the decorations he puts on and the masks that cover his face figure materially in this interior transformation". (1915/1965, p250)

In all of the activities a context is created for an experience to happen. Various elements are used: natural elements of darkness and light and trees, artificial elements of masks and mounds, psychological elements of participating or watching sexual intercourse, dancing and singing. It is these which make the effervescent experience possible by creating "an environment filled with exceptionally intense forces" (1915/1965, p250). The experiences are created, or facilitated, by the participants through these various types of context, and through their expectation that the experiences will follow. Natural, artificial and psychological elements combine to produce Durkheim's effervescence.

Durkheim describes how the clan awakens within its members the idea of external forces (1915/1965, p251) and that the individual "does not even see that these impressions come to him from the group" (1915/1965, p252). Thus the participants believe that the experiences have arrived *ex nihilio* and are persuaded to worship the totem and hence the clan.

What is clear from Durkheim's account is the significance of the context. Whether the

contextual elements are understood as facilitating or creating the experience, they are clearly essential to it. As I will argue below, it is the mental context which is most significant, as the other contexts are all understood through mental context. Thus the experience occurs as it does because that is what the individual and the group are expecting to happen. The participants are involved both consciously and sub-consciously in creating the experience that they are having.

3.1.3 Weber – religion as ethic

Whilst Durkheim's account focuses primarily on the social and starts with a definition, Weber notoriously does not define religion (1922/1991, p1). His focus is on the individual, although he recognises the social effect of the individual. Within this Weber deals with suffering and theodicy as a prime factor in religion, the charisma of the religious virtuosi, and how religious communities result in ethical systems. Weber's prime intention is to analyse the economic effect of religion, such that he can start his sociology of religion with the statement that "the ends of religious and magical actions are primarily economic"(1922/1991, p1). Thus Weber diverges from Durkheim's clear distinction between the sacred and the profane. For Weber the two are intertwined.

For Weber as for Durkheim, religion has its roots in powerful ecstatic experiences, primarily those of the natural mystic, or religious virtuosi, who has a "charisma". This ecstasy may also be experience by some non-virtuosi, but only through artificial intoxication by drugs, or ("especially") music (1922/1991, p3). These experiences do not remain dissociated from the rest of life, but come to play a role in life as a symbolic activity. (1922/1991, p6). Eventually, all life is drawn into this symbolism.

Individuals dealing with the vagaries of life approach the religious virtuosi, who "have promised the salvation of individuals *qua* individuals from sickness, poverty, and from

all sorts of distress and danger" (1921/1958, p272). For Weber religion has a primary function of providing both a theodicy and a means of salvation from suffering. Thus religion functions for the individual as a source of meaning and contextualisation of life. The systematisation and rationalisation of religious symbols through taboos creates an ethical system which affects all aspects of life (1922, p39).

Overall, Weber takes a similar starting point to Durkheim and James but takes it in a radically different direction. Experience is still the root of religion. Those who have particular expertise, or virtuosity, with religious experience become those who mediate salvation to others through ethical systems. The non-experts do not share with the experts in the experience. Instead the two groups share in the values which result from the experience and in the community which holds these values. This is to take the spiritual experience and make it the basis for spiritual identity.

3.2 Framing and context spirituality

The discussions above lead to the theoretical model which is at the heart of this thesis, that of framing, and its significance for spirituality. Early social science accounts of religious experience concluded that certain experiences gave rise to religion. Their argument is that religion is an *a posteriori* result of these experiences. Both James and Durkheim pay attention to context in their descriptions, even in Durkheim's case, to the constructed nature of that context. But they subsequently disregard the context, as if the experiences arrived *ex-nihilo*. In doing this, their thinking appears to be that the experience itself is so significant that the context is irrelevant. However, in each of their descriptions, the case can be made that those involved have experiences because that is what they are expecting. The individuals are not simply recipients of an experience, but have been party, *a priori*, to the creation of that experience through the manipulation of

the context.

The contexts identified by Durkheim (1915/1965, p248) including the use of natural elements like darkness, the creation of environments and objects for particular purposes, and the associated creation of a mental context for the events which are to unfold, are used to enable a mystical "effervescent experience". It is not clear exactly what part each element plays in the enabling of the experience, all we have are the accounts which suggest that these are the elements used. Similar issues may be identified in any religious context. It is not clear if it is the material elements of a religious building or the gathering of a community, or the liturgy used in a service, or the preaching, or some other element which is most significant in making the experience significant for those who attend. There is not always an explicit religious symbolism for a context. Thus a building may have religious symbols marked on it, which identify it as a church, mosque, synagogue, or temple.

Other significant elements in the religious context may not have uniquely religious significance. Individually, and outside of the other contexts of the religious experience, they may not have the significance that they do in the religious context. A school hall may become a place of worship only at a particular time with a particular group of people and with its furniture arranged in a particular way. The issue is not the material qualities of the context, religious, spiritual or otherwise, but how the context is understood.

Thus, context is not a neutral, objective part of reality, but is constructed as frames, midi-narratives, or paradigms within our culture. Two clear examples of this are our approaches to nature and our approach to psycho-active substances. Historical/cultural approaches to both nature (for example the mountain environment) and drug use,

expose the changes through time and in different societies in the way each of these two realities are conceived and experienced. Mountains have shifted in western European understanding from the feared home of ghosts and spirits, to places of spiritual enlightenment (MacFarlane, 2003, p205). The same drugs are variously conceived as part of social, recreational, therapeutic, pragmatic, or ritual-religious contexts in various cultures (Durrant and Thakker, 2003, p157). In each of these the reality experienced is determined by the socially constructed frame individuals bring to the context. Furthermore, understandings of a context are not necessarily homogeneous within western culture. For example, by comparing attitudes to the countryside from environmentalists, farmers and urban tourists, we can see how different groups hold different frames of the same context.

This leads to understanding context alongside experience and identity as facets of reality which can be framed as spiritual. An environment such as a school hall may be re-framed by a community as a sacred place for a particular time. That spiritual context creates the potential for spiritual experience, which in turn creates ,or re- enforces, spiritual identity. This enables community based on that shared identity. These three aspects, which I term the *dimensions* of spirituality, are thus inter-related in the framing of reality.

3.3 The sociology of subjective reality

There are two sociological models which particularly explore the general relationship between the individual, their understanding of context, and reality. The chronologically later model provides a simpler and more flexible paradigm whilst the earlier model is more explicit about its content. I will deal firstly with the primary concept for these which is constructionism. Then I will refer to Berger and Luckmann's (1966)

distinction between objective and subjective reality. Thirdly I will address Goffman's (1974) understanding of frames.

3.3.1 Constructionism

Constructionism came to particular prominence through Berger and Luckmann's book on the sociology of knowledge, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). It has gain currency to the point that Crotty (1998, p42) identifies constructionism as the "dominant paradigm" in some academic areas. He defines constructionism as

> "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent on human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (1998, p42).

It is worth noting that this conception is about meaning, that reality and "all knowledge" are thus understood to be about meaning. This then is not to deny an objective existence of the material world, but to assert that the construction of meaning is what creates the realities in which we live.

The significance of the individual in the process of constructionism is a primary issue, and is methodologically relevant to this thesis. This addresses a familiar problem in sociology, that of the actor/structure balance. As Berger and Luckmann suggest, (1966, p65) this reality is transmitted to individuals socially, initially by primary carers, then through a wider social network. The reality initially appears to the individual as an "objective reality" in the sense that it is immutable and comprehensive. As the individual develops they discover that what appeared to be monolithic is in fact pluriform, that there are alternatives and options. Crotty addresses this issue by using

the terms constructionism for "the collective generation and transmission of meaning"(1998, p58), and constructivism for "the meaning-making activity of the individual mind" (1998, p58). Others are less clear on these terms and may use other terms, such as interpretevism, for the same concept, eg Willis (2007, p126).

I will be using the term constructionism as a general term to refer to the reality-construction activity of humans. I choose this understanding for two reasons. Firstly, as noted above, in the modern world we do not operate in a single culture or reality, but in multiple realities (see also Mead, 1934, p142). The individual is obliged to assemble their own collection of realities from the various cultures they inhabit. Snowboarders may also have social lives, jobs, families, or religions, each of which may involve them in a different culture. Secondly, the significance of the individual in the cultural reality-construction activity depends on the context. To change the reality in wider culture, for example in a country, requires the individual to have a huge amount of significance in that country. To make changes in a narrower culture, for example one's family, requires significance only in that family. Within snowboard culture the concept of soulriding is not mainstream, it is marginal. Although many snowboarders appear to consider their activity as spiritual, this is not a major discourse within the sport. So both the individual and the social constructions of snowboarding are significant, and the relationship between the social and the individual will not be a primary area of attention for this study.

3.3.2 Objective and Subjective reality

In their section on "Society as subjective reality", Berger and Luckmann focus on two concepts, that of the 'subjective reality', and that of socialisation. Subjective reality is the individual conciousness, and is contrasted with the institutionally defined 'objective

reality' (1966, p170). Subjective reality depends on plausibility structures which are maintained through relationships (1966, p174). The subjective reality is initially acquired through primary socialisation. This process occurs through "significant others" who pass on their subjective reality to us as an objective reality (1966, p151). Primary socialisation may be followed by secondary socialisation as we enter other "sub-worlds" (1966, p158). However, there is also the possibility of "alternations" (1966, p176) in which an individual's primary subjective reality is transformed. Interestingly for this context, Berger and Luckmann use religious conversion as an example of an alternation (1966, p177).

The term 'subjective reality' gives a clear understanding of what is meant by the term, in a way that 'objective reality' does not. Berger and Luckmann use 'objective reality' to refer to the subjective reality of a large social group, rather than to some aspect of reality which is not subjective in any sense. Crotty (1998, p58) as mentioned above would later term creation of the subjective reality of the individual conciousness "constructivism", and that of collective reality "constructionism". These themes echo my work above on context and re-enforces the sense that it is *how* each of us interprets reality which is significant, rather than the 'objective' nature of that reality.

The singularity of the term subjective reality is, I would suggest, misleading. It implies that we inhabit a single social world, rather than multiple worlds. Berger and Luckmann recognise that we inhabit "sub-worlds" (1966, p158), but do not address the issues that these sub-worlds raise. Neither does the thesis address, although it does recognise (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p151), the significant changes undergone as children become adults and consequently form a reality significantly different from that of those responsible for their primary socialisation.

As well as inhabiting multiple social worlds, we use multiple conceptual structures. Berger and Luckmann focus on the development of a child, and the growth in perception of the physical and social worlds from being equally objective and singular to being subjective. This can be taken a step further with the recognition that both the physical and social worlds are subjective and pluriform. We deal with different social realities in the various aspects of our daily lives. Technology and various environments allow different experiences and provide different perceptions of physical reality.

Berger and Luckmann are particularly intent on establishing the necessity of the plausibility structures which depend on relationships to maintain them. However, their argument does not address the possibility of circularity, in other words that we create relationships around us which support the subjective realities we choose.

Another oversight in this theory is in the process of changing subjective reality through alternations/conversions. As noted above, Berger and Luckmann recognise the possibility of this, but they dismiss conversion experience as "nothing much"(1966, p177). My suggestion is that the conversion experience is only possible when the context is conceived in a way that is amenable to the experience. Thus "having" an experience means interpreting (sensory or other) data in a particular way, which must fit with our *existent* interpretive frameworks. This is somewhat akin to the Whorfian hypothesis on the relationship between language and culture (Shaul and Furbee, 1998). Whilst a conversion experience may mark a transition in self perception, it occurs as part of a longer term process of change of subjective reality. For example, St Paul's Damascus road conversion experience, to which Berger and Luckmann refer (1966, p117), comes in the context of St Paul's repeated interactions with the Christian community rather than *ex nihilo*.

3.3.3 Frames

Goffman is generally credited (Benford and Snow 2000, Fisher 1997, Gamson 1992) with being the instigator of the academic use of the term 'frame' in his *Frame Analysis* (1974). In the book, Goffman talks of "Primary frameworks" which equate to "Schema of interpretation..... rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful" (1974, p21). These primary frameworks may be natural or social. Natural frameworks are unguided events, such as physical laws. Social frameworks are those imposed by "an intelligence" (1974, p22), such as laws passed by a parliament. Both types of frameworks "constitute a central element of culture" and a "framework of frameworks" forms the belief system of a group (1974, p27). So a (primary) frame is how we understand and make sense of the world around us.

The concept of frames and the associate frame analysis have proved useful in a variety of academic fields. Benford and Snow (2000) have identified its use in psychology, linguistics, media studies and political science as well as in sociology, particularly in the study of social movements. There are currently (September 2010) almost 2700 references to *Frame Analysis* in the *Social Science Citation Index*, 1865 of which are since 2000. Konig notes this growth and states that "Frame analysis is en vogue" (2005). He believes that the success of the concept is due to its "unorthodox application" and that it has lent itself to "disparate approaches" which are "only losely connected to the original formulation" (Konig, 2005). Gamson (1992, p384) echoes this in saying that the concept is "both indispensable and elusive".

There is a general agreement among commentators that the terms are not used in any consistent way. Fisher (1997) says, "The many branches of 'frame analysis' literature do

not exhibit a consensus over some basic questions, including what frames are or how individuals make use of frames". This is perhaps unsurprising given that Goffman did not clearly define 'frames'. Goffman was primarily interested in the organisation of individuals' social experiences, and in *transformations* in understanding of a particular "strip" of experience. Thus he does not pursue in any greater detail the basic understanding of frames. As Bennett Berger identifies in the 1986 foreword to Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974), this lack of clarity is one of the difficulties with Goffman's use of the term 'frame'. Berger suggests that Goffman was using the term 'frame' as a "metaphor for what other sociologists have tried to invoke by words like 'background', 'setting', 'context'" (Berger,1986, pxiii).

Critiques of *Frame Analysis* have noted that "the idea of a primary framework is underdeveloped" (Manning, 1992, p123). Even in its original premise there is ambiguity. Gamson (1992) identifies that frame can signify a picture frame or the framework of a building (a usage significantly more familiar in North America than in Europe), or sense of frame as boundary. Gamson further identifies that frames might refer to issues or to stories, that frame suggests something static, where the cultural referent requires a more dynamic metaphor.

Fisher (1997) describes the disparate directions that scholars in a number of disciplines have developed the idea of frame analysis. He examines the understanding of frame analysis by a variety of scholars in social movement studies, social psychology, and linguistics. His paper particularly identifies how scholars have drawn distinctions between frames and framing; various typologies of social movement frames and framing; discursive structural frames and cultural frames; and frames and ideologies. Each distinction shows a scholar or group of scholars defining frames and frame

analysis in different ways. Various scholars, and disciplines, have differing views on the relationship between the terms such as frame, discourse and ideology and their derivatives. These distinctions show the need for clear stipulative definition of what is being meant by frame in a particular situation, matched by an awareness of some of the major issues of definition indicated in the list above. Konig (2005) identifies 14 frames which emerge in a selection of 5 academic paper,s and suggests whilst these may reflect social reality, there is no sense of how these frames were arrived at. Konig suggests that this reflects a lack of an empirical process of frame detection.

Frames have proved to be useful to scholars because the concept is malleable and lends itself to the kind of things they want to say. Frames are particularly useful to the social constructionist, which is not surprising given that Goffman was a social constructionist (Davis, 1975). The concept of 'frame' gives the clear simple, premise, that frames are means by which we make sense of our experience. This has the advantage of being clearly a metaphor, and thus suggestive and malleable, in contrast to a conceptualisation which might be taken as a definition and thus immutable. Furthermore, the visual nature of the metaphor creates the possibility of discussing, for example, multiple sequential frames, or of changing frames. It recognises that there are a number of primary frameworks which together form the "framework of frameworks" (Goffman 1974, p21) we have as our belief system. Sociologically, as Gamson points out, "The concept of frame maintains a useful tension or balance between structure and agency" (1992, p384). Finally, frames have the capacity to draw attention to particular areas of their content (Konig, 2005).

In this thesis I am using the term frame in the Goffman's general sense of "Schema of interpretation" (1974, p21), and to correspond to Berger and Luckmann's "subjective

reality" (1966, p170). The primary metaphor in this understanding is of the picture frame. The concept of frames I am using is of a set of interpretive tools which the individual subconsciously applies in order to understand each situation. These may be used singly or in combinations. As I will suggest later, some frames combinations complement each other and some frames tend to compete with other frames. Frames are not consciously manufactured, they operate at a sub-conscious or semi-conscious level. Frames are created socially as part of culture but adopted individually.

Before moving on to general academic criticisms of constructionism, it is worth pausing to note similar terms, and to consider the particular choice of the term frame. Two other possible terms might be 'paradigm' and 'midi-narrative' both of which I have used in this thesis. Kuhn uses the term 'paradigm' to mean a "mode of scientific activity" in which scientists are "committed to the same rules and standards" (1970, p11). This term has come to have a wider sense than Kuhn's original meaning, but I would suggest it still carries a connotation of singularity. In his conception there is a single dominant paradigm within a culture with respect to any particular context. Savage et al's use 'Midi-narrative' (2006, p37), which they define in contrast to both the "grand scale" 'meta-narrative', and the individual 'mini- narrative'. It "operates on the here and now...It is communal on a small scale" (p38). I would understand both paradigm and midi-narrative to be types of frame. However, the use of 'frame' gives a flexibility to use multiple frames, which the use of paradigm would preclude, and to include both meta-narratives and mini-narratives, which the use of 'midi-narrative' would preclude.

3.3.4 Critique of constructionism

In the three sections above I have already noted some particular criticisms of the theories of both Berger and Luckmann, and of Goffman. As this thesis is both

constructionist in nature, and uses a particular form of constructionism in the basic theory, I will address the main critical approach to constructionism. It is also worth noting here that there are a variety of names by which what I am calling constructionism goes, and that there are a variety of specific types of constructionism. In a journal volume dedicated to contemporary debate around constructionism, Stam says

What is social constructionism? At its most general it serves as a label denoting a series of positions that have come to be articulated after the publication of Berger and Luckmann's influential work in 1966 but that have been influenced, modified and refined by other intellectual movements such as ethnomethodology, social studies of science, feminism, post-structuralism, narrative philosophy and psychology, post-foundational philosophy and post-positivist philosophy of science, and more. (2001, p291)

The main opposition protagonists in the general debate are those from a realist/positivist tradition who are maintaining a world view which includes concepts of knowable absolute truth and scientifically discoverable objective reality. Their critique of constructionism is forcefully put by Matthews (1998) in his essay *Let's get real.*

Radical social constructivism and its equivalencies ..... have become, in my opinion, a serious blight on the American intellectual landscape. The argument, which I will shall refer to in general terms as post-modernism, is, as I will show, logically fallacious. In essence, the post-modernist position is that truth is only relative and has no general application given that said truth is a mere construction created by a given social context. Relativism makes no distinction between objective knowledge and superstition and is deeply flawed as an epistemology. It is, by definition, a direct attack on science, scientific method,

and critical rationality (1998, p16).

Willis (2007, p124) addresses two of Matthew's criticisms specifically. He views the criticism that truth derived from research has "no general application" as most serious. Willis believes that constructionist research is capable of generating "local truth", whereas post-positivists are looking for "law-like generalizations". The "local truths" are capable of use outside their immediate contexts, but they require the user to decide what seems to be applicable, rather than requiring the user to correctly apply a law. Willis also responds to the criticism that "Relativism makes no distinction between objective knowledge and superstition" (2007, p124). Willis suggests that constructionist research allows a strong sense of "correctness", but that it does not allow objective certainty of a method or findings. Crotty takes this argument in another direction. In response to the argument that constructionism is mere subjectivism, he states that "No mere subjectivism here. Constructionism takes the object very seriously" (1998, p52).

Liebrucks takes a more conciliatory post-positivist position when he suggests

> It is possible to maintain a realist position and nevertheless accept a plurality of perspectives.... After all, social constructionists do not declare that everything is socially constructed. The findings of social constructionists are absolutely compatible with the general theories of realism (a) that there is a reality existing independently of our beliefs about it: and (b) that it is possible to acquire genuine knowledge about it. The theses of the social constructionists (a) that knowledge is produced in the course of interpretation...and (c) that knowledge is always dependent on the social circumstances under which it was produced - are also central to modern versions of realism (2001, p372)

This is a version of realism which takes account of Kuhn's (1970) seminal criticism of naïve positivism by demonstrating the way that paradigm changes alter the view of reality which dominates in science. Liebrucks is reaching out to those constructionists who can accept that objective reality exists even if they question the certainty of knowing that objective reality. His presentation of constructionism doubtless has a realist bias, but it is reasonably consistent at least with Patton's presentation of constructionism (2002, p97).

The reverse of Liebrucks' approach can be seen in Gergen's work. Gergen has been a significant theorist and apologist for constructionism across many disciplines, although based in psychology. In 2001 he wrote recognising that "constructionist arguments have too often functioned as a sword, with the elimination of empirical study as its seeming goal" (2001, p4). Gergen notes that in non-academic life he often functions as a realist, for example when he or his family need medical care, but he also notes the benefit of constructionist approaches to medicine for example in the field of mental health. Thus he sees benefit in both approaches, and in a discourse between the two. He describes realist discourse as "a language of mutual trust; it unites participants in a way that promotes order and predictability" (2001, p18). In contrast, constructionist discourse is "a liberating agent... opening new realms of comprehension and action" (2001, p18). He does not advocate synthesis, "Rather, by casting these discourses as cultural resources, we are positioned to appreciate their positive powers along with their possible limitations" (2001, p23). This is to frame realism in a constructionist light, which again would not be acceptable to thoroughgoing realist, but may appeal to some post-positivists.

Thus it is clear that there are a variety of positions, as well as of labels, on each side of the realist/constructionist debate. Constructionism has achieved sufficient academic

history to have opened a nuanced discourse and has a sound basis as an academic platform. Given the critiques above, the constructionist approach of this thesis is clearly appropriate. It is premised on the "local truths" which form individual's understandings of snowboarding, rather than any objective law which might validate spirituality. It is focussed on the object of study, the perceptions of the snowboarders. These do not form the basis for objective laws, but they do qualify as meaningful frames. It takes seriously Giddens' suggestion that "sociological concepts thus obey... a double hermeneutic" where a "universe which is already constituted in frames of meaning..... is reinterpreted in theoretical schemes" (1976, p162)

3.4 Framing and spirituality

I have already demonstrated the direction which fits the conceptualisation here is to use Goffman's model of frames, and to give it the clarity of Berger and Luckman's understanding. Thus a frame is a perception of subjective reality. It is an interpretive conceptual structure which we use to make sense of the world around us. In this section I am suggesting that the nature of spirituality is that of a frame on reality.

Otto asserts in *The Idea of the Holy* that the holy "is a *purely a priori* category" (1923/1950, p112). He suggests that experience gives the occasion for an *a priori* cognition element of holiness. This is a view rooted in a particular theological anthropology which I am not seeking to assert here, rather my point is that the suggestion has been made that the perception of the numinous is *a priori* and not *a posteriori*. Using Otto's concept alongside the work of the sociologists above suggests that spirituality is not an outcome of experiences, but is a perspective, a set of lenses with which objective reality is viewed, such that spirituality is itself a frame. a subjective reality. In this model the spiritual is not located in *what* we perceive, it is

how we perceive.

What I am suggesting is that when we encounter the 'spiritual' it is because at some level we expect to do so, it fits with our primary frameworks, we have applied the spiritual frame to this context. Whatever understanding of spiritual is being used, from those of experience or identity spirituality, the concept of spiritual is used because it is a part of our subjective reality. This is to follow James in his "Copernican shift" from considering religion in the object, God, to the subjects, the believers.

The understanding is similar to George Simmel's perspective, when he writes "Religiousness is the fundamental quality of being of the religious soul" (1911/1997, p10). Simmel is attempting to avoid the problems created by characterising the object of religious faith as illusionary. He does this by focusing on the subject of religious faith, and affirming the reality of the religious quality within humanity. Indeed he says that this quality is ubiquitous if not universal (1911/1997, p9). Simmel does not attempt to turn the focus back to the object of religion, but remains with the subjective turn. Ultimately the 'religious person' "will remain sure of his religion for it is the same to him as being sure of *himself*" (1911/1997, p17).

Framing is also similar to Beckford's position when he states that religion "is an interpretive category that human beings apply to a wide variety of phenomena" (2003, p4). He is explicitly taking a "social constructionist" (2003, p3) approach to religion and looking at the discourses around meanings of religion rather than focussing on any kind of realities (2003, p28). In adopting this approach Beckford intends to focus on a wide variety of groups and to look at "the uses human beings make of religion" (2003, p29).

Woodhead and Heelas also approach this perspective of framing. Their criterion for deciding which associational activities they would count as having spiritual significance was on the basis of the provider's judgement (2005, p37). Thus, for example, some osteopaths were included and some were not (2005, p38). This approach is equivalent to basing the research on the framing of the activity as spiritual, rather than any inherent quality of the activity. It is also noteworthy that there is no implication that the other participants in the activity needed to frame it as spiritual, only the provider.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Roof identifies "Reframing" as a means of using religious speech or symbols and "creating *truth* or *provoking* confrontation with it" (Roof 1999, p169). For Roof this is one of three processes of narrative construction for self-transformation. Reframing is therefore closely linked with Giddens's discussions around the reflexive project of the self (Giddens, 1991, p75). For Roof, religious symbols are one resource in the project of creating a "coherent narrative of meaning and life" (1999, p169).

3.5 The significance of spirituality as frame

I am suggesting a model of spirituality which is an integral part of the process of the creation and sustaining of the subjective realities of our lives. One direction that this leads is to a particularly sociological understanding of spirituality, by which I mean an understanding of spirituality based in sociological terms and concepts, and an understanding which is not adopted from other disciplines. I believe that this model of spirituality is particularly sociological on two grounds. Firstly it looks at spirituality in terms of frames, or subjective realities, which are sociological concepts. Approaching a sociological understanding of spirituality as a frame enables us to use sociological tools and assumptions to analyse spiritual phenomena sociologically. Hence we are not

relying on the approaches and assumptions of another discipline. Secondly, it addresses a key sociological theme, the balance of the relationship between the individual and society. My suggestion at the end of the previous chapter was that this is currently a significant difference between religion and spirituality. The development and change of spiritual and religious frames is a hugely significant theme in our pluralist society. Sociology is exactly the discipline with the tools to address the balance between structures and actors in the development and understanding of these frames.

This model provides some clarity on the discourse around spirituality within the Sociology of Religion. The shift from object to subject makes sense of the claims of the "vagueness" of the term spirituality. Sociology of Religion has been pursuing a sequence of objects rather than addressing the perceiver of the objects. Further, a number of purportedly authoritative definitions of spirituality can clearly be seen to reflect no more than particular perceptions from particular individuals or groups. This is not to dismiss them, but to clearly contextualise them and to recognise that they need not be accorded particular deference. Similarly, stipulative definitions can be affirmed as reflecting valid or useful perceptions. Roof's quadrant of spiritual and religious identities can be seen to be getting at a key issue of spirituality as identity, as discussed above.

The contentious area of the relationship between spirituality and religion becomes more nuanced by the application of this model. If spirituality is about frame, then it concerns those parts of religion which provide that frame. This might include the cosmology, practices and cultures of the religious. Understanding spirituality as frame begins to exclude some areas of religion, which might be characterised as those parts of religion which are external to the individual. This means material objects themselves, such as

places of worship and objects used in religion are not spiritual, although they may have spiritual significance. Similarly, parts of the intellectual framework of a religion, its theology, jurisprudence, governance, may have spiritual significance without themselves being spiritual.

3.6 Frame spirituality and the SCAA understandings

Through this chapter the significance of context was identified in the writings of James, Durkheim and Weber. This was shown to form a third aspect to spirituality alongside experience and identity. This was further developed into understanding of spirituality as frame using the constructionism of Berger, Luckmann, and Goffman. Chapter 4 will consider how these terms interact, and will connect them with ten elements of snowboarding. As a conclusion to this chapter I will compare the frame model with those of another discipline, the SCAA understandings from education.

The consideration of the SCAA understandings of spirituality (section 2.1.1) suggested a number of features which are useful interrogators of the frame spirituality model. Firstly, there was an enforced inclusivity in the model, everyone was spiritual. Frame spirituality does not make that assertion. In contrast it allows that some do not frame either their experience or themselves as spiritual. Secondly, the SCAA definition might be said to be simply concerned with the psychology of the individual. The frame spirituality definition recognises that an individual's psychology may be framed as a form of spirituality. Thirdly, the SCAA includes a wide set of meanings. Frame spirituality does not limit what may be viewed as spiritual, but moves the emphasis to the group or person who uses the frame. Finally, the relationship between spirituality and religion is left open, as there is no implied relationship between a frame of religion and a frame of spirituality.

Frame spirituality emerges from this analysis as a model which enables sociological consideration of spirituality, using sociological understandings, but without either depending on or disregarding the insights from other disciplines. This makes frame spirituality a useful sociological tool for understanding spirituality.

Chapter 4 - Applying the frame model of spirituality to snowboarding

Thus far, this thesis has suggested that a distinctive model of spirituality is necessary for sociology of religion, and has suggested the model of spirituality as a frame of reality. The model emerges from the overlooked *contextual* element in early social science accounts of religion. The model incorporates the more traditional experience and identity aspects of spirituality. This chapter will take the final major theoretical step as it considers how identity spirituality, experience spirituality and context spirituality relate to each other, and will locate ten elements of snowboarding which are examples of these three aspects of spirituality. Having established these relationships the chapter will consider various theoretical understandings relevant to those ten elements and provide a background to their significance in snowboarding.

4.1 The three dimensions of spirituality

The first stage here is to clarify the relationship between the three forms of spirituality. As seen in chapter 1, I have chosen to use the concept of *dimensions*. Thus context, experience and identity are three *dimensions* of spirituality. This terminology uses the visual imagery of one-dimensional (a straight line), two-dimensional (a flat object), and three- dimensional objects. This type of language follows naturally from the primary model in the thesis, that of spirituality being a *frame* of reality. Thus the frame of spirituality is a three dimensional frame.

This language addresses the question of whether all three dimensions are necessary. The term 'dimension' deliberately suggests that without one of the dimensions a spirituality is incomplete, given that real life objects have three dimensions. However a spirituality

may be understood or perceived as comprising one or two dimensions rather than all three.
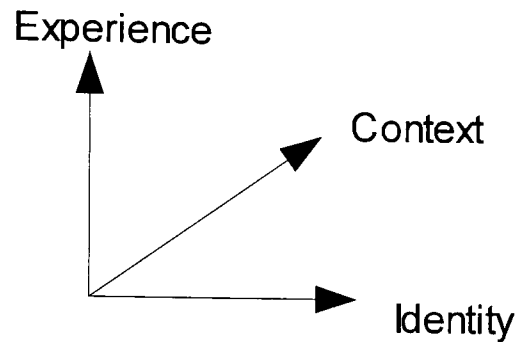
Figure 3: Three dimensions of spirituality

Having established the model it is now appropriate to discuss each of the dimensions in more depth to clarify and expand on what is understood by that dimension of spirituality.

a) Context. Context is the *external* dimension of spirituality. It includes those elements which are perceived as located external to the individual. Most obviously for snowboarding this includes the element of nature, of which mountains are a dramatic example. However it should be noted that within the constructionist understanding used here, the significance lies in the framing. Thus what is important is the socially constructed frame of the element. Context and frame are not identical. A context is a particular externalised element, and will itself be framed, or understood in particular ways, both by the individual and within culture. As will be discussed below, our understanding of nature, and thus the reality of nature as we understand it, can clearly be seen to be socially framed. Related to nature is the perception of freedom and escape as context. These refer to a lack of physical and other constraints present. Again, this is perceived as being inherent to a context, but this can be shown to be a frame of reality. Similarly both risk and play are mainly perceived as external to the individual, but

constructionism locates the reality within the individual.

b) Identity. Identity is the *internal* dimension of spirituality. Community was located in this dimension as it is a primary source of identity. Similarly, lifestyle is a strong reflection of identity. Meaning and purpose form the most overtly spiritual elements of this dimension as they potentially address ultimate questions of being. This location of identity does not imply that the whole of the identity is necessarily constructed as spiritual. Some parts of the identity may be framed as spiritual and others not. A spiritual part might be aspects of lifestyle which relate to religious practice. However, as referred to above, sexuality may be conceived as not spiritual.

c) Experience. Experience is the *interface* between the internal and the external and is the dimension of the senses. For an experience to be spiritual, the individual is framing that experience as spiritual. This may be due to the application of contextual or identity frames, or to other factors such as a lack of other suitable frames with which to interpret an experience. Flow, peace and transcendence are each experiences identified within snowboarding which can be framed as spiritual.

4.2 Ten elements of snowboarding

In order to explore the effectiveness of the frame model and the three dimensions of spirituality identified above, some elements of snowboarding were identified which would potentially be both significant and spiritual for snowboarders. These elements were identified through the initial stages of the research, including the pilot study described in chapter 5. As they form a key part of the structure of the thesis, a significant amount of background theory for these elements is contained in this chapter.

The ten elements were chosen to represent key themes in freeride snowboarding, and to represent the three dimensions of spirituality. Sometimes these were themes that distinguished snowboarding from other activities or from normal life. Sometimes these were themes which distinguished freeride snowboarding from other types of snowboarding. There was an iterative and developmental process involved in deriving the ten elements. Suggestions for elements came from pilot interviews, magazines, videos, and study of usernet groups. The number of elements went from five to thirteen, and only finally settled at ten during the first stages of the main interviews.

The context elements are some of the most obvious elements to be identified. *Nature*, in a variety of forms, provides the backdrop to almost all freeride snowboard imagery. This is in contrast to the imagery of freestyle snowboarding which is often highly urbanised. Both the mountains in general, the local geography, and the particular snow conditions are significant for freeride snowboarders. *Risk* is significant in all snowboarding and in extreme sports in general. However, within freeride snowboarding there is a particular awareness of risk that is not within the individual's control. In all extreme sports there is the possibility of injury due to human error. In freeride snowboarding there is the additional possibility of injury due to avalanche or other natural phenomena, especially as one moves away from the prepared runs and into the "backcountry". *Freedom and escape* are two elements that were combined because of continual interaction in the concepts during the initial interviews. They jointly evoke the opportunity for a different mode of being created by the snowboard environment. For freeriders in particular, the whole mountain appears to be available and there are no boundaries such as are present in the city. Similarly the experience of snowboarding is itself one of transcending the normal limits of movement. Finally, *play* emerged as a perspective on the activity which distinguished it from normal life. This perspective is

primarily one of the framing of the snowboarding context rather than of the snowboarding experience, thus the mountains are seen as a "playground".

The connection between spirituality and the context elements is made in a variety of ways. Nature is frequently connected with spirituality. Risk is connected with mortality and thus with a key feature of religion. Freedom and escape are contexts of otherness and opportunity to explore a different realm and identity. Play is, among other aspects, an opportunity to return to an innocent state, an opportunity to grow and develop, and an alternative context with different rules and norms.

The three experience elements are all intended to reflect the immediate experience of being on the mountain snowboarding. The first of these, *rhythm and flow*, arises from the essential turning movement of snowboarding. The element uses two terms which are clearly related within snowboarding in order to give clarity to the essential concept which is the movement of the experienced snowboarder down the mountain, constantly making fluid turns. This motion is essential to freeride snowboarding. The experience of *peace* may be evoked from the contexts outlined above. It is experienced in a variety of ways by snowboarders, both before, during, and after a snowboard run. *Transcendence* is experienced rarely, however it proved to be more widely understood than was expected at the start of the research. It was a discussion about transcendence on a snowboard newsgroup which was an initial impetus for this research. Peace and transcendence have obvious spiritual connections, and the flow experience, it may be argued, is frequently connected with assorted mystic and trance rituals, for example when any kind of dancing forms part of a religious ritual.

Identity has been shown in chapter 2 to be clearly a dimension of spirituality, and the three elements used in this research are each major themes within identity. The element

with the strongest explicit roots in snowboard culture is *lifestyle*, a term which is frequently used in snowboard media to refer to an idealised way of life lived by some snowboarders. It does have a more realistic and widespread usage to refer to actual practices. Lifestyle is used alongside the term *community* in a cynical sense by those disillusioned with the commercialisation of snowboarding. The sense of being part of the snowboarding community is a significant part of the sport for some snowboarders and a repellent factor for others. The community is understood in a variety of ways, and these nuances around the term may need clarifying in order to understand which type of community is under consideration. *Meaning and purpose*, a single element which was intended to refer to significant values in life, was not a native concept to snowboarding. Whilst many snowboarders demonstrably orientate their lives around snowboarding, it is not an explicit discourse within the culture.

These ten elements will now be considered in more detail. Each main section considers the elements which fit in one dimension, with the elements of the context dimension considered first, then those of the experience dimension, finally those of the identity dimension. As each element is considered I will identify why that element is significant in snowboarding and why it may be considered spiritual. I will also highlight particular theoretical perspectives which are significant in understanding the comments of the interviewees in the research.

4.3 Context elements

Nature, freedom and escape, risk, and play are the four elements which fit within the dimension of context spirituality. Nature is the first and most straightforward of the elements to be considered because of its physical nature. The natural aspects of the mountains is connected through MacFarlane's work with the natural theology movement

and an ongoing cultural understanding of nature as inherently spiritual. Urry's consideration of the nature of tourism makes significant points in this context. Through these, nature will also be shown to act as a wider societal frame, the nature frame, with which the other frames interact. Freedom and escape are considered together, and are also contexts with significant physical elements. Freedom and escape will be connected with Durkheim's understanding of the sacred. It will be suggested that there is a societal 'escape frame', distinct from the 'nature frame'. Risk is examined as both a positive and negative factor within snowboarding and sociological issues of risk management are considered from both theory and the interviews. Risk will be connected with both Goffman's and Giddens's analysis. Finally, the significance of framing snowboarding as play will be considered, and associated with the work of Huizinga. The section concludes by considering how the context elements relate to experience and identity spirituality.

Before considering the theoretical background to individual elements within this dimension it is worth making some distinctions between various types of context.

4.3.1 Types of context

As has been seen above in section 2.6, both Durkheim and James draw attention to the significance of context in some types of mystical experience. Durkheim notes the use of natural, artificial and psychological contexts in the production of an expected mystical experience. By natural context I refer to a non-artificial part of the environment, such as a mountain, or valley, or river. Natural contexts would include natural phenomena, such as snow and sunshine. Natural contexts would also include the presence of non-human life, both plants and animals. Both separately and in various combinations these comprise the natural environment. However, it is worth recognising that these natural

contexts are all framed, or mediated, by human perceptions. We do not see things as they are, we see them as we construct them.

This is most obvious in the case of an artificial context. These are things which humans have constructed, and this construction involves meaning or purpose. The masks and mounds which Durkheim draws attention to in the accounts he uses (1915/1965. p248) are created for a particular purpose and are significant symbols within the culture of the people who created them. This is simply to re-emphasise the basic concepts of symbols within culture.

Whereas all contexts are subjective in that they are mediated, cultural constructs, there are some contexts which are doubly subjective. These are the psychological contexts, such as risk and play. They are internal perceptions which are then interpreted. In this research the term risk is premised on a perception of danger, which does not necessarily relate directly to an objective measure of danger. This perception of danger is addressed to a greater or lesser extent by the individual taking precautions. The individual is left with their perceptions of the risk, which continue to form the mental context for the activity. The snowboarder's ongoing attitude to the risk may vary significantly. The risk may be welcomed, it may be helpful, it may be something to be overcome, or something to be worked with. Play is another psychological context. Any recreational activity falls into the category of 'play' rather than work. Engaging in the activity is a choice rather than an obligation. But 'play' is conceived in particular ways, maybe as something childlike and innocent, or maybe something purposeless and futile. To 'play' may be to engage in an activity for its own sake, and not for what one will get out of it.

Contexts can be about contrasts rather than about simple places, objects or states. Both 'freedom' and 'escape' fall into this category. They each focus on a contrast between

environments or states. It was intended that 'freedom' would signify the contrast between the physical state of snowboarding and that of normal existence, and that 'escape' would symbolise contrast between the artificial environment of human habitations, particularly cities, and the natural environment of the ski slopes. However, the early interviewees tended to use the terms indiscriminately, and so the distinction between freedom and escape was dropped.

It can perhaps be seen from the above that the distinction between context and frame is not always clear. In theory one might say that a pure context would be an unmediated object, and that a frame is purely the social construction around an object. However, in practice all contexts are socially constructed, and all frames contain an object. This is clearly the case even in such simple objects as trees, which can be framed as elements of wilderness, as habitats, as raw materials, or as national symbols.

The most obvious of the context elements was nature. Snowboarding takes place in an environment which most would conceive as being 'natural', although some recognise the artificial intrusions into the natural environment which create the ski hill. Associated with nature was the escape and freedom which snowboarding gave. For those from the cities, the mountain environment was a profound contrast with their everyday lives. Even for those who lived in the mountains and worked on the ski hill, snowboarding outside work was an escape, and for everyone the sensations of riding are those of being freed from the normal constraints of movement. Risk was a psychological factor that snowboarders recognised, often in a negative sense, as part of the context for their riding. Finally most snowboarders associated snowboarding with play, an element that was often hard for them to find elsewhere in their lives.

4.3.2 Awareness of nature

Nature is, in various forms, of huge significance to the snowboarder. In particular the weather, the geography and the zoology of the mountains may become significant as the snowboarder gains experience. Snowboarding depends more than many sports on the vagaries of the weather. A good 'powder day' depends on there being an established base of compacted snow, on which an appropriate layer of new snow is deposited. The weather then needs to clear away so that the snowboarder can see where they are going. Whilst riding they need to be aware of changing weather conditions which might make continuing hazardous.

Snowboarding is generally done in mountainous environments, and snowboarders are aware of the geography surrounding them on both a large scale and small scale. On the large scale the grandeur of the mountains and the general outline of their slopes are significant. On a small scale, snowboarders are looking for the type of terrain and features they most enjoy riding. Whilst riding, the snowboarder will often be surprised by signs of creatures that live in what seems to be a white wilderness. Birds and mammals may be viewed, some of which are quite rare, and their presence may add a sense of both wonder and a recognition of the snowboarders own vulnerability and alienation to the environment. Snowboarders will often become aware of the impact their presence has both on the mountains and the animals that live there.

MacFarlane's (2003) history of the European fascination with mountains shows how attitudes towards the mountain environment has changed in the last few hundred years, from viewing mountains as the haunt of "ghosts and monsters" (2003. p207) to a delightful spectacle. MacFarlane is a Fellow of Emmanuel College, who teaches in the English department at Cambridge University, and has a particular research interest in

travel writing. He asserts that the change in attitudes towards mountains was accomplished in particular by the natural theology movement of the early 18th century, whose premise was that "to visit the upper world and contemplate its marvels was to be elevated spiritually as well as physically"(2003, p208). MacFarlane shows that it is our attitude to the natural environment which is significant, not the environment itself, hence he reminds us that mountains are not intrinsically beautiful or awesome. These are attitudes to nature, frames, which arise particularly in, and maybe as a result of, an urbanized, industrialised environment for the majority of the population.

The grandeur of nature seems to be a popular impetus to spirituality, and awe is often considered the appropriate response to large scale natural features. MacFarlane demonstrates just how significant a shift has taken place in this attitude since the seventeenth century, and thus that this attitude is very much a cultural perception. There is evidence that mountains have been considered as significant places for religion throughout recorded history. However, this seems to have been on the basis of their remoteness and the difficulty both of ascending them and of remaining in them. It is only in the last fifty years that the mountain environment has been sufficiently tamed to allow the majority of the population to ascend mountains with ease, and to live comfortably on their upper slopes in 'ski resorts'.

Urry is even clearer about the constructed nature of the tourist environment. Whilst considering Niagara Falls he says that "The gaze we experience is structured by pre-existing cultural images in which the physical object is barely 'seen' at all." (2002, p59). For Urry, the "gaze" is the social organisation and systematisation of that which we perceive (2002, p1). This corresponds with that which I am terming the framing of the object, although he does appear to leave conceptual space for the physical object to

have a reality which may be seen. Urry's concern is with tourism, and within this field he makes significant spiritual connections. He suggests that the "Tourist is a modern pilgrim on a quest for authenticity" (2002, p9) and that one form of the tourist gaze includes "a personal, semi-spiritual, relationship with the object of the gaze." (2002, p150) Again, within Urry's framework these are both social constructions. Thus tourism is potentially a form of spirituality, and it falls within particular discursive authorisations. (2002, p149).

Urry identifies one particular discourse in which he appears to be including extreme sports similar to, but not explicitly including, snowboarding. He suggests that "These corporally defined practices are found in specific, specialised 'leisure spaces', geographically and ontologically distant from work and domestic sites" (2002, p155). It is necessary that these places are "sensuously 'other' to everyday routines and places" and that they "involve 'adventure'" (2002, p155). Snowboard tourism in the mountains clearly fits into this description. The mountain environment is developed into a leisure space through the construction of accommodation and facilities to enable both travel up the mountain, and enjoyable descents with the minimum of hazard. The mountain environment remains stimulatingly different from the urban environment, and engaging with the environment on a snowboard potentially provides that sense of adventure.

4.3.3 Freedom and escape

This element relates to the connected contexts of snowboarding as an expression of freedom and the mountains being a place of escape. The activity of snowboarding creates a sense of freedom which is rooted in the contrast between itself and 'normal' existence. Snowboarders look at the slopes around and feel that they have complete choice about where to go, what to do. This is particularly true in the sense that

snowboarding is a recreational activity, the choice of where to go is up to the individual, or their group, to decide. There is no task to be achieved, no schedule to be kept, or supervisor to be satisfied. The environment in which snowboarding occurs is artificially shaped so that skiers and snowboarders can utilise as much as possible of the terrain (compare with Urry, 2002, p155). The sense of freedom is magnified in the back country, away from the pistes, where there are no trails to follow, no artificial boundaries imposed. The only constraint is the individual's limitations and aspirations.

The sensation of riding itself gives a sensation of freedom. The usual rules of movement do not apply. On a snowboard one is able to travel through an environment which would be difficult to traverse without the board. One is able to move at speeds much faster than running, and with little or no effort. One can use a ramp of snow to fly through the air for a considerable distance, or one can drop off a cliff of 10 or 20 feet high and not only survive, but ride away having enjoyed the experience. In soft snow one looses the sensation of one's feet being on the ground, and it feels as if one is flying. Should one fall, soft snow will cushion the impact and even make it enjoyable. Thus there can arise a sense of being 'superhuman'. All these experiences are accessible to those with only a few weeks experience of snowboarding.

The mountains are a complete contrast to the artificial urban environment, again as Urry identifies in regard to other extreme sports (2002, p155). The dominating landscape is natural in origin, even if is has been greatly adapted for the use of winter sports leisure. The mountains are generally perceived to be beautiful and majestic. They are clean and pollution free when compared to the cities. Most people who visit the mountains will stay in a resort area where the urban structures of business and industry are notably absent. It is a completely different environment from the city. Thus it

enables them to escape from their everyday life for a period.

This difference does not just apply to the physical environment. The combination of a recreational environment and the remains of small town mountain culture, often affect the social environment in ways which contrast with urban rules. People appear to be more friendly and have more time for each other. This is a partly result of the combination of those on holiday having more time to be friendly, and those who work in the resort making hospitality part of their work practices. There is less rush and less pressure than in city life.

Mountains have always been places of escape, places whose remoteness and splendour makes them attractive to those who seek some kind of spiritual experience. In Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, significant encounters between humanity and God occur on mountains, and the tops of mountains and hills were sites of pagan worship. There is an 'otherness' about these places, as has been referenced in MacFarlane (2003, p207) and in Urry (2002, p155). Similar ideas of escape also imbue many holy places. They are sacred and set apart. This is often marked by rituals involved in entering them and by different rules about what is appropriate in these places when compared to the 'outside world'. In entering such a place the adherent is 'escaping' from the outside world of their day to day experience, into a place that is different. The physical environment is designed to reflect this otherness through architecture and decoration. The adherents' behaviour may be different. Extravagant actions and emotions may be displayed. The sacred place is inherently a place of the 'other'.

There is an obvious connection here with Durkheim's definition of religion "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things – that is to say things set apart and forbidden" (1915/1965, p62). Durkheim includes concepts of both

being set apart and prohibited in this bipartite division. Mountains are, both for the urbanite and for the person who lives among them, inherently set apart. They are not generally places of habitation. Even ski resorts only become habitable with a great deal of effort in both construction and maintenance. The environment itself gives a sense of prohibition. It is difficult to navigate, and difficult to survive. It is this otherness that is a significant part of the appeal of these places. The mountain context is so radically different from the urban context that for some the difference may enable a sense of sacredness.

The extent of the otherness of this context invites the application of a significantly different frame of reality to that normally applied. The urban snowboarder visiting the mountains finds themselves in a place where their normal rules and mores do not apply. The nature frame, as described above, forms a significant part of this frame. Below (Section 6.2.4) I will suggest that the contexts of freedom and escape relate to an additional frame, the 'escape frame'.

4.3.4 Risk

By the time a snowboarder as done a few weeks snowboarding in the mountain they will probably have seen or heard of people injured through attempting tricks in the snowboard park or elsewhere. They will also have been warned of the dangers of going off-piste, away from the marked runs. Snowboards are particularly good at riding on the uncompressed off-piste snow, which makes it easy for inexperienced snowboarders to get into dangerous situations. All new snowboards come with a disclaimer, which snowboarders in the USA are required to sign before taking the snowboard away from the shop. The disclaimer reminds the user that snowboarding is a dangerous activity and places the responsibility for any incident on the individual.

As one engages more with snowboard culture, one becomes aware of those who have died as a result of accident or avalanche. One of the inspirational figures in soulriding, Craig Kelly, died in an avalanche during the period of this research. He was a highly experienced snowboarder and mountaineering guide. Every year in the mountains of Europe and North America, a significant number of snowboarders die. In a single year in Canada, 2002/3, 29 people were killed in avalanches, and on average 150 people are killed worldwide every year by avalanches (Canadian Avalanche Association, 2004).

Thus all snowboarders know that they are engaged in an activity which has a significant degree of danger. There is, of course, the 'it won't happen to me' factor, which enables all of us to continue with activities which we know have significant danger, such as crossing the road. Just as in crossing the road, snowboarders take precautions. The wearing of helmets is becoming standard, and those who ride off-piste will normally carry specialised avalanche equipment and have been on a course so they know how to use it. But these precautions can only lower, not eliminate, the danger.

At this point it is significant to introduce a distinction between danger and risk. By danger I am referring to the *objective chance* of incurring death or significant injury. This might be measured in the statistics of injuries of those involved in particular genres of snowboarding, or in the potential for a particular snow slope to avalanche given certain conditions. In contrast, by risk I am referring to the *perception* of incurring death or serious injury. This is perspective of the individuals engaged in the activity. In other words, risk is a framing of danger.

This framing of danger can be misleading either by increasing or decreasing the actual chance of injury. For example, activities like cooking or driving may carry a reasonable level of danger. However, we do not associate them with risk. We normalise these

activities and frame them as low risk. Conversely, snowboarding has a low (although still significant) danger, however, the perception of risk is high. Snowboarders view their activity as involving significant risk. The mismatch between level of danger and level of risk can be helpful or can itself add to the hazard. An activity which has a high degree of perceived risk may conversely carry a reduced danger precisely because the perceived risk will encourage the individual to take more care. Conversely an activity in which the perceived level of risk is significantly smaller than the level of danger, may cause a lack of attention which can result in harm.

Snowboarders are actively engaged with risk and danger, and there is an inherent connection with spirituality through an awareness of mortality. The original element to be considered here was 'mortality', however, this was dropped as the respondents in the pilot study felt that the term had no resonance. Nevertheless, the risks of snowboarding are an engagement with the limitations of mortality. The snowboard context is one in which participants have died and regularly get injured. This addressing of mortality is familiar ground for sociologist of religion. One example is Berger (1967, p53), who places the issues of theodicy associated with death as a significant element of his *Sacred Canopy.*

Two other sociologists have made helpful contributions to the theory of risk which are relevant here. Goffman (1967) has focussed on approaches to handling risk. Giddens (1991) identifies risk management and discusses the conscious adoption of a portfolio of risk within life.

Active risks within life are termed "fateful activities" by Goffman (1967, p164). Snowboarding provides a good example of such a "fateful activity". The activity places the snowboarder in a degree of physical danger which depends on the terrain being

ridden, and the approach being taken to the terrain. There is a "play" (1967, p164) in determining how one will ride, what risks one will take. There is a physical danger which may result from taking these risks, and there are one's co-riders, or those with whom one will share stories of the day's riding. Goffman suggests two approaches taken to ameliorate these aspects of risk. Firstly, one can "take care" (1967, p174) in order to try to "widen the reserve of risk" (1967, p174) and hence lower the danger of injury. Secondly, one can attempt to make advance provision for the possible adverse consequences of a fateful activity. Snowboarders venturing into the backcountry, away from the pisted runs, will adopt both of these strategies as part of managing the risk. They will check the avalanche forecast and possibly take a guide to widen the reserve of risk. Advance provision is common among snowboarders riding off-piste, both in the form of protective clothing such as helmets and padding, and in the form of avalanche rescue equipment, and the training in how to use it. The element of co-presence is seen in the precaution of riding alongside 'buddies' who will each ensure that the other has safely completed a section of the route.

Giddens labels the process of identifying and dealing with the risks involved in real life as the "colonisation of the future" (1991, p111). He asserts the "awareness of risk seeps into the actions of almost everyone" (1991, p112). We are forced to attempt to deal with these risks, but we cannot fully do so. Giddens suggests that one response to this risk climate is to actively take on certain types of risk. These active risks may be a part of individuals attempts to take control of their lives. In doing so they create what Giddens calls a "package of risks"(1991, p125). This risk management forms part of the life plan that Giddens suggests is integral to the colonisation of the future.

The perception of risk is increased when one leaves familiar territory and particularly

when one travels into new areas. The more unfamiliar the environment, the more dangers may be lurking unrecognised. Thus for the urbanite, nature is an inherently risky context. There is a subtext of risk within the nature frame, although normally this risk will be perceived in term of insect bites or minor injury. The greater the engagement with nature, the greater that risk element becomes. Snowboarding, like other 'extreme sports' such as mountain biking, is a high-risk engagement with the nature frame.

Snowboarding may thus be seen as an attempt to retake control over one's life, and to re-balance the risk portfolio. For those whose lives are at the mercy of a complex world of unforeseeable risks, snowboarding provides a simpler short-term alternative. Whilst the risks of riding are by no means always within one's own control, the number of factors is vastly reduced and the balance of factors is in the snowboarders control. One chooses whether to go off-piste. One chooses which slopes to ride. One makes these decisions on the basis of the information available about weather conditions, one's companions, and one's own skill, among other factors.

4.3.5 Play

In a 'serious' adult world, to snowboard is to play. This is not a trivial experience, but an opportunity for re-creation, refreshing the snowboarder. Snowboarding gives snowboarders the opportunity to experience their world in a new way, to experiment, to discover what the new boundaries of this world are for them. These may be boundaries of gymnastic ability, of fear, of skill, of speed, of height, or boundaries of daring to venture into uncharted areas and to depend on oneself. There is obviously a serious and potentially risk taking aspect to this, but there is also a playful element. For many adults, the opportunity to play is limited, if not denied, by our culture. Play seems to be

that which is almost frivolous. Play can be constructed as an activity which separates children and adults. Yet we *play* sports and games, even if we are professional participants. We *play* musical instruments. Snowboarding may be construed as play, even though the word is not explicit in the grammar of snowboarding. Whilst we play football, we do not play snowboarding, we simply snowboard.

For a significant proportion of the snowboarders interviewed snowboarding was their employment, yet they still conceived of what they were doing as play. This perception is built into the leisure industry, where employees are expected to make significant sacrifices in terms of remuneration because of the opportunities to 'play'. Long hours and low pay are common, and are ameliorated in the perception of the employee by the opportunity to snowboard throughout the season.

The use of the term play about an activity is to make one, or both, of two suggestions about it. Firstly, one can be saying something about the nature of the activity. For an activity to be play means, it is not serious, it is not work. However, this understanding is only a general understanding, for most things which are played can be played seriously and even professionally. Many sports are played, and are played professionally. Musicians of all levels play their instruments. The second suggestion is that the activity is not significant or substantial. This is primarily to place a value on some activities rather than on others. To say that play activities are not valuable is to dismiss a number of characteristics of play which will be discussed below, including play's potential for learning and play's psychological benefits. It is also noteworthy that the leisure industry, which is constructed around various kinds of play, is a major part of the world economy.

Any consideration of play quickly engages ambiguities about the nature and value of

play, and identifies tensions and disconnects in our understanding of play. This is not a new phenomena, as play has been the subject of human study and thought since antiquity. Various thinkers have understood the significance of play in many different ways, and there is little unanimity on its value or even on the definition of play. Ellis (1973) attempts to draw together the main definitions and theories of play. Particularly Ellis notes that play is not a category reserved for children, but one that can be used for adults. Ellis's section on adult play goes on to talk about leisure as opposed to play, but makes no distinction of definition in doing so.

Moyles (1989) asserts that play should be provide fun and enjoyment, but that this is the basis for other benefits. Moyles believes that play "develops creativity, intellectual competence, emotional strength and stability and ... feelings of joy and pleasure" (1989, p7). In approaching the issue of play and work, Moyles agrees that "Play is an approach to action, not a form of action" (1989, p11). This is a reflection of the key argument of this section, that context is constructed, and thus that play is a frame. For Moyles there is no doubt that play is a very valuable learning tool, yet she notes that:

> Play has all too often been used to infer something rather trivial and non-serious, the polar extreme to work, rather than, as in a child context, the essence of serious concentrated thinking and one purposeful means to learning (1989, p16).

For snowboarders there is no doubt that they have been engaged in a learning activity, but that the learning has taken the form of play. One clear example of this is that snowboarders (in contrast to skiers) tend not to learn by taking formal lessons, but by informal 'play' learning, trial and error.

The greatest academic claims for play are made by Huizinga in "Homo Ludens" (1938/1955), who places play at the centre of civilisation and at the essence of humanity. For Huizinga "all play means something" (1938/1955, p1), it has a significance, there is some part of play which transcends immediate needs and imparts meaning. Huizinga believes that the English word 'fun' "characterizes the essence of play" (1938/1955, p2). Play is universally present "as a well defined quality of action which is different from ordinary life" (1938/1955, p4). Huizinga also believes that "All play has its rules"(1938/1955, p11), which are particularly important in establishing the play-community. This play community is a source of alternate identities, constructed within the rules and culture of the play. "Inside the circle of the game the laws and customs of the ordinary life no longer count. We are different and we do things differently" (1938/1955, p12).

Most significantly for this research, Huizinga makes an explicit connection between play and religion. For Huizinga, religion is a sub-set of play: "Our ideas of ritual, magic, liturgy, sacrament, and mystery all fall within the play concept" (1938/1955, p37). Furthermore, the mental attitudes of play may be compared with religion. "The joy inextricably bound up with playing can turn not only into tension but into elation"(1938/1955, p40). So religion is a form of play and play can lead to a religious ecstasy. Huizinga has a third connection between play and religion, that of the sacred space. The play environment, he says "Cannot be formally distinguished from the temple or the magic circle". These interactions between play and spirituality are particularly interesting because they are clear once they have been identified, but they are not part of the general social framing of play.

The descriptions above show that many understandings of play permeate our culture.

both as dominant understandings, and as subtexts. In terms of the primary thesis of this study, these understandings form frames with which snowboarders understand their activity. However, in contrast to earlier contextual frames, the play frame has less coherence; the understanding of what is meant by play in these contexts varies significantly, as does the willingness of the snowboarders to apply the frame.

4.4 Experience elements

Snowboarding is an experience in contrast to the normal experience of humanity, especially urban humanity. It is not just the context that is different. The sensations which result from the context and the activity are different from those of 'normal' life. The aspect of these sensations which is considered here is how they are framed and the significance of that framing of the experience.

Two elements, peace and transcendence, have very obvious connections with spirituality. For many they form an 'other' context, in contrast with a normal life which is neither peaceful nor (by definition) transcendent. To many they may be desirable or they may be simply alien. Durkheim identifies both peace and transcendence in his description of elementary religious experience. In the context of the fierce excitement there are also moments of "profound silence" (1915/1965, p249). Durkheim describes how the participant may arrive at a state of exaltation where he may not "recognise himself any longer"(1915/1965, p249). Both peace and transcendence are goals of some forms of religion, for example of meditation, however they seem to be so familiar as to be taken for granted, and no distinct theoretical perspectives were discovered which related the interviewees comments to the thesis of this research.

The most widely understood frame was that of flow. The concept of flow has been investigated particularly by Csikszentmihalyi who has made it his life's work. What is

remarkable is the strong correlation between Csikszentmihalyi's description and significant elements of snowboarding. Csikszentmihalyi also makes explicit connection between the flow experience and religious experiences. He connects flow with Durkheim's "collective effervescence" (1990, p110) and with Maslow's peak experiences" (1990, p251). In doing so he appears to suggest that flow provides a personal route to the core experiences of religion and thus the practice of flow offers a form spirituality (1990, p8,22). Whilst the claims Csikszentmihalyi made for his theory may be overstated, the elements of flow themselves have a degree of validity as the comments of my interviewees will show. The next section will expand on the elements of the flow experience, and demonstrate how they match with snowboarding.

4.4.1 Snowboarding and the flow experience

Both the term flow and the elements of the flow experience resonated strongly with the interviewees descriptions of their experience of snowboarding. The interviewees' responses also fitted very well with Csikszentmihalyi's theory of the flow experience. In what follows, the seven elements of Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory will be explained and connected to snowboarding. The six original elements are approached in the order that Csikszentmihalyi expounds them in his original book on the topic *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975/2000, p38ff). Csikszentmihalyi later added a seventh element (1990, p48), and this too is connected with the snowboarding experience through the interviewees' responses.

a) Merging of action and awareness (1975/2000, p38). When someone is in 'flow' then they are not aware of themselves as separate from the activity, there is no internal dialogue concerning the activity. This may be compared to the act of running where one is not aware of the movements and balance needed to run, but only of choosing a

direction to run in. The merging of action and awareness requires total engagement in the activity of the moment. In snowboarding this may be readily seen in the movement down the slopes when competence has been achieved. The snowboarder may not have a sensation of themselves as separate from their snowboard, but only of the snow, as if they were experiencing the snow beneath them directly.

b) Centring of attention on a limited stimulus field (1975/2000, p40). This involves a focus in the moment and on a small number of parameters, those of the activity. Csikszentmihalyi particularly studied rock climbing, in which the stimulus field is the rock on which the climber is moving. At each point only a few movements will give the desired result of gaining height. The moves behind are ignored, only the next few moves are significant, the route which will be taken to ascend the rock face. This focus is a benefit of flow activities as it enables the participants to put other concerns out of their mind for the duration of the activity. Csikszentmihalyi introduces another aspect of the centring of attention, the inducement which causes this focus (1975/2000, p41). In rock climbing it may be a question of survival which enables the focus. In other activities competition or personal gain may be an attraction, but Csikszentmihalyi's point is that the activity must ultimately be done for its own sake.

The stimulus field in snowboarding consists of an awareness of the snow and slope conditions, and a wider awareness of the mountain around the snowboarder. This wider environment is likely to consist of a limited palate (snow, sky, mountain, maybe some people), with little detail. At higher speeds, or in more technically difficult terrain, the snowboarder is focussed exclusively on their immediate context and on getting through the obstacle set with which they are faced.

c) Loss of ego (1975/2000, p42) The loss of ego means that there is a loss of self-

awareness in a specific way. "What is usually lost in flow is not the awareness of one's body or of one's functions, but only the self construct, the intermediary which one learns to interpose between stimulus and response" (1975/2000, p43).For competent snowboarders, there is no requirement for an ego to interpose itself. So long as the snowboarders feel that their technical skills and physical ability are not being exceeded, their mind can switch off the ego function.

d) Control of action and environment (1975/2000, p44). Those in flow will generally feel that they are able to control everything significant around them. For rock climbers this means there are no extraneous forces affecting their climb, there is nothing distracting their attention. In competitive games Csikszentmihalyi suggests that flow is a feeling you can only have when you are in control of the playing arena, and that your opponents cannot experience flow at the same time, because they are not in control. However, the experience is not about beating another, the focus is on having competence to control the arena. These feelings of competence are readily achievable in snowboarding, and hence the sense of being in control. There are obviously risks to be aware of, and external factors such as other mountain users and the weather, but competent snowboarders will feel that they have managed and controlled those risks and factors.

e) Demands for action and clear feedback (1975/2000, p46). A flow activity will involve "coherent, non-contradictory demands for action" and provide "unambiguous feedback" (1975/2000, p46). In climbing, for example, there is a clear goal and means to accomplish it. The climber can know how they are doing in terms of their progress up the climb, and their ability to continue climbing. In snowboarding the demand for action is always clear and the feedback is always unambiguous. Once a route has been chosen

it becomes clear what is required to ride the route. Alternatives may present themselves as the route is descended, but the action required will always be clear. The feedback from snowboarding is also consistently clear. At one level, just to get down the slope without (or even with) falling over is sufficient feedback. At another level, the sensations of riding are themselves direct physical feedback. As identified above, one type of snowboarding, carving, is devoted to the sensations of achieving a 'perfect' turn.

f) The 'autotelic' nature (1975/2000, p47) Csikszentmihalyi quotes a respondent saying "The purpose of the flow is to keep on flowing, not looking for a peak or utopia, but staying in the flow"(1975/2000, p47). Autotelic, in this understanding, concerns an activity which is its own reward, which requires no other goal or prize than the activity itself. In this it relates closely to play, indeed Csikszentmihalyi says that "Play is the flow experience par excellence"(1975/2000, p37). One correspondent in the pilot interviews said that there are two types of snowboarder, techriders, who ride to achieve an external goal, and soulriders, who ride for the pleasure of riding.

g) Transformation of time. Csikszentmihalyi later (1990, p48ff) added to and slightly changed the above list of elements. He splits element four ("Control of action and environment") into "sense of control" and a "challenge-skill balance". He adds a "transformation of time", the sense of time being expanded or contracted.

These seven elements indicate a potentially close association between Csikszentmihalyi's theoretical description and snowboarding. However the work of this thesis is not to validate Csikszentmihalyi's approach, any more that it is to validate any description of peace or transcendence. The intention here is rather to use flow as one element in the experience dimension of spirituality. The flow experience is expounded

in detail here so that separate elements of flow may be identified in the responses of the snowboarders. Csikszentmihalyi is attempting a comprehensive understanding of flow. Snowboarders may not include all Csikszentmihalyi's elements in their own understanding, and rather would relate to a more general, unnuanced version of flow.

4.5 Identity elements

This snowboarding identity is not necessarily the dominant identity of the individual, although for some snowboarders it may be. In contemporary society identity is no longer likely to be conferred by a singular culture in which one has a particular role. Mead (1934, p142) identifies the normalcy of "multiple personalities" as a result of the various social situations in which we engage. According to Mead these various personalities require organising and managing to achieve a "unified self". Thus the snowboarder identity will often be a significant part of a portfolio of the identities of the individual. Alongside the snowboarder identity may be such identities as the significant other, the parent, the co-worker, the sibling, and the child. The individual may have significantly varying degrees of control in how those identities are constructed, for example due to a controlling work environment or to dominant parents.

The sources of identity can come from a wide range of areas. Many relationships, activities, beliefs, diseases, geographical locations and other features of human existence can form the catalyst for an identity source. This raises the issue of what features makes something into a potential source of identity. Three elements of snowboarding appear to enable it to become a source of identity rather than simply an activity. Firstly, there is an existent community of snowboarders. Community is the social dimension of the individual and thus the social dimension of identity. In community the individual relates to, and defines themselves with regard to others.

Membership of communities confers an identity both within the community and without the community. Within this thesis, community will particularly be discussed with regard to Bauman's concept of "cloakroom communities" (2000, p92) and Maffessoli's concept of the "neo-tribe" (1996, p76).

The second element of identity in snowboarding is lifestyle. The primary feature of lifestyle are the values which are connected to the aspect of identity. At a simplistic level this means, for example, that snowboarders think that snowboarding is good, that it is an appropriate way to spend time and resources. This might mean prioritising the creation of ski resorts over the maintenance of pristine wilderness. Lifestyle is related by Bauman (2000, p76) to the individual's patterns of consumption which are implied in their values, and by Giddens to the individual's "routinised practices" (1991, p81). Snowboarding is considered by marketing analysts as a "lifestyle sport" (Mintel, 2001, p7), by which they mean that particular clothing, patterns of behaviour language and music are closely associated with the sport, and this association creates opportunities for products to be sold.

The third element of identity is meaning and purpose, which involve the commitment to the activity. To be a snowboarder is not just to have participated in the activity, but to be in some sense continuing with the activity, the community and the lifestyle. Thus meaning and purpose are temporal dimensions of the individual, areas Giddens talks of as the "reflexive project" of the self (1991, p75).

Snowboarding is for most of the interviewees a significant element in their portfolio of identities. This was clear from their responses to the questions about community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose. It should be noted that identifying snowboarding as part of one's identity portfolio is itself a framing of snowboarding, captured in the

phrase "I am a snowboarder". The social perceptions of snowboarding, both those within and outside the snowboarding community, create a frame with which snowboarders can view themselves. Each of the elements of identity used in the interviews will now be considered individually.

4.5.1 Community

Community has long been a disputed term within sociology of religion. Hillery (1955) notoriously identified and classified 94 definitions of community. Some see community as a significant term, for example Nisbet identifies community as "The most fundamental and far reaching of sociology's unit-ideas" (1966, p47). Others do not consider it worth mentioning, and neither Giddens in the UK (2001), nor Macionis in the USA (1989), allow the concept either a chapter or index reference in their introductory books on sociology. Two recent understandings of community form significant background for understanding the interviewees comments. These come from the work of Bauman (2000) on cloakroom communities, and of Maffesoli (1996) on modern tribalism.

Bauman suggests that communities are "*postulated*; projects rather than realities, something that comes after, not before the individual choice" (2000, p169). Choice is thus key in communities, they are no longer fixed parts of the individual's social environment, but options. Bauman offers the concept of "cloakroom communities" (2000, p199), communities which come together for a limited time, and for a specific purpose. Within these dividing interests are laid aside, and common mores are adopted. Negatively, these communities "ward off the condensation of genuine (that is, comprehensive and lasting) communities"(2000, p201). Bauman is stipulatively defining what is, and hence what is not, "genuine" community. He is suggesting that

only "comprehensive and lasting" communities are genuine. It is useful to note that in an increasingly mobile society, with the benefits of new communications and media technology, stable committed community appears to be making way for more flexible and transitory communities.

Maffesoli (1996, p76ff) argues that the emerging form of community is the tribe, or more accurately the neo-tribes. He calls his work "The Time of the Tribes", emphasising that "Contemporary lifestyles are no longer structured around a single pole. They branch out from tremendously varied occurrences, experiences, and situations" (1996, p85). Maffesoli does not suggest that these tribes make demands of exclusivity on their members. The construct is more about belonging to a community (although Maffesoli prefers not to use the word) rather than engaging in an activity.

Community is a familiar aspect of sociological approaches to religion. Institutional religion presumes and requires a community to structure the religion around. Durkheim's description of elementary religious experience (1915, 1965, p249) includes, again unacknowledged, a community which creates the experience. Weber's (1922/1991) analysis presumes a community of both virtuosi and non-virtuosi, with the latter benefiting from the experiences of the former through the ethical systems created. However the question of whether this community aspect can or should be extended to spirituality has not been resolved. As has already been noted, Guest (2007, p181) contrasts religion and spirituality in terms of the individual against the institutional. This leaves community somewhere in-between, and creates a particular area of inquiry for this research as to whether community is framed by the participants as spiritual.

It is evident that, whether recognised or not, community is significant in creating the frames for individuals. The discussion boards and other media referred to in section 1.3

are not just passing on information about soulriding, they are framing the sport as spiritual for those who engage with that media. It is also noteworthy that in other disciplines community has clearly been identified as a form of non-institutional spirituality. In the psychology of sport, Robinson's work identifies a football spectator community as a spiritual community (2007, p57)

4.5.2 Lifestyle

There are significant divisions in the theory of lifestyle as well as in the practical understandings. Lifestyle is for some the material dimension of identity, relating to the commercial side of the sport. Bauman suggests this when he says "postmodern society engages its members primarily in their capacity as consumers"(2000, p76) which implies a life organised around consumption. As indicated above, for some of the interviewees this aspect of lifestyle was problematic.

Giddens devotes a sub-section of *Modernity and Self-identity* (1991) to lifestyle, which he describes as "routinised practises, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favoured milieux of encountering others" (1991, p81). Giddens is thus recognising the significance of the material aspects of lifestyle, but paying attention to the choices we make in our use of these material aspects, and to the way these choices become "routinised practises". He goes on to make it clear that in contemporary culture we not only have significant choices about which lifestyle to adopt, but also that we are likely to be engaged in a number of lifestyles, which he calls "lifestyle sectors". These are a result of the diversity and segmentation of the life worlds we inhabit. Interestingly there is no necessity for coherence within our lifestyles. Giddens says "Modes of action followed in one context may be at variance with those adopted in others" (1991, p83).

One significant nuance within the word lifestyle is its application to either a real individual or an idealised model. An individual's lifestyle is, as Giddens describes, their practices within a segment of their lives. In the context of this research the most appropriate segment would be their snowboarding life. Thus the lifestyle would incorporate their choice of accommodation, food, clothes, the routines of their day, etc. All of this is focussed very specifically on the individual. Different snowboarders might have very different practices. The model lifestyle would be a more generally held (and harder to pin down) set of practices. This might include brands and styles of clothing, types of food, music and so on. The individual's actual lifestyle may approximate to the model lifestyle in some aspects, and this may be a conscious choice, or the individual may not even be aware of a model lifestyle.

Mention should also be made here of Hebdige's much-quoted work on subculture (1979). Hebdige believes that what subcultures express is "a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate lives" (p132). Subculture carries connotations both of community and culture which are different in some way to mainstream culture and community. These may be seen to form an implicit criticism of mainstream culture, or to provide an 'alternative' part of the individual's fragmented life.

Lifestyle is a familiar aspect of religion within sociology. Durkheim's definition of religion includes "beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" (1915/1965, p62). Mason's recent (2004) definition of spirituality, already noted, is based on lifestyle as he says it is a "conscious way of life ..... based on transcendent referent". These definitions both creates an issue. Does the lifestyle need to be explicitly based on the sacred or transcendent, as seems to be implied, or are any chosen lifestyles inherently a form of

spirituality? Some education definitions allow for any lifestyle to be spiritual, for example that of Rawle and Green quoted above "spirituality is seen as a set of guiding principles for life" (2002, p4). This issue again is one of framing, framing both in the object and in the subject. The framing in the object is the decision as to whether source of the lifestyle is spiritual or not. Thus for example a lifestyle sourced in a religion might be spiritual, and a lifestyle sourced in a philosophy might not. These two lifestyles might have the same content (the same 'rules'), but the source might determine whether they are spiritual. The framing in the subject is the decision as to whether the person employing the lifestyle sees it as spiritual. For example, one vegetarian might frame the lifestyle as spiritual, and another as purely practical. As I have shown in section 1.3, snowboarding is not framed as a primarily spiritual activity, and thus does not fall into the first of these understandings of spirituality. It may however be framed by participants as spiritual for them.

4.5.3 Meaning and Purpose

A key part of Giddens work on self-identity (1991) is focussed on the "trajectory of the self" (1991, p70). This is the development of identity as a project into the future, and management of time and the body to achieve a self-actualisation (1991, p71-78). It involves the appropriation and creation of meaning and purpose for the self from the options available with one's context. Giddens suggests that this sense of identity is formed on a basis of authenticity, of "finding oneself" (1991, p79). At one level it is a discovery of who one 'really' is, at another it is the creation of identity, meaning and purpose in life. Further the trajectory of identity is not to arrive at a fixed or final form. It goes through transitions from one stage to another. The issue of identity is a process in search of an authentic personhood, or set of personhoods.

Meaning and purpose are well-recognised aspects of religion. Berger puts this well when he says "Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established" (1967, p25). The construction of an anthropocentric cosmos is exactly the activity which gives humans a sense of meaning and purpose. As noted above, Versteeg continues this perspective when he identifies spirituality as "finding a personal direction" (2007, p107).

Snowboarding can surprisingly be an all consuming activity, even for those whose home is in the UK. Some snowboarders ('seasonairs') make snowboarding their year round focus, taking jobs which allow them to live in the mountains through the winter season. Others ('weekend warriors') balance a career with taking as much holiday time as possible. Others still move to the mountains to live permanently and become the locals who staff the ski resorts. For all of these snowboarding becomes the major focus for their identity and the focus for their lives. It is possible to assess this in some objective sense by evaluating the amount of time and money the individual puts into the activity. What is not always clear is individuals perspective, their frame, on the activity. The fact that people spend all their disposable income on snowboarding, and think about the sport with all their available time, does not mean that they frame it as their meaning and purpose in life, and still less that they see this as spiritual.

4.6 The three dimensions of spirituality conclusion

This chapter concludes the theoretical perspectives for the thesis. It has detailed the relationship between the three dimensions of spirituality and introduced the ten elements of snowboarding which are used to explore the three dimensions of spirituality. A variety of theoretical perspectives for the ten elements of snowboarding have been used to place them in context. These will be referred to in the following

chapters which examine each of the dimensions in the light of the interview responses. It is this comparison which will explore the frame model and the three dimensions of spirituality considered here. However, before proceeding to the analysis, it is necessary to consider the methodological approach taken by the research.

Chapter 5 - Understanding soulriding

The preceding chapters have laid out the theoretical section of the thesis. This chapter presents the conceptual and practical framework of the research. The issue here is how the understanding of spirituality as a frame of reality, modelled in three dimensions of experience, identity and context, can be explored in the understanding of a community of snowboarders. The key term in this is 'soulriding', and the challenge is to evaluate whether the theoretical model enables some understanding of the meaning and significance of the term 'soulriding'. The thesis will subsequently move to the analytical sections, where the responses to interviews are examined.

The first of the conceptual issues are the base theoretical positions on the nature of spirituality and interpretive understanding which have been adopted as part of the research. The issues of designing research to give valid conclusions is considered next, followed by the resultant overall analytical approach. The chapter then considers the particular practical issues of the research. The initial interviews of the research were the pilot study interviews. These were undertaken to establish how the subjects of soulriding and spirituality might be approached with the snowboarding community, and to clarify the elements of the soulriding experience. Once the pilot study had been conducted and evaluated, the main study could be conducted. The strategy for obtaining interviewees is explained, and particular issues of terminology and incommunicability within the interviews are explored. The issue of ethics in these interviewees is considered next. Then the methods and issues associated with the analysis of the data from the research are dealt with. Finally my roles and biases as snowboarder and religious professional are identified and the position of insider researcher is considered.

5.1 Theoretical positions

The research started with two issues. The theoretical issue arose from questions about the nature of spirituality which have been detailed in chapter 2, and which led to the construction of a model of spirituality as a frame of reality (chapter 3), and the three suggested dimensions of the spirituality derived in chapter 4. The cultural phenomena at issue was the term soulriding within the vocabulary of snowboarding. Each of these creates issues of basic methodology for the research. The nature of spirituality creates issues of definition, and the culture of snowboarding creates issues of how a phenomena can be understood.

As there are a wide range of opinions on the nature of spirituality, the researcher in this field has the option to pre-determine or not to pre-determine what understandings of spirituality will be valid for the research. The first option means to decide on a definition of spirituality for the context of the research, adopting Mason's (2004) approach of stipulative definitions. The second option is to accept the understandings of the interviewees and to adopt methodological agnosticism. This means that the researcher decides to have no opinion about the validity of the understandings of 'spirituality' within the context of the research. A result of this position is that the subjects of the research need not be constrained in how they understand the term 'spirituality'. In the context of this research, methodological agnosticism was decided to be appropriate because it is precisely the range of understandings of the term 'spiritual' which are the subject of the research.

The approach to the research design was used based on the concept of interpretivist understanding. This understanding cannot come from observation, but from revelations of self and mutual understandings. The knowledge which this study is concerned with

is situated in the understandings of members of the snowboarding community. The understanding is not monolithic but varied, and the aim of the research is to build a picture based on the variety of understandings collected. Willis puts this as:

> The interpretivist's understanding.... is not a single understanding of the 'right' way of viewing a particular situation. Instead it is an understanding of multiple perspectives on the topic"(2007, p113)

The context of this research raises the significance of gaining understanding from those involved in snowboarding. They have the knowledge which is necessary, but uncovering that knowledge is a problem, which, as Giddens put it, requires immersion in a culture, "to know how to find one's way about in it" (1976, p161). This does not necessarily imply that there is a single cohesive understanding to be discovered. It may also be the case that there are a variety of understandings of the term 'soulriding', and that this variety of understandings will contribute to a fragmented whole. Additionally, the nature of these understandings may vary from snowboard mini-culture to snowboard mini-culture. For some groups or nationalities there may be one set of understandings, whereas in another there may be significant differences.

Within snowboarding there is no authority figure whom one might approach for a definitive understanding of the term 'soulriding'. There may be certain individuals whose understanding carry more significance within the culture because of their positions of power within the snowboarding community. This power may result from access to the snowboard media (for example as magazine editors or video producers), or it may result from a wide respect for one's opinions resulting from fame or skill at snowboarding. The significance of these opinions would then be reflected in the opinions of the wider community. Thus the snowboard media becomes one possible

source of information; however, it is not the crucial one. The key source is not the opinions of individuals, but the wider understanding of the community or communities. Thus the approach of this research is to obtain a range of understandings from a range of individuals.

Another relevant feature of the necessary epistemology is identified by feminist writers such as Harding (1991), and by black writers such as Hill Collins. These writers identify the particular contribution which can be made to knowledge by those whose position within culture is marginal or subliminal within mainstream culture. Hill Collins says "Placing black women's experiences at the centre of analysis offers fresh insight on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies."(1999, p553) Harding (1991, p150) goes further to argue that including these opinions increases the objectivity of research. Thus the research should actively seek opinion from outside the mainstream, and particular weight should be given within the analysis of research findings to any of their opinions which diverge from the broad spread of opinion.

The approach to the research question is therefore based on constructionism, with a broadly interpretivist epistemology. Practically, these mean finding ways of eliciting, from a variety of snowboarders, what their snowboarding means to them. As the construction of reality in this case is not amenable to observation, and as the textual evidence for the phenomenon is scarce (as set out in section 1.3), options for this are essentially through questionnaires or through interviews. Questionnaires may be advantageous when dealing with large numbers of participants in a survey. However. in this case what was needed was enough variety of respondents to obtain a "local truth" (Willis, 2007, p124) rather than simply an individual opinion, and enough depth to the information to elicit the insight needed. Interviews of sufficient depth and a sufficient

number of people provided the appropriate strategy for implementing the epistemology.

5.2 Validity and triangulation

The aim in considering the validity of this research is to consider how bias in the research can be brought into the open and evaluated. The primary source of bias is the desire of the researcher for the research to fulfil the expectations associated with it. This need not be intentional, but may result from primacy being given to data and analysis results which reflect certain positions. A secondary source of bias would be through skewed sampling and data sets, and this is considered in section 5.6.

One simple tool to approach the bias of the researcher is through overt declaration of the researcher's situation within the research, and thus through an explicit self-awareness of the researcher. This self-awareness is necessary at all three stages of the research process. The design should be structured so that the data collected by the research may be obtained in a consistent method. The data collection phase should ensure that the results obtained are not 'led' by the researchers requirements or agenda. The analysis needs to ensure that the interpretation of the data is 'fair' both to any overall pattern of the data, and to the particular sources and elements of data. Self-awareness on the part of the researcher is vital in all of this, allowing conclusions to emerge from the data, rather than imposing conclusions upon the data.

Another tool to ensure validity is the use of triangulation. This can mean the use of multiple methods, the use of multiple sources, or the use of multiple types of analysis. The use of the term triangulation in qualitative research was popularised by Denzin in 1970, although the use of the term is a matter of some debate because of its positivist overtones, for example Denscombe (1988, p85) and Seal (1999, p57). However, as Silverman points out (2005, p122) triangulation can lead to an approximation of data at

the cost of the original contexts. Thus a balance needs to be maintained between generalising within the data from research, and respecting individual contributions.

I have adopted the principle of triangulation in a number of ways into the research. In the pilot studies I use different types of data, from various media, and a number of interviews in order to obtain some wider view of the subject of 'soulriding'. I then used two groups of data sources (UK and Canadian interviews) and attempted to obtain a range of individual interviews within each data source. The analysis used three approaches to the data, reducing the data gathered to simple binary data in order to search for patterns within the data, generalising within each group along thematic lines, and searching for a narrative within each interview.

5.3 Interviews and methodology

Interviews are a widely used research method in social science, both for qualitative and quantitative studies. Denscombe's typology (1998, p112) is typical in that it divides interviews into structured, semi structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews are most appropriate to quantitative research and survey situations as they use scripts which the interviewers are required to observe. Unstructured interviews are the traditional tool of ethnographic research, and rely on the interviewer to identify and pursue an appropriate dialogue. Semi-structured interviews use an outline of the topics to be covered in the interview, but do not require these topics to be covered in any particular order or with any particular wording. Deviation from the pre-determined subject is acceptable and may also be helpful.

Another approach to this typology may be found by examining the required level of pre-existent knowledge on the part of the researcher. In an unstructured interview, the researcher does not need to know much about the subject in advance, although a high

degree of skill is necessary to identify areas of interest and to lead the interview in the direction of those areas of interest. The overall question might be "What is going on here?" In a structured interview, the interviewer is simply following the interview guide and need have no knowledge of the subject, and in this case need have little skill in interviewing. However, in a semi-structured interview the researcher needs to have a reasonable, though not complete, knowledge of the subject in order to identify and pursue areas which might be significant.

For the purposes of this research it was therefore reasonable to use an unstructured interview in the pilot study. This was used to find the outlines of the topic of soulriding in order to establish the basic premises for the main data collection. In the latter, a semi-structured interview gave a more concise interview and a clearer and smaller body of data than unstructured interviews would have done.

A significant theorist of interview methodology, Kvale, notes that "the qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge" (1996, p42). Thus interviews are themselves a constructionist activity. An awareness therefore needs to be maintained of how the knowledge is being generated within the interview process, and particularly whether this is coming from the interviewer or the interviewee. Kvale also identifies that an interview involves a power relationship (1996, p126). The interviewer exercises a degree of control over the interviewee, and this may be significant in determining the content of the interview. The interviewee may well adjust what they say in response to the interviewer. Many factors reflect the power relationship, and may encourage or discourage particular strands of conversation. These issues require that the process of both data collection and analysis need to be done with a self-critical awareness.

5.4 Analytical approach

Superficially, analysis is the province of a particular phase of the research and certain chapters of the final report. However, if analysis is the process of "transforming data into findings" (Patton, 2002, p495), then analysis is a part of each stage of the research process. In the pilot phase an outline question is given shape which results from data suggesting possible interpretations. During data gathering patterns emerge which will be tested by further data gathering. During the initial writing up of the data there will be an editing which gives primacy to data that fits with and that challenges an analytical model. The process of coding to textual data from computer analysis is an analytical process. Finally, even when the part of the process which is formally called analysis is complete, the researcher embarks on the redrafting of the research, during which new analytical understandings emerge. So analysis is woven into every stage of the process of research. The process of research is a sequence of analytical iterations, each iteration working with particular analytical models through one or two stages of the research process.

It is over simplistic to suggest that, as Patton does, that there is such a thing as "raw data" (2002, p441). For a constructionist there can be no such thing as raw data. Every data set reflects a perspective of some kind. This suggests two possibilities, either one attempts to get as close as possible to the 'raw data' by providing as much detail as possible from the data collection, or one accepts and is clear about the means by which, and degree to which, one has edited the data. Even the process of transcription is an analytic process. Patton notes that "doing your own transcriptions... provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates some emergent insights" (2002, p441).

Patton (2002, p483) describes phenomenological analysis as seeking to "grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure and essence of lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people." He suggests two significant elements to this process, *epoche*, and *bracketing*. Epoche is the suspension of judgement about the phenomena being investigated throughout the process. Bracketing is the process of identifying and interpreting key elements of the data and then finding the essences of these features. Kvale (1996, p193) describes a similar process to bracketing, which he calls condensation.

During the formal analysis of the data for this research, two types of condensation were used on the data, thematic condensation and narrative condensation. Thematic condensation was used across the dataset, looking for common themes, and aiming to bring out both the commonalities and the differences in how the theme was understood by the various interviewees. The narrative condensation treated each interview as a whole and attempted to highlight the particular features of that interview. These narrative condensations were able to be fed back to some of the interviewees to establish that they felt them to be an accurate summary of their perspectives. This introduced an additional level of iteration to the analysis process, and created an additional level of validity. The practical aspects of the analysis will be dealt with in section 5.9 below.

5.5 Pilot study

This section will explain the processes that made up the pilot phase of the research. The pilot study was undertaken with two purposes in mind. Firstly it was an explicit attempt to ensure the basic premise of the research was valid, that there is the existence of some understanding of spirituality within snowboarding. Secondly the pilot study was an

opportunity to hone a variety of skills and technical issues in order to ensure that the main interviews ran as smoothly as possible. Information gathered during the pilot study was used to refine the ten elements of snowboarding (see section 4.2) which formed the main structure for the interviews. The development process for these ten elements was inevitably creative and iterative, and it has been difficult to accurately ascribe particular conceptual stages to a chronological order, as will be discussed below. In particular, discussions with supervisors and others who had input to the initial phases of the research happened in an *ad hoc* manner.

The pilot study used a wide range of snowboard media, both traditional and new media, as cultural sources. These media have been identified and described in section 1.2, and the content relevant to spirituality has been described in section 1.3. It is pertinent here to give some description of the selection process for media. Snowboard media is voluminous but segmented in web sites, social media, magazines and videos, as suggested in section 1.2, and limited in books. This meant that it was necessary to select certain media which focussed on freeride snowboarding rather than those which focussed on freestyle snowboarding. I read any books on snowboarding which I could obtain. Internet search engines made it possible to check widely on snowboard lists and web sites for references to spirituality and soulriding, but the volume of traffic on the various snowboard lists meant that it was necessary to focus solely on the few UK-based forums for less obvious references to spirituality.

For the pilot interviews I identified three individuals: one was the editor of a UK snowboard magazine, one was a high-level snowboard instructor from Austria, and another was a writer with a strong interest in snowboard imagery. I identified these three in different ways. I chose the magazine editor as someone who would have the

widest understanding of the UK snowboard industry and culture. I made the contact by writing to the editor to ask for an interview. The snowboard instructor was a personal contact who had a long history of involvement in snowboarding. The writer was another personal contact, a non-snowboarder, who thus straddled the line between insider and outsider. Unstructured interviews with the three individuals was intended to provide the opportunity for a discussion of the possibilities and issues within the research, but without imposing my agenda on the conversation.

It should be noted that these interviews were not single and simple. Face-to face interviews with each of these subjects were supplemented with phone calls and emails and informal conversations. The face-to-face interviews enabled me to develop my skills of interviewing in this subject area. The interviews themselves were opportunities to develop technical issues around taping interviews. It was good from this perspective to have the back-up of pen and paper to record significant insights. The interviews were also unstructured in a temporal sense. The formal part of the interview was part of an ongoing dialogue around the topic of 'soulriding'. Progress resulted from the interactions between the various dialogues and also reflection in the academic setting. Thus the interviews were an ongoing part of the process in which the goals and methodology of the study was refined.

The three interviews gave varying degrees of information. The writer gave a valuable but limited perspective, drawing on a knowledge of snowboarding which was that of an outside observer, and combining it with his involvement in 'alternative Christian worship'. The magazine editor had a lot to say about the contrast between 'soulriders' and 'techriders', and was able to give his impression of what made up a soulrider. The snowboard instructor talked much more from personal experience, explaining what was

important for him in his riding.

The magazine editor was keen to distinguish between the soulrider and the techrider and clearly favoured the former. For him techriders were somewhat shallow, and were riding for less valid reasons. In this category he would include those who spent most of their time doing tricks in the snowboard park, trying to show off to, and keep up with, their friends. The 'soul' element was about being in the mountains and riding powder, which he described as the "holy grail" of snowboarding. He quoted one of his friends who said that "Some go to the mountains to snowboard, some snowboard to go to the mountains". The implication is that techriders are interested in the mechanics of snowboarding, and the mountains are simply the location for the activity. In contrast soulriders are particularly interested in the mountain environment in which their sport takes place. He acknowledged that freeriding, which includes soulriding, was "an older guys way of progressing", and also that soulriders could be dismissive of freestylers. However, these were in contrast to the general attitude he expected from soulriders, that of a relaxed but focussed approach to riding. He also contrasted the soulrider who would ride with "a buddy", whom he trusted to help in times of trouble, with the freestylers who would ride with "mates", in a group with less mutual commitment. In doing this he identified the significance of risk in snowboarding.

The snowboard instructor commented that "We treated it like a religion". This appeared to signify his commitment to snowboarding and the high level of significance it had for him. There was obviously a strong connection between his snowboarding and his adolescence, as he grew up in the mountains near Innsbruck. He was part of a group of friends who had formed a club based around snowboarding, and the club had lasted up to the present day, and formed the basis for many of his best friendships. He said that

the sense of community was one of the most important features of snowboarding for him. This was connected with a wide social acceptance within snowboarding, and with an emphasis on trying and learning rather than being able to sit on your laurels as the best snowboarder. The feelings that he experienced when riding were also very important for this snowboarder. At times when he was able to be completely 'in the moment', with none of his other worries and concerns intruding, and in a consciousness that was fixed solely on the riding he was doing. When riding, he said. "You don't have to think". Another very significant feature was the presence of nature, and the awareness of both the unchanging majesty of the mountains, and the constant changes of the environment. He saw nature as very spiritual. He felt that religion was about looking for something, an inner thing, a freedom, which could be found in snowboarding.

The writer felt that snowboard culture made frequent references to the divine, but that "vocabulary is beside the point". There was for him a strong sense of relationship with God for snowboarders, but this was unexpressed and inexpressible, and it was a "bad idea to name it". This was because naming the inexpressible would detract from it in some way. The writer identified the strong presence of nature in the images in snowboard magazines, where the mountain scenery often dwarfs the snowboarder. He also identified the high percentage of members of his group of Christians who had been either snowboarders or skateboarders, and to suggest that there was a link between them. For the writer then, snowboarding was a sport which activated a sense of the spiritual. Some snowboarders would then pursue this activated sense.

The pilot study confirmed that soulriding was extant as a spiritual phenomena of within the culture of snowboarding, but that it was a very small part of the overt culture. The

three interviews gave three very different perspectives on the subject, from the magazine editor who saw the whole of snowboard culture as essentially divisible into soulriders and techriders, through the instructor who talked about a very personal and deep rooted set of experiences and understandings, to the writer, who suggested snowboarding activated the spiritual in some people.

The pilot study was also significant in defining and confirming the ten elements of snowboarding which formed a major part of the structure for the main interviews. The ongoing discussions with the three pilot interviewees enabled the elements to be clarified, and for some of the initial suggestions to be sub-divided. Although there was some progression in the elements after the pilot study was finished, it was the pilot study which essentially defined the elements.

5.6 Sampling for the main study

The interviews for the main study were to come from two sources, enabling triangulation of the data collection. The main source was to be UK snowboarders. This was to be supplemented with Canadian snowboarders obtained during a 3 month visit to a Canadian ski resort. This created the possibility of a different cultural perspective. It was decided to obtain approximately thirty interviews in order to obtain a wide spread of perspectives, but not to have too many for qualitative analysis to be done appropriately. Approximately twenty of these should be UK based, and ten from Canada. These figures were intended to reflect a primarily UK based research, with sufficient informants from another English language culture to enable some cross cultural comparisons to be made. The actual numbers of interviewees were twenty-four UK interviews and nine Canadian interviews. The sampling approach taken for the UK interviewees was one of widespread advertising with self-selection. A number of outlets

were used to identify possible interviewees and anyone who responded to these advertisements, and who could reasonably be interviewed, was interviewed. Sources included adverts on web pages commonly accessed by UK snowboarders, UK email groups, snowboard magazines, contacts from interviewees, personal contacts, and snowboard shops. The advertisement used was as follows:

> **Help needed for snowboard research !**
> I am doing a PhD in Snowboarding and I need your help. My PhD is all about why people snowboard, and what they get out of it. The research will be based on interviews with experienced snowboarders. You could be making a significant contribution to the development of our sport, and you will be involved in one of the first PhD's in Snowboarding. If you would like to help please contact me at snowboard.research@uce.ac.uk

The Canadian interviewees were obtained by a variety of personal contacts in the town where I was working and in the nearby snowboard resort. My approach was to ask anyone whom I knew was a snowboarder to do an interview for the research.

The only explicit criteria for the interviews was that the prospective source should be an "experienced" snowboarder. Whilst this approach leaves in place a significant opportunity for self-selection by the interviewees, those who responded turned out to have a wide range of levels of experience, from those with a few weeks to those with many years. The level of experience is indicated within this research in the quotes used, and it provided an interesting insight into the data. The intention of the research was not to obtain a statistically representative sample, but to obtain a wide range of perspectives.

While the general approach was to accept whoever came, it was felt to be important to prioritise interviews with women and non-whites as these demographics are less well represented in the snowboarding population. In practice this meant that when there was

a choice of interviewing a white male or another person, the other person would be chosen, and that I would travel further to interview a non-white male. The most recent statistics from the USA (www.snowsports.org, 2008) show females as 26 % of the snowboarding population, as compared to 40% of the ski population. The latest British statistics are those of Mintel (2003, p43), which give women as 30% of those likely to snowboard. It is very notable on the anecdotal level of an informal survey of a ski slope that non-whites do not seem to participate in snow sports, with a few exceptions. I was able to include interviews with a representative percentage (25%) of women, but only one black man. A brief table of demography is shown below, and full details of the interviewees is in Appendix 2.

			Approx.	Age	
		20	25	30	35 and over
UK	Female	1	2	2	0
Interviewees	Male	2	5	13	4
Canadian	Female	1	1	0	1
Interviewees	Male	0	1	3	2

Table 2 - Demography of interviewees

The only UK statistics available on the demography of snowboarding are those of Mintel (2003, 2004), and both of these surveys bracket all above 15 as adults. US statistics (www.snowsports.org, 2008) give approximately 40% of snowboarders under 18, 40% between 18 and 25, and 20% over 25. The snowboarders I contacted were all over 18, were typically in their mid to late 20s and 30s. They were generally, although not all, experienced snowboarders with a degree of commitment to riding. Which is to say that snowboarding was demonstrably a significant occupation for them, one in

which they had invested considerable time and money. Typically, by the time someone has built up four years experience, they will have paid around £800 for their own equipment and they will have spent £2000 on holidays. There is likely to be an ongoing cost of around £600-700 per year. This is not to say that snowboarding is exclusively for the more wealthy. Many of those I interviewed had made considerable lifestyle and financial sacrifices in order to participate. However, their commitment to the sport needs to be high in order to make such investment, and conversely the sport might reasonably be expected to be returning their investment in it.

Thus the individuals who responded to my various requests and advertisements for interviewees were those for whom snowboarding was significant. The methodology implicitly precluded 'casual' or 'social' snowboarders by requiring that people were experienced and that they would contribute significant time to an interview on the subject.

5.7 The interviews

The method chosen for this study was initially unstructured interviews within a pilot study in order to establish the areas of knowledge and the extent of my pre-existent knowledge of the areas. This was to be followed by semi-structured interview with a some standardised element in order to make the most of the time available and to facilitate qualitative analysis with the chosen number of respondents.

The interview is 'set up' by information which the researcher provides as part of the negotiation which precedes the interview. In this case I established with potential interviewees that I am a snowboarder who is researching for a Ph.D. in snowboarding. This was intended to put interviewer and interviewee on an equal footing during the interview process (Hodkinson, 2005, p138). This I judged to be advantageous in

eliciting the personal information about people's experiences which is at the core of the necessary data. Revealing that the research was for a Ph.D. was also something I hoped would give the interviewees some sense of significance and of self-value in their contribution toward the research.

I conducted the research interviews at venues suggested by the interviewees, so that they would be in surroundings they controlled. This was intended to put them at ease, as well as to make it possible for the interviews to take place at all. Some of the venues were public spaces such as cafés, parks, or ski hills; some were work environments; and some were the interviewee's homes. I also asked the interviewees if they would be happy for me to tape the interviews. I told them that the interview would take ¾ hour to an hour. These were very rough estimates as shorter interviews could take only 20 minutes, whereas longer ones could take over 1 ½ hours. I was careful to respect agreed boundaries on the interviewee's time, particularly when the interview was taking place in a work situation.

The one area I did not make people aware of before the interview was the area of spirituality. When asked, I told people that I was researching "What people get out of snowboarding". I chose to do this because I felt that an exact explanation might dissuade some from taking part in the interviews. They might feel that they had nothing to contribute, particularly in the light of the confused discourse about spirituality noted above. It was notable that on occasions I would ask a question about spirituality only for the respondent to answer "sorry, no", possibly implying they wished that they did have something to contribute, and that not to do so was somehow a failure on their part.

The interview was intended to enable each interviewee to reveal some personal feelings about their snowboarding and to access memories and experiences which might seem

quite alien to the context in which the interview was taking place. In order to do this the interview was structured in such a way that the interviewee might become increasingly mentally located in a snowboarding environment, and also that they might become more used to sharing personal information, particularly feelings. I also aimed to establish a rapport with the interviewees based on a common appreciation of snowboarding, so that they might trust me with these personal experiences. I would always start the interviews with some off the record discussion which established what I was doing. This would extend to talking about how long the interviewee had been snowboarding, and other general discussion of a mildly personal nature.

When I had covered the above material, and established that the interviewee was happy to be taped, I would start the more formal part of the interview by asking the interviewee their full name, and asking them to spell any difficult parts of that name. Although I was not intending to use the name in the data, this provided a start mark for the interview, it established that I was writing things down, and it got the interviewees name, a most significant piece of personal data, written down. It assures the interviewee that the researcher is taking them seriously, and that their details will be treated with respect. In other words this is a reminder of a contract between the interviewer and interviewee.

I went on to ask three questions about the interviewees snowboarding experience and how it has affected their life. There were intended to mentally locate the interviewees in their snowboarding experience. Sometimes these would evoke answers which were significant. These questions also provided concrete subjects for reflection, as opposed to the more abstract subjects which were to follow. Thus the questions are bridging the interview into concepts which may be less familiar to the interviewee. I would note any

significant answers and return to them later if they did not re-emerge naturally in the course of the recorded part of the interview. The questions are detailed in the full interview schedule in Appendix 1.

I followed this by asking whether snowboarding had any spiritual dimension for the interviewee. Within the question is a deliberately open definition of spiritual, which was only challenged on a couple of occasions. When I was asked what I meant by spiritual, I repeated "Whatever it means for you". This was always sufficient to elicit an answer, even if the answer was negative.

I asked the interviewees to tell me for each of the 10 elements whether it was or was significant for them, and if so how. I would explain that I wanted the interviewees to continue to illustrate their answer with examples if there was some connection either positive or negative.

I ended by first asking whether the term soulriding meant anything to the interviewee, and then asking about their religious background in order to elicit any relevant background information.

5.8 Terminology and incommunicability in interviews

One particular issue identified during the interview process was how to use terms which would evoke appropriate responses, but which would not compromise the validity of the interviews by confusing the subject areas. Of course this is significantly less of an issue for a semi-structured interview than for a structured interview. However, some blurring of terminology was necessitated within the interviews.

One example of blurring is the refusal of the interviewer to define 'spirituality' for the interviewees, as referred to above. This understanding of spirituality is the central

theme of this research. Because the individual respondent's particular understanding of spirituality was never made explicit, it was the implicit understandings of all of the respondents which collectively became the subject of the research. Similar ranges of understanding could be clearly seen around, for example, the terms 'lifestyle' or 'soulriding'. These will be explored in the various relevant sections below.

Another type of blurring is when terms were combined with other terms. This occurred when interviewees were unsure of the significance or relevance of a term being used. The term 'flow' in the interviews was often connected with the term 'rhythm'. Similar issues existed with escape and freedom. Again, these issues are explored individually in the relevant section. However, it is again significant that this is qualitative rather than quantitative research. The individual responses disclose the understanding the interviewee holds of the term being used, in contrast to the undifferentiated understandings from a quantitative method.

The incommunicability of the experience was an issue at a number of levels. A number of times snowboarders expressed that the experience or aspect of snowboarding they were describing was simply one which had to be experienced, that words were not adequate for the task of describing it. The sense that a spiritual experience is incommunicable is a common one. Maslow says "the most fundamental or transcendent experience" is one which "can hardly be shared" (1970, p27), and James identifies ineffability as the first of four marks of mysticism (1902/2002, p414). Sometimes the respondents did not have a particular vocabulary for the concept they were trying to explain. This was sometimes resolved through a discussion with the interviewer. This relates to the aforementioned recognition that the interview is a construction site for reality, and that the experience was one which the snowboarder had not integrated into

their worldview, or was restructuring their worldview through the interview process. This also was an incommunicability which the interview process was addressing by enabling the interviewee to construct, and perhaps to name, their reality.

5.9 Ethics

As this research is based on straightforward interviews with consenting adults, many of the common issues of ethical research were avoided. Patton (2002, p408) lists 10 ethical issues which apply to qualitative interviews. Of these, issues of risk assessment and interviewer health did not apply as I was the only interviewer. No deceit was involved in the topic of the interview as the purpose of the interview was explained, and as the interviewee agreed to the process, informed consent was given. No advice was given as a part of the interview process. Both my training as a clergy person and the respect for individuals implicit in the constructionist methodology gave ethical frameworks and boundaries on data collection. However, two significant ethical issues were still present, the use of the interview data, and the contractual balance between interviewer and interviewee.

5.9.1 The use of interview data

In the process of organising for the interview to take place a number of ethical issues may be said to have been negotiated (Denscombe, 1998, p109). There is informed consent, the interviewee's words are 'on the record' and as such may be quoted and taken seriously, and the interviewer is given some control of the interview process. However, the interviewee is not given any control about how their words will be used or who 'owns' the data generated.

In my discussions with potential interviewees I identified myself as a researcher, intending to use the interviews as part of research towards a Ph.D. This was a sufficient

level of disclosure for the interviewees. None of my interviewees made any comment about how the interviews were to be used, nor about the confidentiality of the content of the interview. However, I felt that it was appropriate that individual identities should be protected, and there was no reason not to do this. Therefore I have anonymised the data by referring to the interviewees only by initials, and not including the actual names of the interviewees in the research. I have also included the gender, approximate age, and approximate experience level of the snowboarders, none of which would identify the snowboarders. This anonymisation of the data also removed an issue of ownership of data. As the individuals are not being represented as holding certain opinions within the context of the report, there is no ethical or legal responsibility to the originators of the opinions for the content of the report. However, it is still a matter of integrity to act ethically with the data, particularly by representing the opinions of the interviewees accurately. This integrity was checked by sending the narrative condensations back to a representative 20% of the interviewees.

5.9.2 The contractual balance between interviewer and interviewee

One of the underdeveloped issues in interview methodology is the power relationship between researcher and respondent. In a research relationship, the researcher is frequently gaining cultural capital, professional status, and often financial reward from the research. The interviewee makes no gain, and often there will be a cost in time or expense to them in being involved in the interview. In my interviews I frequently conducted the interview at someone's place of work, and I was aware that they were taking time out to do the interview which they would have to make up later, or they were taking time from their lunch or in their spare time. Academic interviews rely on the goodwill of the interviewees, and generally no reward is offered for participation. However, the participant in an academic interview is often left with the impression that

they have contributed to the "common good" (Patton, 2002, p413).

A constructivist approach to interviews alters this perception significantly. The interview is not a one-way process of data collection. Rather, the researcher is engaged *with* the interviewee in constructing a new reality. In doing this, the researcher is potentially giving something to the interviewee, as well as gaining something themselves. Patton claims that qualitative interviewing "leaves people knowing things about themselves that they didn't know before the interview" (p405). This is a much more positive understanding and one which was confirmed in the course of this research. A number of interviewees for this research said that they had learnt something from doing the interview.

5.10 Data Analysis

Theoretical issues concerned with the interview analysis have been dealt with above (section 3.4) This section will deal with some practical issues within the interview analysis.

The first phase of the data analysis was spending some time familiarising myself with the data that I had collected. This familiarisation mainly came in the form of first listening to and then transcribing the interviews. The interviews were then coded as will be described later. Once all the interviews had been transcribed they were treated in three different ways: quantitatively, thematically and narratively.

The quantitative analysis condensed each interview to a set of yes/no answers to the questions on the 10 elements, and those on soulriding and spirituality. These were then entered into a database which was used to identify simple patterns in the data. This was particularly useful because the complexity of the data hid patterns within the data. The

condensation was not always straightforward because the answers to the questions were not simply positive or negative. Sometimes the response was that the interviewee didn't know, and sometimes both positive and negative elements were present in the response. It proved to be useful to return to the interviews once the patterns in the data had been identified, to examine whether particular interviewee's responses had been correctly identified. On a number of occasions the first impression yes/no proved to be an inaccurate reflection of the whole of the interviewee's response. This iteration was not always undertaken to simplify the data set, but sometimes when a response just didn't seem to 'fit' with the rest of the interviewee's responses, or with the rest of the responses in a particular section of the data set. The database was also useful in that it enabled particular individual interviews to be identified as significant for the research. These might be interviews which were typical or atypical. The interview could then be examined in closer detail and in the light of the wider perspectives from the database.

The thematic analysis used the individual answers to various questions within the interview as well as unsolicited responses. Each interview was coded using the MAXQDA program. This enabled responses on a particular topic to be viewed together, but maintained the individual identity of the respondent. Nuances of the individual interviews were not subsumed into an anonymous mush of data, but were preserved in context. Particular interviews could then be viewed as a whole to ensure that any conclusions from the fragment were valid in the whole interview. This was particularly significant in regard to the responses around less well defined or understood terms. As in the qualitative approach it was often necessary to return to the transcript in order to establish exactly what the interviewee meant in their answer.

Narrative analysis is suggested by Kvale (1996, p184) as a contrast to the thematic

analysis which fragments the transcript of the interview. The thematic analysis creates fragments of the interview which fit with the themes within the interview data set generated by the researcher. These themes can be useful for examining concepts across a range of interviewees, but they lose the nuances and emphases of the individual interviewee's understanding. A consideration of the approach of the whole interview to a particular topic enables those nuances and emphases to emerge without requiring the whole interview to be quoted in the text. Two steps were taken as part of this process. Firstly, the interview transcripts were condensed (1996, p193). This process involved careful consideration of the transcript and the attempt to bring out the essences of topic within the interview. The second step was to contact a sample of my interviewees with the interview condensations, and to ask for their comments. Kvale suggests this as part of the interview process (1996, p189), I extended his suggestion to a written process of feedback. This process is further considered below.

The narrative condensation approach was used in examining the key topic, whether snowboarding was 'spiritual'. This topic was at the root of all of the substantive questions within the interview, in contrast to the questions about the individual elements, which generally formed more discrete sections. Attempting a condensation of the interview to its most significant points was effectually an answer to "why does this person believe snowboarding is, or is not, spiritual?"

In all these processes the two sources of interviews (UK and Canadian) were kept separate in order that wider difference between the two might be identified and that any generalisations might identified as belonging either to the whole data set or to a specific sub-group.

5.10.1 Ensuring integrity in the transcription and analysis of data

A major issue in method and methodology is the incorporation of processes which will eliminate bias as far as possible, and which will make any remaining bias as transparent as possible. This bias may clearly be inserted particularly at two stages of the research process, that of transcription and of analysis. In order to establish that the interviewees were content with how I was representing them, and to provide an opportunity for them to add any information they felt appropriate, I contacted a number of the interviewees with the summaries of their interviews which were to be used for the narrative analysis. The interviewees were invited to comment on the validity of the summary, and to make any additional comments they wished to.

A further issue in the use of interview data in this thesis was to ensure that the interviewee's context was visible. To achieve this, each significant quote from any interviewee includes the nationality, gender, approximate age and approximate level of snowboarding experience of the interviewee. The first category is to ensure there is no confusion about which data set the interviewee belonged to. The last category is included because the experience of the interviewee was found to be significant in some particular ways. The experience categories used are intermediate, advanced, expert, and professional. Intermediate snowboarders had done at least one week of snowboarding but were not yet competent. Advanced snowboarders had completed a number of weeks snowboarding but indicated that they still found themselves in situations where their technical skills were challenged. Expert snowboarders had generally completed a season snowboarding or an equivalent number of weeks, and felt themselves competent to handle any snowboarding situation. Professional snowboarders were those who were both expert snowboarders and employed on the basis of their expertise within the snowboarding industry. This meant that not all snowboard instructors were classified as

professionals, as not all the instructors were expert level snowboarders, nor were snowboarders who worked in snowboard shops necessarily classed as professionals.

5.11 My position as snowboarder, priest and insider researcher

My interest in this research results from its intersection with two significant fragments of my identity, that of a religious professional and that of a snowboarder. In order to enable a perspective on the conclusions I will be drawing from my research, I will explain what each fragment contributes to my motivation.

As a religious professional this topic is of more than personal or academic interest. The processes collectively known as secularisation have implications for my employability, my financial security, and my identity. The topic of 'soulriding' sits right at the juncture between the sport of snowboarding and the issues of spirituality and religion. Thus understanding of the nature of contemporary spirituality may give insights into the medium term outcomes of secularisation in terms of the viability of the church in its current forms. One positive potential outcome would have been in finding that soulriding offers a way for the church to connect with snowboarders.

Snowboarding is both a source of identity and a resource for me. I have been snowboarding for around 15 years. I moved to British Columbia in 2005, primarily so that I could snowboard. This knowledge of snowboarding was invaluable in building a connection with the snowboarders I interviewed (as detailed in Appendix 1). It meant I shared a common language and culture with the interviewees. Within my geographical community my research offers significant cultural capital. It also enables me to offer something back to the sport in terms of a re-framing of the nature of snowboarding as a form of spirituality.

As Hodkinson identifies, the dual identity of "insider researcher" (2005, p146) is a familiar one, particularly within ethnography of youth cultures, which might be said to include snowboarding. His notion of "initial proximity" (2005, p134) is relevant to my research position as I started from a location as insider within the culture I am studying, and moved to becoming a researcher as well. Hodknison notes the value of the knowledge and "cultural competence" in understanding and communicating with others. He says of insider researchers that "They have a significant extra pool of material with which to compare and contrast what they hear and see during the research process" (2005, p143) Hodkinson believes this approach places researchers in "a strong position both to empathise and to scrutinise" (2005, p144). He suggests caution around developing a reflexivity within the research, and also assuming that such research can give "privileged access to a singular insider truth" (2005, p142). Nevertheless, the position offers "Significant potential benefits" (2005, p146) The investigation of other people's understanding of the nature of soulriding has also been an investigation of my own passion for this sport. The academic challenge within this research has been not to project my own perspectives into other people's interviews, but to let their individual and collective perspectives come out.

5.12 Summary of the theory and methodology of the thesis

This chapter has given a detailed explanation of the methodology and method of the research. It has explained the pilot process through which the ten elements of snowboarding were selected. It has considered a variety of issues within interviews and interview analysis, both those in interview literature and those which emerged from the interviews conducted for this research. Finally it has located the researcher as a means of ensuring transparency of bias within the interpretation and analysis of the interviews.

This moves the thesis from the theoretical portion to the validation of the theory.

So far the thesis has proceeded as follows:

The research is addressing what is spiritual about soulriding (a form of snowboarding). To address this means firstly having some sense of what spirituality means

Chapters 2 and 3 identified the following:

- Spirituality is significant but confused discourse in academia and esp in the sociology of religion

- Experience and identity are recognised dimensions of spirituality

- Context has been overlooked in sociology of religion but is determinative in experience

- Context is itself framed in culture

- Thus spirituality has three dimensions - context, experience, identity

- Each dimension is culturally framed in our perception.

Chpater 4 and 5 began to apply this theory in the context of snowboarding:

- The test case is "soulriding" - a potential form of spirituality within snowboarding.

- Identify elements of snowboarding within each of the three dimensions which may be understood as spiritual. This happened through pilot study and is supported by theorists.

- The main research consisted of interviews snowboarders which were intended to elicit a range of responses to the elements

The thesis will now move to analysis of the interview data itself to establish whether the

data validates the model. The data analysis is divided into four chapters. The first three

deal with the three dimensions of spirituality, context (chapter 6), experience (chapter

7), and identity (chapter 8). Chapter 9 deals with spirituality and soulriding themselves,

and thus with the understanding of frame as a model of spirituality.

Chapter 6 - The Context elements - Nature, Freedom and Escape, Risk, and Play

This chapter is concerned with analysing the interviewees' responses to the context elements. These are analysed before the experience and identity elements for two reasons; they are the most straightforward of the three sets of elements in which to see framing occur, and they are key elements for the two original concepts of this thesis, spirituality as frame and context spirituality.

The context elements provide the background for the experiential elements, and the context into which the identity elements are projected. These elements are significant in the snowboarders' mental construction the environment of their riding. This chapter will examine the interviewees' perceptions of each of these elements, to attempt to understand not just whether it is significant, but how it is construed, and in particular whether this understanding of the context might in some way be 'spiritual'. The chapter builds on the theoretical perspectives considered in chapter 4.

The four context elements considered here were each affirmed as significant by very high proportion of the interviewees; by all of the Canadian interviewees, and twenty-two of the twenty-four UK interviewees. This included both those who found snowboarding to be spiritual and non-spiritual. The interviews suggested that these elements were not those which the snowboarders discovered when they came to ride (as in the case of the experience elements) or had discovered through riding (as in the identity elements), but they formed part of the context of their riding. These were things the snowboarders came to expect at the slopes.

6.1 Nature

Nature was a very important element for all but a few of the snowboarders. For most of them, snowboarding was an opportunity to engage with nature, to feel part of the landscape, or to be awed by the grandeur of the scenery. This sense of nature can be a great contrast with the snowboarders normal experience of life. CC (UK male, 35, expert) says "Yeah, I have a much greater appreciation of nature and the outdoors than I would ever have had living in London. It puts things into perspective much more."

The perceived purity and peace of the backcountry, away from the main slopes, is a significant factor for some snowboarders. NJ (UK male, 35, expert) comments:

> I love being up in the mountain environment. It's a very pure, natural place. It's good. When you get to the mountain it's gravity, and it's you, and it's a big pristine virgin environment. I can see why people get spiritual about it in a way. It's just the sense that it's creation at its purest. White snow. And we're not leaving much. I love physical environment, reading the landscape, going backcountry, avalanches.

Here NJ makes the connection between nature and purity a number of times. The clear suggestion is that this is particularly a contrast with places of human activity. The 'natural' mountain environment is contrasted with the artificial environment which dominates the planet, and particularly with the urban environment. NJ's implication is that humanity has despoiled the environment by shaping it to human use.

For others there is a sheer beauty about mountains which is stimulating. SC (Canadian female, 20, expert) says:

> It's just so beautiful. I think about it all the time. Every day when it's clear I

look around, I can't stop thinking about it. Just unbelievable, I'm stoked on it every day, still after two months. Still stoked on the mountains and how big they are and just the expanse. You think of the power of the earth to create these huge things. I hope I never stop getting excited about that.

This highlights two constructs, that of beauty, and of the "power of the earth". Each of these is part of a societal discourse, the beauty of nature, and the understanding of the earth and our relationship to it. Both NJ and CS are demonstrating an emotional engagement with those constructs and positioning themselves within the discourses.

Mountains are emotionally powerful places, naturally hostile to human habitation, with the rugged landscape and the danger of avalanche. PH (UK male, 30, expert) states:

Mountain sports are about being in the mountains and being aware of their immense power and potential for destruction. And also their immense power for uplifting your soul, and their potential for play in that very innocent way. It's all in this arena of awesome natural power. For me it's a privilege position to enter nature and play in nature, but giving ultimate respect to your surroundings because they can kill you.

These factors combine to make some snowboarders feel small in the face of nature. CU (UK male, 35, expert) says " Being in the mountains and being surrounded by nature. it kind of takes the emphasis off of us. We're not that important down here, we are not the be-all and end-all."

For many of the snowboarders interviewed there was a sense of 'going back to nature', especially when going into the backcountry. This is to a great extent a comfortable illusion, as the snowboarders access the backcountry using modern equipment, and

depend on cell phones as backup if things go wrong. They will probably not be camping out overnight but staying in a warm hotel or hostel on the mountain. As some snowboarders recognise, the mountains as most snowboarders experience them are a physical and social creation of man. To see it as a "pure, natural, pristine environment" is to miss a significant part of what is in front of one's eyes.

However, a few snowboarders made the point that snowboarding, and the associated access and resorts, actually destroys the environment. TW (UK male, 20, professional) said "It's a bit of a grey area. They've built all these resorts in the heart of the national forest, so I guess I am adding to the whole system of it." One snowboarder, RS (Canadian male, 25, expert), valued the opportunity to outwit nature, and to shape it to his own ends.

> I love being able to go where I want to go. I've gone through steps to educate myself so that I can go where I want to in the backcountry. I feel that I can do that with a relative element of safety, and go out and challenge the environment. And when I do that it almost feels like I'm conquering the environment, I'm outwitting it. I've made these decisions based on experience and personal knowledge. I like ski hills. I like being in places where there's snow. When I look at a mountain I think how can we develop this mountain just to make it that much more fun.

These are very different locations in the nature discourse. TW exemplifies those who do not frame ski resorts as natural environments, but as artificial environments. TW expresses regret about the process, RS welcomes the opportunity to "develop the mountain" and "conquer the environment"

It was interesting to note that all of the Canadian snowboarders affirmed the nature context as an important part of their riding. This is significant because these are people who live in the mountains year-round, and so the nature frame might not be expected to be so much a part of their framework. AC (Canadian male, 35, professional) gives a particular insight into this.

> It's so in your face that you can't help but notice it. I think we tune it out. When you go out there on your own time you're always looking for things, noticing things. I take runs because of the view.

AC is acknowledging that it is possible to become inured to the natural context, generally he believes we "tune it out". But that the frame is waiting to be applied when mental space allows, and then it is an attractive frame to employ.

6.1.1 Nature and spirituality

A connection between nature and spirituality was made in a number of different ways by various interviewees. At the most general level RW (UK male, 25, advanced) reported "Sitting on top of a mountain. You're awed. You turn into a bit of a hippy. When you're surrounded by such a large amount of natural beauty it's difficult not to think that there must be more to life." Here is a connection between "natural beauty" and "something more to life", where "more to life" is being used as a colloquial expression for the non-material and the spiritual, given the other statements of the quote. Another circumlocution is used in RW saying "it's difficult not to think". What he means is that on the mountain top he gains some kind of spiritual awareness. However, he is uneasy with revealing this. He uses the second person to refer to himself. He trivialises the perspective as the feelings of "a bit of a hippy". But he wants to report the effect of the mountain scape upon him.

PH (UK male, 30, expert) objectifies his sense of the connection between the mountain environment. He states "Mountain sports are about being in the mountains and being aware of their immense power and potential for destruction. And also their immense power for uplifting your soul." For PH mountains have powers and the spiritual effect of the mountains is one of those powers, thus connected with their other powers. Taken literally, this is connected with the sense of awe which RW reported.

The contrast between the products of human activity and the pristine environment is noted above. For some of the interviewees this was itself a prompter to spirituality. As I quoted in the previous section NJ (UK male, 35, expert) comments "I love being up in the mountain environment.... I can see why people get spiritual about it in a way. It's just the sense that it's creation at its purest." It is worthwhile noting NJ's use of the term creation. As NJ is an evangelical Christian this may reflect a theological position vis a vis humanity as well as a wider societal position.

Beauty, awe and purity were the main explicit features connecting nature and spirituality. However one correspondent identified a feature which was present but unnoticed in the other interviews. ML (UK female, 30, expert) says:

> I'm not a spiritual person, and riding makes me feel spiritual. It's a spiritual thing, *but it's not about God*. It's about the environment, the geography, the weather. *I become more aware of myself.* It makes me feel alive. The danger, the avalanches, the storms, how dangerous and so beautiful.

The concept of God is missing from most of the reports of spirituality in the context elements. Instead of a connection to some divine figure, the spirituality comes from placing one's self in this natural context.

It would appear from the above that our culture has imbued natural environments with a power to re-frame our conciousness. I would suggest that this is part of a particular construction of name which I term the "Nature frame".

6.1.2 The nature frame

The way in which many of the interviewees described the environment, including particular terminology, suggested that they viewed it in the same way and with the same values. This was centred on the 'pristine' view of the environment which seems to be a compelling and attractive perception. Snowboarders want to see the mountains as an alternative *type* of environment, a natural type, a wilderness. There were frequent descriptions of a "pure" environment. The beauty which snowboarders appreciate may be beautiful because of the contrast which has been noted between the mountains and the city, and thus because of the rarity of this environment. It may be the rawness of the mountain which gives the sense of 'power' the snowboarders noted. Mountains may have become largely controlled by humanity, but this control is far from complete and the human hold is often fragile.

I would suggest that this 'nature frame' is also a derivation of a particular discourse within society. This is a discourse in which positive value judgements are attached to something that is 'natural', and by implication negative judgements to things which are 'artificial'. The natural is seen as being valuable in its own right. It connects to a concern to preserve our environment, and a recognition that humanity is now suffering from our current and previous usage of the 'natural' environment. The 'nature frame' is promoted through the 'green' and environmental discourses. The nature frame is also one in which spirituality is promoted. Mountains, as well as the countryside. are often framed as the context for spiritual experience. This echoes James's findings on nature's

"particular power of awakening such mystical moods" (1901/2002, p429).

I am not suggesting that the 'nature frame' has a clear and unambiguous form, but that direct and indirect discourse within society promotes this frame on a regular basis. The nature frame interacts with other frames, as will be shown in this chapter. For many, an 'escape' frame includes engaging at some level with nature, whether this is through a recreational activity or simply lying on a beach. The contrast implicit in the nature frame also suggests a different set of risks are being encountered, and that the activity taking place in the natural environment is play and not work. As has been identified above, this is a frame which somewhat loses its compulsion for those who live in rural rather than urban areas. Thus the nature frame is particularly highlighted as a contrast to the everyday environment of the urban majority. Nature is an 'other' place for these people, a place in which they do not live, but which they have an attachment to. The nature frame is still significant for those who live in rural areas, but they need to consciously employ it.

6.2 Freedom and Escape

This single element is intended to relate to the twinned ideas of snowboarding being an expression of freedom and the mountains being a place of escape or retreat. Within the interviews these two themes were considered together, because the interviewees would generally talk about them together, as two aspects of the same term. Here, separate sections will consider the two elements.

6.2.1 Freedom

The strongly physical sensations of freedom when riding were echoed in the mental sense of freedom. The snowboarders felt that they were able to go anywhere and almost do anything. Of course this is far from the truth. The snowboarder is limited by the

need to obey gravity and descend. Taking one's snowboard off and walking, as snowboarders will often do to access particular areas, quickly reveals how hard it is to walk on soft snow. The limits of the ski area, and of the topology of the mountain are also significant. The sense of freedom is not absolute but relative. The urban environment is a one of constraints. There are roads or walkways which have to be used in particular ways. The majority of the urban environment is a prohibited area because it 'belongs' to someone, and is often fenced or walled off. In nature and particularly in the mountains, the snowboarder is free to go anywhere they can go. This is therefore a place of freedom, of opportunity.

Another facet of the personal freedom, paradoxically, is the personal responsibility which accompanies it. Snowboarders have to make decisions which may be momentous, in Goffman's terminology "fateful decisions" (1967, p164), and they have freedom to make these without societal interference. It is possible that nobody will come after them if they decide to cross the ski area boundary into the unpatrolled backcountry areas. This is another contrast with lack of freedom in the urban environment, where one is protected not only from other people but also from oneself. A large number of rules govern our movements, even though we have internalised them to such an extent that we hardly notice.

In view of the repeated contrast made here between the mountain and the urban environment, it would not be surprising if those from the Canadian interview set experienced a lesser degree of freedom because this freedom is a much greater part of the Canadian lifestyle and culture. However, this was not the case. The Canadian interviewees who responded very positively to ideas of freedom, as well as to those of escape.

The mental and physical freedoms experienced by the snowboarder may be framed as spiritual in that they are enabling the snowboarders to transcend the normal limitations of their lives. Thus snowboarding is facilitating an opportunity for identity development through defining oneself in the mountain context. The freedom experienced in the mountains is in contrast to the relative constraints in the urban environment.

Freedom was definitely a very significant element for many of the interviewees, as already indicated. Another snowboarder, TD (UK male, 35, intermediate), said "It is so far away from everything else I do. It *is* freedom". This aspect was re-emphasised by NJ (UK male, 35, expert) "For me the perfect sensation of freedom is certainly riding fresh powder in a beautiful scenery with some friends."

A number of significant elements of freedom emerged, incorporating physical and emotional responses to riding. The primary physical sensations involved are those of weightlessness and of speed. Riding in soft powder snow is a sensation which snowboarders describe as being "like flying" (PO, Canadian male, 40, expert). This is literally the case when a snowboarder jumps off a snow ramp or down a cliff. On a snowboard one seems able to go as fast as one desires, "The mountain is like a motorway with no speed limits."(IF, UK male, 30, expert) The speed can be a psychological release, "The feeling of speed gives a really great sensation of getting away from all that's around you."(SS, UK male, 30, advanced) Another snowboarder, LS (UK male, 25, expert), summarised these when he said "When it's going right, everything comes together, you feel you can do anything. A fantastic feeling of freedom from physical constraints".

There is an emotional responses which mainly centre on feeling free from external and

social constraints. MA (UK male, 25, advanced) says "One of the biggest things, you can do your own thing. You can escape from an ordered life." The freedom not to have to respond to other peoples demands is significant for some snowboarders "No-one can tell you what to do, there's no bosses" (IF, UK male, 30, expert) This puts the onus on the individual to decide where to go and what to do. TW (UK male, 20, professional) comments:

It's one of the main things about it. You're in total control, of where you go, how you get there. It's a total individual sport. Anyone can do it. Having the freedom to go anywhere, as slow or as fast as you want.

This freedom also brings a somewhat unaccustomed responsibility for one's own safety as PB (UK male, 20, expert) explains:

But also when you're on a mountain and you discover a little powder area and you look up and its beautiful, it's like your own space, your own area. You can roam about as much as you want. You're not so protected, it's about fending for yourself a bit.

Thus the physical context of snowboarding, and the contrast it provides, combined with the freedom of being outside the urban environment leads to a mental framing of the context as one where "you can do anything". There is a further freedom from those who normally control one's activities. Overall this is an empowering and liberating sense for the snowboarders, which some are prepared to describe in spiritual terms.

6.2.2 Escape

Snowboarders understand this activity as escaping in a number of complementary and

overlapping ways. Snowboarding appears to provide many aspects of escape in one activity. These include physical and mental escape from work, escape from other pressures of normal life, and escape from self. The theme of escape elicited the most positive response from the snowboarders. For some it was the single main reason that they were snowboarders "Escape is probably the best part of riding." (RH, UK male, 30, professional).

One major type of escape is escape from work. This was relevant to those who live in the cities and those who live in the mountains. The activity of snowboarding is one removed from the pressures of work, even for those for whom riding is a part of their work. "As soon as you get there you don't remember this, I don't remember my clients. What we're doing. It's just complete escapism." (CC UK male, 35, expert). Even when the snowboarders work is on the mountain, the riding is still an escape. SC (Canadian female, 20, expert) works in customer relations on a ski hill. "It's for sure an escape. When I'm tired of work I'm thinking I can't wait to get out on the hill. Even some days I try and get out on my own, and obviously that's an escape."

The mental escape which snowboarding can provide is also significant both for visitors and residents. The combination of the activity and the environment enable snowboarders to 'switch off' from their everyday concerns, and from the context of their 'normal' life. This escape appears to be hugely significant to some snowboarders, and snowboarding seems to have a unique ability to enable this for these snowboarders. In this sense, snowboarding is therapeutic for these snowboarders. It enables them to deal with the difficulties of their everyday lives by having an alternative reality. Snowboarders may be escaping from a particular physical environment "There's no grey walls, it's white or green or blue" (SS, UK male, 30, advanced). Snowboarders are

also escaping from their problems. "All the stuff you've got up in the air doesn't matter cos you've got something else to concentrate on" (MA, UK male 25, expert). This is echoed by RT (UK female, 25, advanced) "Because of the concentration if you're at the top of a red run and you're thinking about your shopping your not going to get down." The escape can even be from one's self as RH (UK male, 30, professional) says "It's that escape from you're normal being, your normal self." EH (UK female, 30, expert) puts it slightly differently "Oh yeah, definitely, completely – I can escape from the boundaries of my own being in a way, because I always thought I was a non- sporty person."

The ski slopes may become generic places of escape, an idealised 'type' of location. The escape need not just be about the riding itself. Some find the whole process of preparing to go away is itself an escape, LS (UK male, 25, advanced) claims "It's nice to have something to look forward to and to think about planning the next trip. In a way that's as much a part of it – talking about it, planning trips, anticipating it."

However, there are those who do not see snowboarding as an escape, but as part of their lives. AC (Canadian male, 35, professional) says "No. What I'm doing is ordinary life, it's my ordinary life. It doesn't feel at all like an escape. Freeriding is part of my job, part of my personal development. I've always been a very technical person." This reflects AM's acknowledged privilege as a head instructor in a snowboard school.

So escape comes in many different ways and the concept evoked a wide range of positive associations for the snowboarders. Part of the mental escape is the concentration needed to focus on the riding, but even this is not a necessary feature of riding. It would be possible for snowboarders to take their problems to the slopes to consider them. But this is not what they appear to do. Snowboarding is framed for them

as an activity in which the normal part of their lives is left behind and a different reality pervades their conciousness.

6.2.3 Freedom and escape and spirituality

The interviews demonstrated that a number of snowboarders frame the activity as creating an opportunity for spiritual experience. PO (Canadian male, 40, expert) said "It gives you the space to get the meditative thing going on". DS (Canadian female, 40, expert) believes "When you're boarding you get into that space when you're just you, just being". This was put more strongly by other snowboarders who suggested that snowboarding was active in enabling spirituality. RT (UK female, 25, advanced) commented "It stills your mind".

Thus the context is framed as one which promotes spirituality. The combination of the separations from normal life and from the normal rules of life enable the interviewees to have "space" which is spiritual. ML (UK female, 30, expert) is most explicit about the nature of this framing.

> There's no boundaries on the mountain, you never ride the same way twice. And there's a real silence on the mountain, especially off-piste, not far off-piste. The sensation is liberation, effortless. A zen moment – it all comes together.

The space is exactly the point, the space is the spirituality here. It is the lack of boundaries, the lack of sound, the lack of effort which together create the full sense of space. This is an escape from all the clutter and business of everyday life to an environment which may evoke the Hollywood image of an ethereal paradise.

The most radical sense of escape expressed by the interviewees was the idea of escape

from one's self. EH, (UK female, 30, expert) believed that snowboarding enabled her to escape "the boundaries of my own being".This seems to suggest an internal alienation or fragmentation, however, it could also reflect the perspective of 'spirituality' as self-discovery and development. The ski slopes are places to escape to irrespective of whether this is for a short time (for those who work on the mountain), for a week (for those on holiday), or for a season.

6.2.4 The escape frame

Just as with the element of nature, there seemed to be a well-defined societal frame which the interviewees were connecting with as they discussed this element. It involved the opportunity to get away from 'normal' life, even for those who live and work in the vicinity of the mountain. It included the opportunity to be one's self in a way that was not normally possible, to be both creative and expressive. It made a contrast with the stress and difficulties of normal life. It suggested that the place to escape to was both an 'other', sacred, place in the Durkheimian sense, but also a place where one felt at home and comfortable.

This suggested the interviewees felt a degree of alienation from their usual environment. Furthermore, it suggested that their snowboarding was part of an accommodation that they were making with the usual environment. The escape frame was what made living in the urban environment possible, the knowledge that there is this 'other' place which they can visit and have an escape experience. This frame need not be fulfilled solely through actual snowboarding. It might be through snowboarders getting their snowboard out of storage each week, or looking at photographs of their riding experience.

The escape paradigm has a wider currency than just snowboarding. It is invoked

throughout the leisure industry as various 'getaways' are sold to those who feel the need to escape their usual environment. The escape can happen in shorter time frames, as Malbon indicates in his study of nightclubbing (1999, p38). In Malbon's conception physical context, drug use and cultural framing create a different "social space" for the participants. At a simpler level, time spent reading or listening to music can be framed as escape.

6.3 Risk

Two types of risk are inherent to snowboarding, those of falling and those of avalanches. Within the interviews there was a high recognition of risk as a significant element of snowboarding. Twenty-nine of the thirty-three snowboarders felt that risk was significant for them. However, there was a balance between those who saw risk as a positive factor and those who saw it as a negative factor. This reflected Goffman's ideas of "fateful activities". It was also clear that for some there was a choice to include conscious risk as a balance for the unconscious risks of urban life. In these different perspectives the same risk is being framed both negatively and positively. I will deal with each type of frame separately.

6.3.1 Risk as a negative factor

Risk and fear were significant elements for most of the snowboarders interviewed, but most of them did not perceive them in a positive sense. Many of the snowboarders had personal or second-hand experience of injury, and were unwilling to take risks which they saw as likely to result in further injury. SC (Canadian female, 20, expert) said:

> I don't think about death, but about injury. Something that would make me unable to do what I want to do with the rest of my life. I always think about that when I do things like a cliff drop or glades. That's definitely in the back

of my mind, keeps me on the safe side. Risk is good as long as you're doing it with people who know what they're doing, and as long as it matches your ability level. There's always going to be some risk that you'll hurt yourself. It's just about knowing how much risk to take.

For many of the snowboarders their continued time in the mountains depends on not injuring themselves. RW says that for him there is a "Fear of injury cos you're dependant on a job." Those who are not physically able to do the job they are in the mountains to do can find themselves without pay, or accommodation, as these are both provided by their employer. So as a result of injury they have to return to their home.

The balancing of risk seemed to be typical of snowboarders, who are prepared to moderate what they do in order to stay "on the safe side". KE (Canadian male, 30, professional) says:

> As I get older my level of risk-taking is diminishing. I'm much more calculated, I'm much more concerned about having 200 good snowboard days then to have one epic run. That comes from injuries.

Most snowboarders dismissed the notion that they were risking their lives, although this is an obvious and recognisable risk. The 'it won't happen to me' attitude does seem to apply to the risk of death. Snowboarders do have to deal with the risk of injury, and it is this that they addressed in the interviews. Injury has other implications which snowboarders took on board. Thus in Goffman's terminology the 'play' is with their health, and the possibility of riding rather than with their lives. Snowboarding is a "fateful activity" in which snowboarders engage and which contrasts with the recognised but underplayed random risks of urban living and of 'normal' life.

6.3.2 Risk as positive factor

Some snowboarders take a positive view of risk. Here risk is framed as a means for self-development. Through risk the individual's identity is strengthened. PB (UK male, 20, expert) comments:

> There's a lot of fear in snowboarding and overcoming your fears makes you stronger. There's believing in yourself and having confidence. It's assessing the risk. That's what makes it even more exciting. If I screw this up I'm going to land on my head. I don't think it's just a macho thing - it makes you feel more alive. Taking the risks is part of feeling alive, overcoming your own personal barriers.

ML (UK female, 30, expert) adds "I've had to overcome the fears. Fear holds you back and you have to overcome the fear. Snowboarding is an opportunity to come to terms with fear with knowledge and practice." Thus risk becomes a potential form of spirituality as will be explored in section 6.3.4 below.

The fear can add to the experience of riding in another way, that of making you more aware of what is going on around you. PO (Canadian male, 40, expert) says "The fear and risk are part of that. That's part of the excitement. It's part of the heightened awareness." Whilst some feel that they are able to be "in control" of their environment there is an acknowledgement by some that the mountain deserves an appropriate level of "respect". JA (UK male, 30, expert) says:

> You have to pay respect to the mountain. You have to be aware of it, but you can feed off it. Snowboarding is about pushing it and seeing how far you can take it. Every so often the mountain will turn around and slap you.

This statement is interesting in that it is an example of an explicit anthropomorphism. Here the mountain is identified as being sentient and aware of the snowboarder. The risk is framed as that of being disrespectful to the mountain. This positive attitude to risk welcomes the engagement with risk as stimulating to their riding. Falling, and potentially being hurt are the result of pushing too far.

6.3.3 Risk management

In both those who had a negative and positive view of risk there was a common theme of a recognition of the dangers and a management of those dangers to a level acceptable to the snowboarder. The evaluation of risk is for some part of the experience of riding. NJ (UK male, 35 expert) feels "It's part of the fun, calculating it, working out if you've got the skills to deal with it." This evaluation of risk is obviously not unique to snowboarding. Referring to a road intersection outside his window, NJ continues "But we have the same things here – that junction's nasty". There are two significant differences between the risks involved in crossing a road and the kind of risk a snowboarder is taking; the choice involved and whether the risk is assessable. Snowboarders have chosen to be in the mountain environment, and generally feel that they can evaluate the risks. The risks in urban living are often neither voluntary nor enumerable on a personal level. In snowboarding there is a perception that you can generally manage the risks you take, and there is a strong culture of personal responsibility. In particular, those who venture away from the patrolled pistes are expected to have equipment for self rescue, and to know how to use it. KPi (Canadian male, 30, expert) notes "We've done our avalanche course. I fear those."

In spite of the perception that snowboarding is a 'risky' sport, most of the snowboarders seemed to be concerned to ensure that the risks they were taking were ones that they

were competent to deal with, indeed this seemed to be part of the satisfaction of riding. Snowboarders take significant effort to evaluate the risk, and to build their ability to deal with risks. The fact that the risks are present and can, to some extent, be evaluated may be one of the appeals of snowboarding. It is a conscious taking of 'limited' risk, of making a play, of being (to use Goffman's 1967 title) "Where the action is". This is in contrast to the majority of daily life, where opportunities for 'fateful action' are few.

This seems to follow Gidden's work on colonisation of the future, however, there was no suggestion from the interviews that the snowboarders considered themselves to be engaged in an activity whose focus was the future. The focus was the present, the connection with the future was the unfortunate possibility of injury. There is a recognition that 'accidents happen', and the longer one spends in a dangerous environment the more likely one is to get caught out. Comparisons were made with the dangers of traffic accidents, and thus of the more random dangers of city life. Giddens's suggestion in the term "colonisation of the future" is the intent to "shape the physical setting of our existence" (1991, p111), in contrast to being subject to an arbitrary future.

Risk was being evaluated not on the basis of the rare events of death, but the more frequent cases of injury. Snowboarders evaluate the risk that they may seriously hurt themselves, and try to prevent that happening, through avoiding particular circumstances or through training. Snowboarders not only accept but actively seek a level of risk which they are comfortable with as part of a "portfolio of risk" (Giddens, 1991, p125). They want to achieve the level of 'optimal experience' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p3) where they can feel more alive. An acceptable degree of risk can lead to the physical and mental state where mind and body are completely focussed and this is a state that many of my interviewees found very satisfying, as Csikszentmihalyi

recognises in his original work on flow (1974).

6.3.4 Risk and Spirituality

One reason the snowboarders participated in the sport is to overcome their fears. This can be an explicitly spiritual side to snowboarding as PB (UK male, 20 expert) reveals:

> Yeah I definitely think this spiritual side to snowboarding. Not so much when you're on the piste with all the other people which is very much an industry. But when you're out so on your own with your mates in the backcountry you're out there for the pure enjoyment. When you're in the park and you do a new trick it's good for your ego you improve and it makes your spirit stronger. There's a lot of fear in snowboarding and overcoming your fears makes you stronger. There's believing in yourself and having confidence.

This is a project of self-development, of self-discovery. To take Giddens term this is a part of the "reflexive project" of the self (1991, p75). It is about self-reliance in a world which controls many aspects of the individuals lives. The snowboarder dealing with risk is moving at a controlled pace into the unknown, challenging themselves and learning about their ability to cope with such situations. Snowboarding provides a context which the snowboarders frame as risky, where they can make a "play" (to use Goffman's terminology (1967, p164))

PH (UK male, 30, expert) takes another approach which connects risk and spirituality "I'm very aware of how things can go wrong, I'm very aware of my own mortality. I'm probably more able to take risks than someone who is less at peace with their own mortality would." It was this aspect which was originally intentioned by the topic of risk, and it was surprising to discover how few of the snowboarders engaged with the

possibility of death. For PH the ability to take risks is a result of recognising the reality of his own death.

In this section the interviews have shown the snowboarders framing their sport as a risky activity, and that the frame has been both positive and negative. The frame of risk is one which has implications for the wider lives of the snowboarders, and which can become a conscious element of a spirituality of snowboarding.

6.4 Play

Play was a positive element for twenty-nine of the thirty-three snowboarders interviewed, and an element they had a considerable empathy with. For example KP (Canadian female, 25, expert) said "Definitely – I come out here and play all the time". One significant element in this seemed to be the opportunity to play as an adult. KE (Canadian male, 30, professional) says "I'm 29 and I'm playing around in the snow. Not a lot of people do that. Definitely I'd say it's a lot of play, it's an excuse. Cos most times you're not allowed to play."

For some this play element is an opportunity to escape from the rules which encompass the rest of their adult lives. MT (UK female, 20, intermediate) states "Yeah, there are no rules". JA (UK male, 30, expert) takes it further "It's about having fun, not getting bogged down in rules, allowing your basic instinct to dictate where you go, what you do. It's an artistic ... spiritual feeling". Note the use of the word 'fun' here, the word highlighted by Huizinger (1938/1955, p2) as the essence of play. The "artistic feeling" JA identifies also relates to the creative element of play. There is an explicit element of creativity within snowboarding culture, expressed in choosing and then riding your own 'line' or route down a mountain.

Snowboarders made the contrast between their structured and bounded 'ordinary lives', and their experience on the mountain where they were "allowed to play". The snowboarders are escaping in a particular way, that of escaping from the rules of everyday life. The escape allows the snowboarders to have fun, and keep from getting too serious about their riding, as well as a release of the tensions of their normal lives. Again this can apply to those who live on the mountains as well as to those who are short-term visitors.

However, the existence of rules was important to one interviewee, DS. (Canadian female, 40, expert) "Yeah, it's not work. But I play the game with rules. Rules about what I can do and stay in my little box." Huizinga makes the suggestion that play has to have rules (1938/1955, p11), however, these rules are under the control of the player to a much greater extent than in 'real life'. Some of the snowboarders reported being conscious of creating their own rules for their mountain experiences. These rules seemed to be connected with personal safety, and as ways of imposing boundaries on the experience. Thus these self-imposed rules may be means of dealing with insecurity, but also a means of exploring one's own capabilities on the mountain. If snowboarder say to themselves that they will not cross a particular boundary it implies both that they feel confident of going up to that boundary, and also that they may feel tempted to cross the boundary. Creating the rules, and subsequently modifying them, may in fact be part of the game.

Play is also a social activity for many snowboarders. This opportunity to play with other snowboarders who enjoy playing in similar ways can be a great source of satisfaction. DS noted "I'd feel more comfortable with someone who knows my abilities. I'm playing with other people." This was repeated by PB (UK male, 20, expert) "Yeah,

especially when you're with your mates, when you've built a jump, there's a big element of play. It's all enjoyment." There is an experience of a common bond, of a satisfaction in each other's performance. Snowboard culture encourages the idea of a 'session', where all the snowboarders taking part are encouraged to ride beyond their normal capability, and everyone has a good time (my observation). This is not about competition, but about community, about shared joy, everyone doing their part at their level to make the session a good one.

A number of the snowboarders noted feeling "like a child" in the mountains. Others commented on snow being a "magical" environment, associated with a return to childhood. RD (UK male, 30, expert) says simply "There's a very child-like element". The strongest exposition of the theme comes from PH (UK male, 30, expert):

> There's a lot of playing in snowboarding – it is ultimately play isn't it? The fascination with snow as a child. It is a magical thing; it's a real privilege to be a part of it. The good condition comes and goes. Going out on a fresh laid layer of snow is a wonderful experience. Yeah, going out and enjoying the snow now is harking back to that; it's the same magical enjoyment that you have as a child. Just now you can explore that in a more adult way, and bomb down on a snowboard.

These themes seem associated for the snowboarders concerned with a return to a simple, pure, state. This may be a way of dealing with the confusions and complexity of adult life. Snowboarding temporarily resolves all of their problems to simple play, simple decisions like which way to go, and what to do there.

Other interviewees gave the theme of play additional therapeutic significance. ML (UK

female, 30, expert) talked about play as therapy "I'm very intense – it's very important to play – because then you're more relaxed. Like laughter it has a physical effect." Here play enables a state of being that has psychological benefits.

Three interviewees felt that play was not what they were doing on the mountain. TD (UK male, 35, intermediate) responded "No, I'm studying, I'm fascinated by the whole process, as much as I enjoy it, it's still something I am seriously trying to get better at. I never liked to be taught." CC (UK male, 35, expert) said "No – I've never thought of it as playing. I just have as much fun getting from the top to the bottom without injuring myself." NJ (UK male, 35, expert) felt:

> I'd never associate play with it, apart from fun parks. I've got to explore the mountains, or teach myself to do something, or teach somebody else to do something – it's the protestant work ethic. I always want other people to be happy.

The negativity towards play in these three interviews is located in three slightly different areas. For one it cannot be play because he is studying and serious. For another he is having fun, not playing, and the possibility of injury has to be taken seriously. For the third, snowboarding has to be a vehicle for doing something worthwhile within "the protestant work ethic".

For two of these the interviewees play is strongly associated with learning. The 'play' of snowboarding is a means of raising the snowboarder's physical and mental engagement levels with the activity. To play in this sense means to experiment with what one can do, pushing one's fear level, trying new tricks or doing the old ones in new ways. This also connects with Moyles' ideas of play as exploring potential and

limitations. Snowboarding in groups gives opportunities to encourage one another to learn new tricks or go into more difficult areas. Moyles' theories of play give insight into this experience, valuing it as undirected learning which develops the individual, whilst giving great pleasure.

Three of the snowboarders who dismissed the concept of play were happy to use the term 'fun'. Some appeared to focus on that fun being about learning themselves, others on the learning of others. These are actually aspects that other snowboarders were happy to include in their understanding of 'play'. I would suggest that this dismissal of 'play' reflects a feeling that play is for children, and is not in itself worthy. In contrast Ellis, Moyles and Huizinga assert that play is an important part of who we are, both children and adults.

This consideration of play in the interviews has identified a number of different frames of play, as well as the option to choose whether or not a play frame is applied to the interviewees snowboarding. Some have framed play as a return to the non-seriousness of childhood and some as a revisiting of the magical innocence of being a child. Others have understood play as a context with no rules, in which one can have fun, or in which one can relax. Play has also been framed as a social activity, and as an activity with psychological or therapeutic benefits. The interviews have reflected the theoretical perspectives in that there have been a wide range of understandings of play. However, there is a clear consensus that play is important with a huge majority of the interviewees finding play significant. What is clear is that these are all views of how the activity is viewed, "an approach to action" (Moyles, 1989, p11), rather than the activity itself.

6.4.1 Play and Spirituality

Two interviewees make comments specifically connecting play and spirituality. As

noted above, JA (UK male, 30, expert) said "It's about having fun, not getting bogged down in rules, allowing your basic instinct to dictate where you go, what you do. It's an artistic ... spiritual feeling". Here the play is both artistic and spiritual, and these two are intertwined. JA seems to be connecting these two through a sub-conscious creativity, a "basic instinct". The play element of snowboarding provides a context in which that basic instinct can be expressed.

A different approach is shown by RW (UK male, 25 advanced) "It's what it's all about. Like going to a skate park where you can play all day. And there is a certain spirituality to it." The play in a skate park is that of a context with no explicit responsibilities. Again, this comment is evoking the concept of play as a return to an innocent state. The spirituality is the spirituality of innocence as opposed to experience.

6.5 Context and spirituality

In each of the elements in this section it has been clear from the interviews how the snowboarders have framed the context in a number of ways. Some of these seem to use better defined societal frames, such as the nature frame or the escape frame. Other frames such as the play frame, seem less well defined. The nature frame in particular provides a significant context for the experience elements in the next chapter.

The interviews have also shown a number of frames being applied within the same context, for example seeing snowboarding as spiritual and play. It is worth noting that the flexibility of the frame concept makes this combination of frames comprehensible. It is clear that not every part of the two frames needs to overlap, but that there are significant commonalities, that both frames are relevant, and that the two frames complement each other. Thus the spiritual frame informs the understanding of the play frame, and vice-versa. This is useful in understanding how the context elements

contribute to the experience elements.

The interviews have shown how context elements can be framed in ways which promote spirituality. The context elements do not appear to relate directly to the identity elements. I will suggest in chapter 8 that snowboarding itself is a context frame. It is snowboarding as a frame which provides the context for the identity elements.

The context elements have also suggested that for most of the snowboarders a concept of God is not part of their spirituality frame. Instead the focus of spirituality is on the individual themselves. Applying the spirituality frame means re-framing themselves in a new context. Whilst the individual is not the centre of the frame, there is no greater entity, God is missing. Instead there is simply a different, wider perspective on life.

Finally, the interviews have also shown where frames have not been perceived to be compatible, for example where snowboarders have not felt that the play frame is appropriate to their sport. Thus it is clear both that frames may be individually constructed, and that part of that construction is a sense of where the frame is applicable.

Having considered the key element of context I will go on to consider the socially conventional dimension of spirituality, that of experience.

Chapter 7 - The Experience elements - Flow, Peace, Transcendence

The experience group of elements show interviewees having an experience which can be framed as spiritual. These elements are those which have strong conventional attachments to spirituality. Each of the elements brings different nuances to the understandings of spirituality and of framing. This chapter will give the snowboarding background for the three experience elements of flow, peace and transcendence. The discussion of flow within snowboarding will be analysed within Csikszentmihalyi's model of flow. This will demonstrate how the elements of Csikszentmihalyi's model correspond with the understandings of the interviewees. The chapter will then examine three different understandings of 'peace' within the interviews, and the way that snowboarding was described as therapy for some of the interviewees. The element of transcendence was affirmed by the interviewees more frequently than had been expected. Two 'native' terms for the snowboarding experience, 'moments' and 'in the zone', emerged from the interviews section on transcendence. The chapter will consider those who did not frame their snowboarding as a spiritual experience and suggests three reasons why this might be the case.

7.1 The snowboarding background to the experience elements

The elements of flow, peace and transcendence are those elements which are directly experiential. They are each descriptors of how the snowboarder might feel at a particular moment during their riding, and of an experience the snowboarders might be seeking in their riding. The most general of these experiences is flow, which was both connected with the rhythmic nature of snowboarding as explained below, and which was connected with a meditative experience. Snowboarders associated this with senses

of fluidity, and being "in the zone". A sense of peace was experienced by snowboarders both as an internal integrity and as a connection with their environment. Transcendent experience of some kind was actually experienced more rarely, but a larger group of snowboarders were aware of it as a potential experience.

Within these three elements there is the potential for progressive intensity, from the mild intensity of snowboarders identifying with the possibility of flow, through achieving some kind of peace, to the peak experience signified by transcendence. Numerically it seemed that for UK snowboarders (twenty-four interviewees) there were twenty identifying with flow, fifteen with peace, and nine with transcendence. For Canadian snowboarders the numbers were almost equal with each at around 5 of the 9 interviewees.

Some of the elements in the context section might also have been fitted into this section. Risk is an immediate experience as well as a general context. However, almost all snowboarders perceived it as something that they put out of their minds while riding. The term escape was deliberately framed to allow both the context and the experience to be included, and again, most snowboarders talked about it as being connected to the environment in both the general sense of being in the mountains, and the more specific sense of their snowboarding experience. Play is also an experience but was mostly construed by the snowboarders as an *a priori* and an *a posteriori* perception. The snowboarders went into the snowboarding environment expecting to play, and returned from the environment conceiving of what they had done as playing, rather than feeling they were playing whilst they were riding. Thus risk, escape, and play are all included as context items rather than experience items.

Rhythm and flow result from a notable aspect of snowboarding, that one is almost

continually turning. Even when one is going along on the flat, or straight down a hill, one will probably maintain a slight turn (called 'keeping an edge in') in order to have maximum control, and to keep from 'catching an edge' or falling over. This sense of turning is one of the aspects that people find attractive about snowboarding. In non-competitive alpine snowboarding it is precisely the experience of making 'carved' turns which provides the aesthetic and experiential enjoyment. In powder snow, the freeride snowboarder is looking to create their own 'line', to express their own individuality by the route and the turns which they perform as they descend.

The rhythm arises from the movement from one turn into the next. In snowboarding this is an irregular rhythm, with small and big turns, slow and fast changes all connected. Photographs of a skier's and a snowboarder's tracks through powder reveal this irregularity, with the skier's tracks tending to be neat and regular, whilst a snowboarder's more likely to vary in both shape and frequency. The flow relates to this sensation of rhythm, and on a physical level describes the experience of 'flowing' down the mountain, moving in harmony with both the snowboard equipment and with the mountain slope. One respondent (JK) talked of the mountain "telling you where to go". By this she meant that one works with the topography of the mountain and the snow conditions to find the route that seems appropriate for a snowboarder on that run. This obviously reflects a level of expertise and familiarity with the snow and the degree of difficulty of the slope being ridden.

The term 'peace' evoked a variety of responses from the interviewees. There seems to be some kind of state where anxieties drop away and the snowboarder is only aware of snowboarding. For some this is a result of a complete focus on riding. Others experience a similar sensation from the quiet on a mountain, and connect it with the

experience of nature. Others get a sense of quiet (rather than excited) anticipation before setting off down the hill, and this is a moment of stillness and of peace.

It could be argued that these are phenomena with very different attributes and sources. However, although these perceptions are so varied it was possible to find a general term that might enable snowboarders to talk about such experiences, if they had them. The word peace seemed to resonate with many snowboarders. In order to open this area up in the interviews, it was sometimes necessary to find an alternate expression and the term being "at one" with nature or self was used.

It was suggested in one discussion on a (now discontinued) UK snowboard discussion group (www.snowserve.co.uk) that snowboarding had been a means of attaining a meditative state, or connecting with some kind of divinity. This discussion was one of the factors which initiated this research. This was not expected to be a widespread experience, but the possibility was intriguing, and it was significant to offer the possibility to interviewees. The subject was presented so that it was inclusive of a range of experiences. A number of the interviewees questioned what was meant by transcendence. Alternate terms used to enable the interviewees to comprehend the subject area in those cases were 'out of the body experiences' and 'meditative'. Whilst these are not strict synonyms for transcendence, the evidence of the interviews shows that the interviewees understood and were able to respond affirmatively and appropriately to the subject.

7.2 Snowboarding and flow

In section 4.4.1 I introduced Csikszentmihalyi's theoretical model of flow, which includes a number of attributes. In this section I will firstly demonstrate the accord between flow theory and snowboarders' experience. I will show how interviewees have

included an affirmation of each attribute. These affirmations were unsolicited, and thus

show how well the theory fits and how the term flow evokes a particular set of

understandings. I will go on to show how the flow experience is understood as spiritual

for some of the interviewees. Thirdly I will suggest that flow is a frame, a mediated

form of experience, and not, as Csikszentmihalyi would suggest, direct experience.

7.2.1 Flow and the interviewees' responses

a) Action and awareness

The ability to merge action and awareness into a seeming unconscious competence is a

key precursor to the flow experience. Snowboarders who have not achieved the level of

expertise necessary to ride without thinking about the basic mechanics of the process

are not likely to experience flow. However this is not a simple binary matter as

snowboarders always have to be aware of what they need to do to control the board.

Many factors, such as the conditions of the snow and the steepness of the slope, affect

whether a snowboarder is feeling competent in a particular situation. KE (Canadian,

male, 30, professional) says "You don't have to think about it, you just do it. You feel

like you can do anything you want, within reason, that's the flow." The comment

"within reason" is significant. Snowboarders give themselves permission to not "think

about it", given certain parameters of competence. It is maybe more accurate to

describe the merging of action and awareness as a background brain activity for

competent snowboarders. DS (Canadian, female, 40, expert) comments "If you reach

that point, it's a more natural thing and you're not fighting it. You're allowing yourself

to just go."

b) Centring of attention

One significant benefit of riding which many snowboarders alluded to at various times

during the interviews was the way that while they were snowboarding they focussed simply on snowboarding. The activity is demanding enough so that your attention is on where you are going and how you are going to get there, moment by moment. Other thoughts are driven from your mind by this focus. PH (UK, male, 30, expert) says "At the optimum point, you don't have any awareness of where you've been or where you're going. It's just in the moment. You're absolutely right there." This is not to contradict the previous point about unconscious competence. The snowboarders are generally controlling their board at an unconscious level, but aware of where they are going at a conscious level. This may be compared to a competent driver who is aware of all the hazards around her but not of the mechanics of controlling the car to avoid them. Again this complete focus is a choice on the part of the snowboarder. Just as driving a car, it is possible to ride and consider other things as well. But snowboarding offers a more complete engagement as the snowboarders moves towards the edge of their competence.

c) Loss of ego

The two features above create the phenomena of the loss of ego. Choosing to ride with complete engagement means the whole mental focus becomes taken up with the activity. EH (UK female, 30, expert) described the sensation as:

> That sense of losing yourself in the flow of snowboarding which is a very physical sensation. But which also allows your mind to be released, it's very calming and very exciting at the same time. It's very grounding in a way, which is weird cause it's elevating too. It's lifting your mind and your body away from mundane things. It's like dancing, that sense of becoming part of the greater rhythm, and giving yourself up to something that's greater than you.

The repeated paradoxes within this statement are intriguing, as they show EH struggling to conceptualise what she experiences. The parallel she makes with dancing is also informative, in that it suggests unconscious competence in a complex activity can become experienced as elevating.

d) Control of action

The snowboarders' comments about freedom are significant here. Being completely in control of the activity and your environment is a valued experience for many interviewees. NJ (UK male, 35, expert) feels "You're picking your own line down the mountain, you control where you're going..... Your destiny is in your own control". For NJ this feeling of control is significant, and provides some contrast with the rest of his life. This may suggest a particular benefit for those who choose to enter this state. It is a re-taking of control from a life which is often controlled by outside forces. Again this relates to ideas covered in the context section on freedom and on risk.

e) Demands for action

In snowboarding, the start and end points of any run are clear, and as one descends there is the necessity to avoid objects, and to control speed. Each of these gives unambiguous demands and feedback. There is a rock in your way, avoid it or hit it. If you go too fast, you lose control and fall. But there is a more subtle feedback loop. The snowboarder is aware of their board on the snow, and of the flex and grip of the board. The attempt to control these nuances is rewarding in terms of the performance aesthetics. PO (Canadian, male, 40, expert) expresses this "It almost becomes like yoga, you get back as much energy as you give. You're pushing it, it pushes back."

f) Autotelic

This was Csikszentmihalyi's meta-category for flow. It also became a key of soulriding

understanding within the interviews Within Csikszentmihalyi's model anyone who is experiencing flow must be engaged in the activity for its own sake, and not for anything else they might get out of it. This does not mean that a snowboarder cannot experience flow if they do get anything else out it. AC (Canadian, male, 30, professional) is clearly a snowboarder who rides for its own sake – even though he is a professional snowboard instructor. His comment was that "I'm snowboarding because I love snowboarding". Many of those who work in the snowboard industry accept low pay and poor conditions so that they can snowboard. This theme will be explored more in chapter 8 on snowboarding as identity.

g) The transformation of time

There were two senses in which time was transformed whilst snowboarding. The first is the more normal transformation of time associated with being engaged with and enjoying an activity. SC (Canadian female, 20, expert) felt that flow meant:

> Sometimes you get to the end of the day and you're kinda "how come it's the end of the day?" You're just so involved you're not thinking anything else, just about exactly what your doing. I think that's what makes it so cool. You have to put so much focus and energy into it that you're not thinking about anything else.

It should be noted that SC was the only interviewee who recognised flow as a theory developed by Csikszentmihalyi. However, she was not aware of the details of the theory.

The other sense of transformation of time is a momentary one. RD (UK male, 30, expert) said "You go beyond concentration, It's like a super-conciousness. It happens

for a short period of time but it feels like a long period of time, and you can see everything. It's very odd." This sense of transformation appears to be that which is referred to as a 'moment' by other interviewees. It is a very special experience for those who have it, to the point where one interviewee stated that she took pictures to remember such moments.

h) Summary

The sections above have demonstrated that the theoretical description of Csikszentmihalyi's flow model works well for snowboarding. The interviews revealed a widespread affinity with the term 'flow' and a wide range of understandings of it. For the UK interviews, twenty out of twenty-four snowboarders, and for the Canadian interviewees six out of nine snowboarders, described flow as being significant for them in their riding. The two Canadian snowboarders who did not see snowboarding as spiritual, also did not experience flow as significant. However, this effect was not so noticeable in the UK interviews, where the four interviewees who did not identify with flow were evenly split between those who saw snowboarding as spiritual and those who did not see snowboarding as spiritual.

In response to the question about flow in snowboarding, the snowboarding experience was described as rhythmic, effortless and floating (ML), fluid and in the zone (LS), freeing (MA), spiritual (JA), meditative, (EH) and beautiful (TD). Snowboarders talked of "losing yourself (EH), "finding stillness" (RD), and other descriptors. These descriptions came up a number of times and in a number of combinations in the various interviews. For most interviewees it was a very significant part of why they ride. KP felt it was "super important". However, whilst the descriptions the snowboarders gave fell within a broad parameter around 'flow', each description was different. Different

features where highlighted. Thus it would not do justice to the interviews to talk of a single, definitive flow experience. Flow was a highly significant, positive term which connected the range of experiences identified above. EH (UK female, 30, expert) provided the most evocative report:

> It's the feeling of your mind separating from your body – If you tried to think about it you couldn't do that kind of thing in a mental way. It has to come from giving up your body into the flow. I suppose you're transcending your physical body – its like an instinct – you have to learn how to snowboard but when you can do it you can't articulate how to do it. It becomes part of the way you move.

The quantitative approach to the data showed that few snowboarders who identified with the other categories in this group did not identify with flow. The flow experience appears to be connected to both the peace experience (eighteen of the twenty snowboarders who experienced peace also experienced flow) and transcendence (all fourteen snowboarders who experienced transcendence experienced flow). There are particular reasons why the two snowboarders experienced peace but not flow; one DA, was a snowboarder who was still mastering the sport; the other, RH, was a highly skilled snowboarder whose moment of peace was before the ride down, which was an aggressive experience. In each of these cases the snowboarder was not feeling in control of their environment. The first snowboarder was very aware of still learning, the second snowboarder was consciously on the edge of their ability.

7.2.3 Flow and spirituality

The topic of flow evoked a number of responses which connected flow with spirituality, however the connection was made in a variety of ways. JA (UK male, 30, expert) made

the connection in terms of creativity and self-expression "When you're not thinking about it, it's an expression of yourself. It almost becomes spiritual." For CU (U.K.male, 35, expert) the rhythmic sensation was "like a meditation. It seems to fit in with the way things are you just getting to the natural meditation ... natural rhythm." This was also true for JK (UK female, 25, expert) "Rhythm is spiritual - it's part of the flowing sense of getting right, you get that in powder fields and it's wonderful. I think it is important." JK has linked in another thought, that "getting it right", is part of the flow experience. In the context of her other statements this would seem to be a part of an affirmation she finds in being able to snowboard at a certain level. Her ability to flow with her snowboard is very significant for her.

PO (Canadian male, 40, expert), whose experience connecting snowboarding and meditation will be considered in more depth later, suggests that it was this flow experience which enabled him to have a "Tantric" meditative experience. He states that flow is "one of the things that brought me to the spiritual moment." Finally KE (Canadian male, 30, professional) expresses a common view that the flow experience is one of connecting with the mountain. His comment is "You just sort of flow down the mountain, you feel like your part of it."

The flow experience can thus be a spiritual experience for these snowboarders, and an experience which is of the moment. The paradoxes of flow, of control and surrendering control, of ego and lack of ego, of focus and lack of focus, all contribute to this experience. They also raise the question of the degree to which this experience is inherent or constructed.

7.2.4 Flow and framing

An issue which follows on from the comparison of the snowboarders' experiences and

the theory of flow, is how the flow experience relates to framing. Specifically the question arises as to whether flow is a framing of experience. Flow theory would suggest that this is not the case. Csikszentmihalyi states that the loss of ego is a significant element within flow and that what is lost is the "self *construct*, the intermediary which one learns to interpose between stimulus and response" (1975/2000, p43). It is worthwhile noting Csikszentmihalyi's use of the term construct (his italics) here. He specifically excludes the constructionism which Berger and Luckmann propose from the flow experience. He says "Activities which allow flow to occur....usually do not require any negotiation" (1975/2000, p42).

Many of the elements of flow are described as direct, unmediated, experiences. The merging of action and awareness, the centring of attention, and the demands for action all fall into this category. However, the control of the environment and the autotellic nature (Csikszentmihalyi's primary characteristic of flow) are not unmediated. In particular the autotellic nature is itself a frame. Snowboarders are framing the activity as one which is valuable in itself, rather than looking for other benefits, such as cultural capital, health, or opportunities for socialising.

Furthermore, in the quote above, Csikszentmihalyi recognises that interposition and thus loss of ego is a learned activity. This mental step is not necessarily easy to achieve, as will be considered below in the discussions on transcendence. It is also a step which requires a contextualising of the activity as one in which the removal of the activity is appropriate. Thus the removal of the ego is in itself a framing of the activity. EH says that snowboarding is "giving yourself up to something that's greater than you". Csikszentmihalyi's loss of ego is a conscious choice not a subconscious result of the activity. For the majority of the interviewees, it was significant for them to be able to

frame snowboarding as an activity, possibly the activity, in which they could experience flow.

7.3 Peace

Peace is not obviously a sociological term, although terms around its absence have a strong sociological presence. Peace is easier defined by its opposite than on its own merit, thus peace is seen as an absence of conflict or disorder. Peace might thus be also contrasted with alienation, stress or unhappiness. As with the term spirituality, the term peace was not defined during the interviews, although two contexts for peace were suggested. The interviewee was left to understand it as they wish and to respond to it in that context. The response they gave indicated the particular understanding they had chosen.

The connection with peace in snowboarding was slightly less significant than flow for both the Canadian snowboarders, with five out of nine finding it significant, and for the UK snowboarders, with fifteen of twenty-four snowboarders valuing it. Within the interviews, the concept of peace was framed in two ways which evoked two categories of positive response, peace with nature and peace within one's self. A further contrast was between those who found a peaceful experience within their riding and those who found it outside their riding. It seemed from the interviews that those who spoke of finding peace with nature often found it while they were not riding, whereas those who found peace with themselves found it while they were riding. These seemed to be two different understandings. The former to do with a reflection on the mountain environment, and the latter connected directly with the activity of riding.

7.3.1 Peace with nature

The concept of peace with nature comes in two familiar forms, one is connecting with

the vitality of nature, the other is escaping the anthropocentric world-view and getting a fresh perspective. Each of these might be expected to form more pronounced contrasts for those who live in urban environments, but the same perspectives were suggested by the Canadian interviews, where the snowboarder lived all year in the mountain environment.

PH (UK male, 30, expert) comments, "The feeling of being at one with yourself is obviously there, and being at one with nature. You're making that all round connection, it's all part of the same parcel. By being in the mountains you're tapping into that vital force of nature." This is evoking a profound connection with a frequently used part of the nature frame, the idea of the "force of nature". The perspective on nature as a living force finds another expression in the words from RD (UK male, 30, expert) who finds a different perspective on life through his riding:

> I feel at peace when I'm snowboarding. It comes from nature, feeling small. I think that as a culture we're too concerned with being at the top of the tree and being this omnipresent force all over the world when really we're not. You can come and go today, the mountain is not going to care. I'm not the be all and end all, I'm not as big as I think I am. The mountain is ever changing - it seems to have moods, and that's kind of a draw.

For both of these snowboarders, snowboarding is an opportunity to engage with a different perspective on life. This is to use the mountain environment as an opportunity to take on a different meta-frame, a wider perspective on reality, where humanity is not a dominant force. This frame is both temporally and geographically located for the snowboarder, it is a state of reality they can only enter when they are in the mountain environment.

One snowboarder (CC, UK male, 35, expert) noted the moment of arrival in a ski resort "One of my best moments is when I arrive in a resort just having a cigarette and looking at the mountain. It's a perfect still moment. I miss that." For this snowboarder peace involved stillness, which was invoked by being in the mountain environment, as well as being on holiday. There would seem to be a connection here with both the nature frame and the escape frame. The interviewee is contrasting his existence in the urban environment with that in the ski resort environment. The fact that CC missed the experience suggests that it is a significant part of the frame for his riding. Thus the experience of stillness was one that he expected.

Many snowboarders noted a sense of peace before they started to snowboard down the mountain, with snowboarders often revealing they pause deliberately in order to enjoy these moments. IF (UK male, 30, expert) put it like this:

> "I get a real sense of contentment from riding. Not just when I've done a run, but at the top before I ride. It's about being there, appreciating where you are, the silence, the beauty of the snow, everything."

The natural environment in which IF finds himself is evoking a sense of peace, which is experienced in the moment, but which is again part of the frame which IF applies.

7.3.2 Peace with self

Those who took this approach in their response seemed to be making a stronger association with snowboarding itself and particularly with the focus Csikszentmihalyi identifies as an element of the flow experience. CC (UK male, 35, expert) commented:

> Definitely at one with myself. Yes. I don't think about anything else or worry

about anything else. I had that feeling. Things being in perspective. Things that were important, gone.....out the window....... It's all the time. But most when you're riding.

The concerns of everyday life are no longer present for the duration of the snowboarding experience. The snowboarder is focussed on the immediate experience. There is a suggestion that all of the time spent in the mountain environment can be like this, but that it is particularly the time actually spent snowboarding. DS (Canadian female, 40, expert) says "You're not thinking of any other worries or pressures, other than just being there, and you get to the point where you're not even thinking. You're just doing and being instead of thinking." At one level these comments might merely reflect an activity which precludes any other thoughts, but the idea of perspective and of this being a particular activity in a particular context suggests that it is more than just about an exclusive focus. Thus, whilst this reflects back to the above discussion on the flow experience, it brings in the additional perspective which being in the mountain appears to generate for these snowboarders.

This is further suggested by JA's (UK male, 30 expert) comment "When I've been on my own, and at the right place, at the right time, time has stopped, nothing else has mattered. I got to hold hands with one big feeling of satisfaction and peace. It'd be nice if it was always like that, but it can't be." There is a wistfulness about this comment which again suggests that this frame on reality is limited. Further, the clear implication is that this is an experience worth seeking, that this is a state of being which the snowboarder wants to repeat. The frame which the snowboarder is able to apply in this context is a highly valued one.

Whilst the sense of deep peace may be transitory, it can form the basis for a lasting

change. AC (Canadian male, 35, Professional) comments "It's a feeling of becoming self-aware. You really develop an ability to look at things in a unique way. The whole self-actualisation thing. Everything becomes clear. You really don't stress about things, you don't have a lot of inner conflict." Here the snowboarder is ascribing the activation of self awareness to his riding. Snowboarding is enabling a process which may be framed as spiritual development.

7.3.3 Peace and spirituality

The connection between peace and snowboarding is one that interviewees were willing to make. RD (UK male, 30, expert) says:

> There's those who love snowboarding because it gives them peace I think without wanting to make it sound like too much of a spiritual exercise, but it is in a number of respects – it gives me peace. Snowboarding encapsulates that idea of a focus point... a point of peace.

Here the spirituality involved is of finding and maintaining a focus point of peace. The context of RD's interview suggests that this is a contrast with his normal life in which there is a lack of peace. The spirituality involved is thus one of difference. This is re-enforced in JA's comments (UK male, 30 expert)

> When I've been on my own, and at the right place at the right time, time has stopped, nothing else has mattered. I got to hold hands with one big feeling of satisfaction and peace. It'd be nice if it was always like that, but it can't be. It was a moment of clarity which happened when I wasn't riding, pondering the questions of life. It both happens and I seek it out. But it's not free and it's not easy.

This raises a number of points. As noted above, JA is connecting the lack of inner conflict with a sense of peace. He goes on to relate this to a "moment of clarity" in which time stops and nothing matters. These moments will be considered below. Furthermore, he actively seeks out these experiences, both within and outside his riding.

Peace is framed in a different way by PH (UK male, 30 expert), who says:

> The feeling of being at one with yourself is obviously there, and being at one with nature, you're making that all round connection, it's all part of the same parcel. By being in the mountains you're tapping into that vital force of nature.

Here the sense of peace is directly connected with the nature frame and with the power of nature referred to in the previous chapter.

7.3.4 Snowboarding as therapy

The deep affect snowboarding can have on individual's lives means that it has the potential to be a therapy for some people. This element came out in various parts of the interview with different people. EH (UK female, 30 expert) " One of the reasons I became so obsessed with snowboarding is that it does block out the rest of life, and the trundle of everyday life. Snowboarding could be a therapy, but it would be a very bad therapy. It's an escape" Note that for EH, the problem with snowboarding as a therapy is that it might take her away from real life. ML (UK female, 30, expert) did not have this reservation "It helped me break away from my partner. It became a love affair. Snowboarding was my therapy." It is also clear that for some the therapeutic aspect was more connected with the experience of snowboarding, for others it was more part of the lifestyle.

Seeing snowboarding as a form of therapy certainly connects with the "spiritualities of life" theme developed by Woodhead and Heelas (2005, p83). Many of the spiritualities they consider are often presented as therapies, for example counselling. The variety of aspects of snowboarding which can have this 'therapeutic' effect demonstrate the variety of needs which snowboarding can address. For some it is a physical sensation which deals with a physical need, for others it is a means of accessing and feeling at home in a challenging natural environment, for others it is a contrast with their everyday lives. All of these are therapeutic parts of the snowboarding experience for the snowboarders concerned.

It is also worth noting that both of the snowboarders above were women. The male interviewees did not use the terminology of therapy in their responses. They were prepared to talk about peace as contentment and satisfaction, even as a deep need, but not as a therapy. This readiness to engage with therapy is again something that Heelas and Woodhead identify as a female characteristic (2005, p94)

The theme of therapy fits between a identity model of spirituality and an experience model. It is rooted in an experience, but it becomes transformative of the identity. ML says "It's kind of like a tool to do things I never thought I could do." In the section above AC noted that snowboarding enabled the process of "becoming self-aware". So this transformative aspect to spirituality is not exclusively a female characteristic within these interviews.

7.4 Transcendence in interviews

The term transcendence was used because it was perceived to have a technical, and neutral tone, rather than terms such as mystical or religious experience. However, the interviewees often asked what was meant by transcendence. I responded by saying that

some snowboarders had reported some kind of out of the body experience. particularly whilst riding powder. This was a reference to the email discussion noted in section 6.1.3 above.

Transcendence would initially appear to be very removed from sociology theory. However, as has been noted in section 2.7.2 , Durkheim based his analysis of religion on "collective effervescence" and "specific experiences"(1915/1965, p465).

Given this initial lack of understanding, it was surprising to discover how many interviewees were able to identify with the theme of transcendence. This was not just as general affirmation, but with examples from their own experience, and supplying their own ideas of a type of transcendence. Nine out of twenty-four UK snowboarders and four out of nine Canadian snowboarders responded positively to this area. In other words around 40% of the snowboarders interviewed had had an experience which they identified as being transcendent as a part of their snowboarding.

For many of these, this involved a separation of the process of snowboarding from their own mental state. LS (UK male, 25, advanced) puts it like this:

> The focus is the thing. When you're really in the zone, your body knows what to do and is doing it instinctively, and you're virtually an observer. There is a sense of detachment, and you're looking ahead, and you're taking in the scene, and there is a sense of detachment between mind and body. and that is a very nice feeling.

I will be discussing the use of the term "in the zone" separately later (section 7.5) as it was a repeated facet of these interviews. At one level LS is reporting the sense of unconscious competence which he has achieved ("Your body knows what to do"). But

this is more than the lack of self awareness involved in for example, driving a car. In this there is an *enjoyable* sense of detachment between mind and body. Snowboarding has become a means of attaining a particular state of being or mental frame.

The detachment can extend to be from every part of one's normal existence. MA (UK male, 25, expert) notes:

> There's definitely a feeling of being detached from the whole normality that you go through when you're home, you definitely feel that you're somewhere else., not just location. You've got a different attitude, you feel removed from it all.

This is a complete escape from normality to an 'other place'. The sensation is typically very short lived. As identified above, RD (UK male, 30, expert) says:

> That does happen, very rarely, when you go beyond concentration. It's like a super-conciousness. It happens for a short period of time but it feels like a long period of time, and you can see everything. It's very odd. It's not something you can go out and achieve, it just happens to you – it is for me anyway.

RD also notes that this sensation cannot be an act of volition, rather something that just happens. He cannot make it happen, but only put himself mentally and physically in the situation where it might happen.

PO (Canadian male, 40, expert) discovered the ability to go into a meditative state through snowboarding having attempted a number of other routes. In contrast to others who noted that they could not determine when they would experience this, PO was

immediately able to deliberately repeat the sensation.

It has been a way to connect to a meditative state. Previously I never linked with anything that got me right there, into the zone, but snowboarding definitely has. The first time I had the conditions were really good. I did the top of the mountain to the bottom. I had real rhythmical turns, good speed. I just lost completely all thought, I got right into that rhythm. It happened most of the way down. That was the first moment when I thought, you can get out there on this. I was looking for that all the time after that. It's given me access to a meditative state of mind when doing something physical. I try to apply that to almost everything. That was the first time. I wasn't just one with the snowboard, I was one with everything, the mountain, the day. I felt just not separate from anything. That was definitely the goal of the Tantric meditation. At the bottom of the run I had this stupid grin on my face, and people come up to me and say, "hey", and I was like "huuhuuhu, oh Jesus" - Just completely wrecked, like happy. And I went up and did it again, and it was just as good.

This is a very strong statement of a connection between snowboarding and a religious practice. It is worthwhile to note the explicit connection with rhythm and speed and thus, again with the flow experience (note PO's use of the term 'flow'). PO identifies "doing something physical" as the means by which he is able to attain this state. What is also interesting in this report is that the wider context is not explicitly reported. PO was aware that he was seeking a particular experience, that of "Tantric meditation" but his implication is that he was not aware that snowboarding could enable this state. This is significant in that it suggests that the snowboarding experience creates or facilitates a

particular state of mind. However, it appears from the interview that PO was able to connect the experience that he was having with his existent, and hitherto theoretical. frame of "Tantric meditation".

Whilst PO interprets this state as the "Tantric" state, others describe a balance point, a point of peace. PH (UK male, 30, expert) describes it as:

> You are totally at one with yourself at certain points, when you really are *on* what you are doing, controlling something that you can't control. You are making a connection with this level of conciousness which is very satisfying in a number of ways. Physically, emotionally, it's a balanced point.

The use of the terms 'balanced' and 'satisfying' may imply that this is in contrast to other parts of life which are neither balanced nor satisfying.

Another response was to say this was a sensation which could not be explained. WA (UK male, 30, expert) said "When you do this powder riding, it's an amazing feeling inside. There's nothing else better. Once you do it you'll never forget it. You come out smiling from ear to ear. Its something you can't explain." As noted above (section 6.8), a number of authors have commented on incommunicability as being a feature of authentic spiritual experience. Here we see a number of snowboarders struggling for a frame to use for the experience they are having. The experience appears from some of the elements described to be the same, but for one it is identified as "Tantric meditation", for another it is a "balance point", for another it is simply "an amazing feeling".

7.4.1 Transcendence and spirituality

The section above has already demonstrated the connection that some make between

transcendence and spirituality, in the report by PO of how snowboarding became a gateway to "Tantric meditation". Whilst others would not frame it in the exact same terms the experience they report seems similar. RD (UK male, 30, expert) states:

> You can be going a 40-50 mph off piste and you are so still... You could have worked for 6 months just to make the experience happen and the 6 months has gone away like that. That's spiritual to me – I don't have to pray to get there.

It is worth noting that this is the experience that RD has been seeking, that he has worked to make happen. He comments that he doesn't have to pray to get this experience, thus that this is a parallel with a religious experience. JA (UK male, 30, expert) expands on this, although his transcendent experience seems different from that of RD and PO.

> It's almost an instinct that comes to life when everything comes together. It's almost dissolving with nature. People get it in all kinds of different ways. It's a way of expressing myself and getting in touch with what I feel and believe without too much complication. Snowboarding is my religion.

The idea of spirituality as being in touch with yourself is one identified in section 6.11, but here JA is explicit that "snowboarding is his religion". He is giving his understanding of the compass of religion in this statement.

7.5 Moments, and The Zone as native terms

The two terms 'moments', and 'the zone' were common within the interview responses. It was clear that these were used with special emphasis in the context of the

interviews. These were all used in responses of those who were positive about transcendent experience, although not always in direct response to the question about transcendence. The term 'moments' is particularly interesting because it was not introduced in the interviews by the interviewer. ML (UK female, 30 expert)" The sensation is liberation, effortless. A zen moment – it all comes together." PH (UK, male, 30, expert) says "At the optimum point, you don't have any awareness of where you've been or where you're going. It's just in the moment. You're absolutely right there."

The term 'in the zone' was originally used by an interviewee in the pilot study and was used to explain transcendence. CU's (UK, male, 35, expert) response to being asked if flow was something he was looking for was "Yes, being wholly concentrated on something.....You're very concentrated, on getting your rhythm right and getting your turns right. And you push the envelope a bit and you do get into the zone."

Thus both of these appear to be native terms within the vocabulary of these snowboarders which refer to the transcendent experiences. The most frequently used of these terms was 'moments', used by seven different interviewees. Four interviewees talked about being 'in the zone'. This accounted for the majority of those who had transcendent experience. The other interviewees were each single users of a term, EH used 'fluid', RT struggled for any term, and NJ talked in terms of endorphins (see section 6.5 for a discussion of NJ's usage).

It was notable that these interviewees generally used one term for their transcendent experience, but used it a number of times. This would suggest that for the interviewees in question, the terms 'moments' and 'the zone' were each frames for transcendent experience. They are providing the interviewee with a way of understanding the

experience. The choice of terms reveals how the interviewee is choosing to interpret what is happening. Each of the terms conveys different connotations as part of its frame, and the interviews show some of the features of the frames.

7.5.1 Moments

ML (UK female, 30, expert) gives the most evocative description as she compares describes moments in snowboarding and dancing.

> Everything comes together, particularly as a dancer. In dancing you reach a peak and you are able to transcend the mechanics and you can liberate your mind. The same is true. It's funny it all goes quiet too, even though the wind is rushing. You're supersensitive. These are the moments I was talking about. It's escaping. It's being immersed in the moment.

PH (UK male, 30, expert) describes "The meditative state of mind of the physical exertion... You're totally, totally, in a pure moment, but then you come out of it. It's very momentary".

The term 'moment' emphasises both the short time of the experience and significance of it. The term also suggest that these are significant, they are not ordinary time these are special moments. For the snowboarders who have had this experience, it is one they strive to repeat, even though it is ephemeral.

7.5.2 The zone

RD (UK male, 30 expert) said:

> Snowboarding encapsulates that idea of a focus point a point of peace. You can be going a 40-50 mph off piste and you are so still. You cross over, something

must be different, you're in the zone, reality seems to slow down. I'm grinning from ear to ear just thinking about it. That's spiritual to me – I don't have to pray to get there.

This gives two significant referents. Firstly is the idea of the zone itself. This idea is popular in athletic circles (Watson, 2007, p96) as a place of complete focus and high achievement. The second idea is that this zone is the same place that spirituality can take one though some kind of prayerful endeavour.

LS uses the phrase "the zone" in a similar way to refer to this state, the concept of focus, and that this is described as a "very nice feeling". KE (Canadian male, 30, professional) re-iterates "I was just in the zone and it just happens. The reason I do what I do is to get to the same place." The term thus implies a desired optimal state or experience.

7.6 Snowboarding as spiritual experience

The interview sections of the experiential elements showed the snowboarders framing their snowboarding experience in a number of different ways. Csikszentmihalyi's model of 'flow' fitted well with the descriptions of the snowboarders experience, and related to the native terms used by the snowboarders of 'moments' and being 'in the zone'. However, in contrast to Csikszentmihalyi's theory, it could be seen that flow was a frame of experience, that the self is involved in constructing the experience. The interviews showed the extent to which context was significant, particularly in snowboarders achieving a sense of peace through their riding. The snowboarders showed that frames of nature and escape were prominent in the way they understood their riding to give them that sense of peace. The significance of framing was also demonstrated by those who have a mental frame of snowboarding which does not

include the possibility of spiritual experience, either because they have a strong attachment of another form of spirituality, or because they have a particular view or practice of snowboarding. Thirdly there were a significant number of snowboarders who have had a transcendent experience in their riding.

These results also revealed how snowboarding is, for many of the snowboarders in this study, a spiritual experience. This was focussed particularly around the descriptions of transcendence, which in turn was linked to both the peace and flow experiences. The snowboarders were consciously framing the experience as spiritual. Some interviewees were also describing how the experience became personally transformative, and hence potentially a form of spirituality.

This chapter has shown that snowboarding fits with conventionally accepted understandings of spirituality. The next chapter demonstrates how other understandings of spirituality are not framed as spirituality by the interviewees.

Chapter 8 - The Identity elements - Community, Lifestyle, Meaning and purpose

The identity elements reflect the identity dimension of spirituality, and have been shown in chapter 2 and 4 to fit within a wide range of understandings of the term. This chapter is concerned with the interviewees understanding of these elements, their significance and the extent to which these elements are framed as spiritual.

For many of the interviewees snowboarding is more than simply a sport or a hobby, it is a significant part of their identity. The three elements of community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose each contribute to the snowboarding identity of the respondents. The first section of this chapter will establish what a snowboarding identity might mean and how these three elements can be considered as identity elements. In doing this it will connect with sociological theory of identity. The three elements of community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose will each be considered in turn. Within the first two elements a number of divisions were discovered. Within community there were three aspects, that of the friendship group, that of the wider community, and that of snowboarding culture. Three approaches to lifestyle; a 'seasonairs' lifestyle, a 'weekend warriors' lifestyle and a generalised 'alternative' lifestyle, are identified and explained. There was a degree of ambivalence around interviewees describing their sport as providing meaning and purpose, and this is considered.

One significant finding within the interviews was that the identity elements were not explicitly connected with spirituality by the interviewees. As has been seen in the previous chapters, some connections were made between personal development and spirituality, but community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose were not framed as spiritual. The final section of this chapter will consider this phenomena in more detail.

particularly by considering how the snowboarding identity becomes a spirituality.

8.1 Snowboarding as a source of identity

A key finding of this research is that when snowboarders say "I am a snowboarder" they are often making a statement about their identity, and not just about an activity in which they participate. This is to say that snowboarding is not peripheral to their sense of identity, but is significant within it. By identity I am meaning a voluntary or involuntary feature of the person by which they distinguish themselves from other people. We may attempt to project our own sense of our identity into the consciousness of others but our identity will be different from the perceptions that others hold of us. The three elements of community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose each contribute to and derives from the identity of the individual.

8.2 Three levels of snowboarding community

In snowboarding, the word community may refer to a variety of types of community, from the immediate people that an individual chooses to spend time with on or off the slopes (not all of whom may actually be snowboarders), to the wider 'community of snowboarders' incorporating all those who are identified (by themselves or others) in some way as a snowboarder. Beyond this there is the culture of the snowboarding community, the symbols, language, values, norms and artefacts of snowboarding, which interacts with the question of lifestyle.

Community appeared to be more significant for the Canadian interviewees, with eight of nine positive responses, than for the UK snowboarders with seventeen of twenty-four positives. This reflects my observation that community is a much more significant term in Canada than it is in the UK. It is used frequently and appears to have a particularly

positive undertone.

The interviewees responded to the significance of community in three different ways. Some talked about their enjoyment of snowboarding in a group. Some focussed on the wider snowboard community and some on the idea of being "on the same wavelength" as other snowboarders, sharing values and understanding with them. There also were a number of respondents for whom snowboarding was a very individual thing, or who felt that either they had changed or that snowboarding had changed, and was no longer the community it 'used to be'. These interviewees' comments provide a counterpoint to each of the three levels of community.

8.2.1 "Group" snowboarders

Snowboarders are notorious for riding around the mountains in groups, and sitting on the slopes socialising rather than 'getting on' with riding. This is accentuated in the snowboard park where snowboarders will often repeatedly using a particular obstacle to try various tricks on. However, snowboarding in groups is not limited to freestyle snowboarders. Freeriders will often go out in small groups, working together to find good safe routes and to support each other, as well as to enjoy each others' company and riding. Only a few snowboarders would prefer to ride alone, and no snowboarder would choose to ride off-piste alone, because this is to invite a disaster should even a small accident occur.

Snowboarders from both the UK and Canada particularly valued riding with friends, but this was expressed in different ways. KP (Canadian female, 25, expert) said "It's always fun to ride in a group, and have a big group to go with." SC (Canadian female, 20 advanced), who was moving to a resort to do a season, was concerned that she would not find snowboarders who were primarily interested in snowboarding, as opposed to

partying

> That's a huge part of it for me. Before I came out here I worried about it a lot, finding people who wanted to ride. I was worried about finding people who just wanted to party. It's been a blessing to find people who just wanted to ride. That community is so important.

For SC, the community is particularly the snowboarding community rather than the more general partying community. SC seems to construct her snowboarding experience around the snowboarding community. In the UK interviews people talked more about riding with friends or mates, CU (UK male, 35, expert) said:

> But my best experiences have been being with friends, going places around the mountain... doing lots of runs, finding cut throughs, taking stupid photos of each other. My girlfriend and I prefer being with people and socialising with people. We've taken lots of people and organised trips. The main enjoyment is when you take beginners with you. The buzz they get from just being out there. Talking with them about the runs they have done we find really exhilarating. Everyone we've taken so far has always come back and wanted to go again.

Thus for CU the social aspect and the joy in the experience of those learning is significant. JK (UK female, 25, expert) makes the time after riding a more explicit part of her experience. Having described a particularly significant day's riding she says

> And the best thing was going to McDonald's afterwards and sitting around and going "wasn't that brilliant". It was an amazing day there was a big gang of us 12 or 13 people.

The quotes from CU and JK also indicates the sense of socialization. In a group, both before and after the actual riding, people discuss their favourite moments and in this way common culture and values emerge. The experience is interpreted and re-interpreted. The discussions which take place are thus framing the reality for those involved.

However, there are those who much prefer their own company when riding TD (UK male, 35, intermediate) says "I don't need to be going with anyone else. You feel like to have to keep up or slow down. I'm a very solitary animal when I get like that." LS (UK male, 25, advanced) adds

> I think it's quite a solitary pastime. But it's more something you do. The solitariness I love. The feeling of being on the mountains with no-one else around. You don't get much time to be alone in London.

Here the opportunity to be alone, in the sense of having no physical company rather than no emotional company, is one of the more significant features of riding.

There is a strong ambivalence about company in the culture of snowboarding. A common saying is "There are no friends on a powder day", which expresses each snowboarder's desire to ride as much of the untracked snow as possible, and the perception that the commitment of friendship might require one to slow down or to not take routes one might wish to take. However, to ride off-piste without a buddy, especially on a 'powder day', is something that experienced snowboarders would also decry as extremely dangerous.

The community at this group level was for most UK snowboarders an essentially transitory one. Members joined the community for the short period of a holiday. Other

types of groups last longer, as they reflect the community of those doing a season together in a resort, or maybe a group of friends who regularly go on holiday together and develop their own rituals and patterns of behaviour. The group activities may include riding together, spending time together in the evenings and living together. For those living and working in the resort there may be particular days or times when the group will gather in particular places. This type of community and culture is obviously not a permanent and committed one, but a temporary and transient one which may last for the period of a holiday, or for a day, a week, or few hours in the day.

All of this perspective on group snowboarders fits very well into Bauman's model of a cloakroom community. To label these as cloakroom communities should not mean that they are insignificant for the participants. For some of them the transitory community may be the most important thing in their lives, an important source of identity and support. What is significant in Bauman's emphasis is that it is the activity which brings the community together for a short period. These are not communities which are defined by boundaries, but by the activity which is the focus of the community.

8.2.2 Wider community

Snowboarding remains a sport where a sense of community exists, solely on the basis of participation in the sport. This community finds particular expression on the internet, where there are a variety of newsgroups and chat rooms for snowboarders. It may also be identified through the snowboard media, notably the magazines, which both depend on and promote this community.

Snowboarders are aware of the wider culture of snowboarding and react to it in different ways. For some this a positive and important part of their snowboarding. NJ (UK male, 35, expert) says "As a snowboarder I am part of a huge, continuously growing

community. I think it is a very strong community which holds together."

This community is often perceived as being open and welcoming to all snowboarders. RT (UK female, 25, advanced) comments

> Definitely – it's one big family. It doesn't matter if you've just started out or you've just won a competition. If you're interested in the sport you're welcomed with open arms. Everyone's had to start somewhere, and they can appreciate the difficulties of where you're at.

This identifies the perceived egalitarianism of the sport. The significance of the 'pecking order' is kept small. All who snowboard are welcomed. At one level this is, of course an idealised picture. It reflects snowboarding's beginnings as an unwanted intrusion in the ski resorts, and the alienation of a youth culture. However, it is a feature that the snowboarders in the interviews identified and affirmed.

This suggests that for the wider sense of snowboarding community there is a greater sense of identification with snowboarding as a source of identity and place of commitment than Bauman's 'cloakroom community' concept would suggest. Individuals might be unrecognisable as snowboarders for the majority of the year, but the connection with this is not an insignificant part of their identity. Thus it fits more closely with parts of Maffesoli's concept of tribes because snowboarders have left the location of the community, but are still emotionally connected with the tribe.

IF gives a clear example of how the wider community works in practice. As a photographer IF (UK male, 30, expert) benefits from this acceptance of other snowboarders by being able to easily "hook up with" or make friends, on the mountain.

When I'm away I like to spend a couple of days just taking photos in the snowboard park. I'll go and hook up with some guys, buy them some beers and take some shots of them riding. The snowboarders aren't pretentious, they're happy to work with you, there's no attitude.

IF is not merely saying that as a photographer he can get some snowboarders to work with him by buying them some beers, but that because they are members of the shared community of snowboarders, they are prepared, for a small favour, to work with IF.

Another common perspective of the wider culture of snowboarding is a disillusionment with it, or a rejection of it in favour of the benefits of doing one's own thing. AC (Canadian male, 35, professional) comments "No. I'm aware of it. It's a part of the sport that turns me off. Snowboarding has a culture of cool that I don't relate to. I'm a very individual person. I do it for myself."

Some have ethical problems with some of the elements which seem to be part of the culture KPi (Canadian male, 30, expert) says "I wouldn't say I fit in. My beliefs are so different. Drinking, drugs, sex, are a huge part of the people that live out here. Most of them are young, wanting to do something different. They're out here to ski second, party first." For KPi it is not possible to disentangle 'snowboard culture' and the wider 'party culture'.

Some of the interviewees locate snowboarding into mountain rather than youth culture. KE (Canadian male, 30, professional) states "My snowboard friends, while they're here, we have beers, we ride. The mountain community and culture." It should be noted here that whilst they would appear to be talking about different things, KPi and KE are both approximately the same age and live in similar Canadian resorts.

In contrast to the sense of group community in section 7.2.3, the interviews here talked about snowboarding as being a wider community in which they were stakeholders. For some this community was something which they enjoyed, and which they were able to benefit from. For others there was a disillusionment with the community, or a sense that they didn't 'fit in' in some way, but these are still the responses of stakeholders in a community. The wider community may not reflect the personal values of the disillusioned snowboarders, or be constructed in the way they would like, but it is still a community which they are a part of. This is an aspect of the sport which is reflected in the commercial approach to snowboarding, selling snowboard clothing as reflecting a 'lifestyle'. In turn many snowboarders object to the way their sport is used, however, there is little they can do to prevent it happening.

8.2.3 Shared values and understanding

Another aspect of snowboarding is its ability to make individuals feel a strong sense of unity and commonality. Snowboarding was taken by some snowboarders to providing a set of shared values and understandings, for example that all snowboarders on the mountain are equal. This was picked up by NJ (UK male, 35, expert) "I think the culture is you're all equal on the mountain. Respect for whoever can get down the mountain, teach people and share." JK (UK female, 25, expert) added "Set of values, is really important. There is that sense of responsibility, to the environment, to other people ..... I think the mountain would be an excellent way to bring up children." Here JK is holding the mountain life as a rounded *set* of values. KE (Canadian male, 30, professional) comments "Most of the people round here don't have much, yet they're some of the happiest people that I've met. Specially in North American culture where consumerism is where it's at." KE is proposing that snowboarding has a non-materialist cultural influence. Another perspective was given by MA (UK male, 25, expert)

"There's a guy across the road from me, he is 82 and snowboards 2 or 3 times a week. He's lived life his way. He is the coolest guy." Other snowboarders have also made the point that older people who ride are included in their role models.

The sense of being part of the snowboarding community can even generate a sense of superiority as evidenced by RS (Canadian male, 25, expert)

> It makes me feel elite. Snowboarding is as much a social event as a physical activity. People who don't snowboard don't value the same things in life, they don't talk the same talk. There's very few other activities which would warrant a complete lifestyle change as much as snowboarding does. Pack up, move, work a meaningless job for no money just to be able to do that one thing that you love. I mean those people don't understand what it means to be a snowboarder, and I'm not sure what I can compare it to.

For a number of UK snowboarders the different set of values and understandings is experienced as their 'alternative' side. CU (UK male, 35, expert) says "On the wider scope I enjoy being a freerider. It is cool, it is alternative. I haven't grown too old not to do these sort of things, there is still some spark in there" MT (UK female, 20, intermediate)"I like being part of the boarding community because it's a little bit more alternative, but not too alternative. It's not too out there, it's a cool, normal one." For these snowboarders their snowboarding is a significant part of who they are, and many of the snowboarders said at some point in their interview that snowboarding was an important part of their identity. This was expressed in two different ways. For some their lives were a whole into which snowboarding fitted. For others snowboarding was a separate part of their lives from the mainstream – their "alternative" side.

These understandings seemed to be ones in which snowboarding provides an identity in contrast to prevailing culture, providing a counter-cultural aspect, defining snowboarders as against the mainstream rather than, as in Bauman's analysis, defining the snowboarding community as existing simply for the duration of an activity. This again accords more with Maffesoli's work on the tribe, a community defined by creating the boundaries of a culture. The activity is simply the catalyst around which the community forms. The suggestion of this theory that some individuals are attracted to the tribe rather than the activity. They become snowboarders precisely because of the counter-cultural aspect of snowboarding. Similar connections could be drawn with Thornton's work on youth and music subcultures. Thornton suggests that "Subcultural ideologies are a means by which youth ...assert their distinctive character" (1996, p10). Snowboarding seems to be able to become a source of identity. It has sufficient distinction as a culture to sustain being used as a frame with which the interviewees perceive themselves.

8.3 Lifestyle

The word "lifestyle", just as the word "community", was conceived in the interviews in a number of different ways. Both community and lifestyle relate to the individual's sense of identity, and to a culture. There was a similar ambiguity within some of the interviews towards the whole concept of lifestyle, and there was also a sense that the snowboarding lifestyle could form the 'alternative' part of the individual's life.

Lifestyle in snowboarding, just as in other areas, can mean a number of things, and it is necessary to be clear which type of 'lifestyle' an interviewee was referring to. There is an idealised professionals lifestyle, modelled in magazines and videos, which involves a seemingly endless and carefree access to perfect conditions and slopes. Few, if any,

individuals actually attain this and for the rest, the professional's lifestyle is a fantasy lifestyle. It was occasionally referenced during the interviews but was not a major theme for the interviewees. For many however, there is the real prospect of becoming a 'seasonaire', living in the mountains for a season, working in the resort or living off savings. Many of the interviewees had lived, or were living, this life. One of the least discussed lifestyles is that of a 'local', someone who lives permanently in the vicinity of a ski hill and can ride whenever conditions and employment permit. Many locals are seasonaires who have made the transition to a permanent life in the mountains. However, this is a small proportion of seasonaires. Finally, there is the 'weekend warrior', with a normal urban life, but a commitment to snowboarding which necessitates using significant leisure time and financial resources to access the slopes. This might involve spending both vacation weeks and weekends on the mountains.

Lifestyle, as already identified, is known by snowboarders to be a term used in the commercial exploitation of their sport, and this is a source of discomfort. A marketing information report (Mintel 2001) demonstrated industries representation of snowboarding as a 'lifestyle sport', alongside surfing and skateboarding, which meant that the products of the snowboard culture were attractive to non snowboarders. The commercial products which are associated with snowboarding lifestyle may arise from practical requirements (for example snowboard clothing and equipment) or may be mediated (for example snowboard associated music). Those outside the actual snowboarding community may identify the community and or lifestyle as desirable objects of attachment, and may take on some features of the lifestyle, or integrate themselves into the community (becoming 'social' snowboarders). This may readily be observed in the prevalence of high street shops selling snowboard branded clothing such as "Fat Face" and Quicksilver".

Lifestyle was not a significant feature of their riding for about half of the UK snowboarders, whereas seven of the nine Canadian snowboarders thought it was significant. The Canadian group included the only interviewees who had made a permanent move to the mountains in order to practice their sport. This may reflect the greater commitment to the sport of those who have chosen to live in the mountains, as opposed to those who have snowboarding as a leisure activity. It may also be that the ambiguity which UK snowboarders express reflects a greater awareness of the commercial exploitation of snowboarding, and thus creates a cynicism towards the concept of lifestyle.

8.3.1 The seasonaire

Within snowboard culture there is the understanding of the 'lifestyle', or 'living the life', as being someone who lives in the mountains and manages to spend all of the winter season riding. This is also known as 'doing a season'. This may be financed through work during the summer, by working in a resort during the winter, or by other means. The method of financing the lifestyle will determine how much actual snowboarding is done. However, this is of lesser significance than that the snowboarder is 'out there'. Most resorts rely on such seasonaires to work in the resort for low wages and the privilege of being able to ski or ride in their time off. From this perspective the idea of lifestyle means putting up with cramped conditions, low income, and menial work in order to have the opportunity to ride for a few hours a day for 3 or 4 months. The lifestyle also involves a strong camaraderie between those who are 'seasonaires' in a resort. They will ride and socialise together and form a particular social group within the resort community.

For some seasonaires the lifestyle becomes not just something to do for one year, but a

continuing pattern, working in the summer in the seaside resorts, in the winter in the mountains. The seasonaire has no fixed home, and little prospect of promotion or career development. In fact home and career are not desirable, because they would make more demands on the individual's time. At this level, the 'lifestyle' is a rejection of the capitalist values of western culture for a focus on living for the moment. It has echoes of surfers travelling the world looking for the ultimate wave, and of hippies 'dropping out' of the 'rat race'. Of course, very few will maintain this lifestyle for more than a few years, but the values of the 'lifestyle' have been embedded in snowboard culture.

This idea of lifestyle becomes an ideal pattern of life, a life without the troubles of living a settled and committed live. The most common form of this for UK snowboarders is to get a job as a chalet host, which enables the snowboarder to work mornings and evenings and to ride most afternoons, and on their single day off. Most jobs in the mountains, full time or part-time, are poorly paid, because many seasonaires are there primarily for the recreational opportunities. During the off-season, these snowboarders will often work long hours at unsatisfying jobs in order to raise the money they need to do the next season.

One professional snowboarder in the UK, TW (UK male, 20, professional), said the effect of snowboarding on his life had been "I've lived in debt. Constantly saving to go back, but in winter I have 6 months off." This seasonaires way of life seems to create or demand a certain attitude to life. RW (UK male, 25, advanced) states "It's very laid back, I've got no money, but nobody's got any money so who cares. But they're out there having the best time of their lives." MA (UK male, 25, expert) also commented that this "Is very important. I'm not big into conforming, and snowboarding gives me the lifestyle that's relaxed. You have to deal with reality, and living on a tight budget –

but it's good for me". Another respondent, JA (UK male, 30, expert), summarised the lifestyle as "Coolness, relax, flow, rhythm, take it easy, have fun".

These values of the snowboard lifestyle can affect those whose snowboarding is solely of a few weeks a year. It can become an attitude to life. It can create friendships which are the most significant relationships in one's life. CC (UK male, 35, expert) says "There's the whole lifestyle which is laid back, and the people I've met, are now my best friends.". A passion for snowboarding can encourage the snowboarder to make a number of lifestyle choices as WA (UK male, 30, expert) notes "You re-arrange your priorities. You try to be a bit healthier. For me it's a commitment."

The seasonaire's lifestyle is about making significant sacrifices in terms of career and material standard of living in order to be able to live in the mountains and have access to riding as often as possible throughout the year. This seems to create or promote certain patterns of life and certain attitudes to life. The key word in the interviews was 'relaxed', this was a relaxed attitude to life. In fact the life was often very hard work, and the content of the word 'relaxed' could be hard to discern. I would suggest that the relaxed element was the attitude to the future. There is unlikely to be a 'future' in riding, although some do make a conventional career out of it. The lifestyle of a seasonaire is about living in the present, living for the days off when you can ride.

The seasonaire's lifestyle might be seen as a wholehearted entering into a subculture, reminiscent of those involved in the 'hippy' movement or various music cultures. In this it fits most closely with Hebdige's ideas of subcultures as criticisms of the prevailing culture, and seasonaires are choosing this lifestyle because for whatever reason they do not want to engage with the conventional lifestyle.

8.3.2 The 'weekend warrior'

For the committed snowboarder, even though they may not be able to ride for more than a couple of weeks a year, snowboarding can dominate the scheduling of the whole year. CU (UK male, 35, expert) expresses all of these:

> It's taking the one month of the year and bringing it back into normal life. Of course it would be nice to be sponsored but for 99 per cent of the people that is not in reality. But you can take the experiences you get from riding and bring them back into normal life and that can sustain you. You come back from your time away and you're still feeling the buzz and you talk about it with your friends. And then halfway through the year the new catalogues come out and you start planning next season and it gets you through. And even going to Tamworth or Milton Keynes [artificial snow slopes in the UK] is re-energizing. It helps you through. It puts a smile back on your face.

EH (UK female, 30, expert) confesses "It was a complete way of life for me, it was completely what I lived for, it was how I really coped."

Those snowboarders who have a commitment to a career and city based life may still see snowboarding as an important part in their lives. The snowboarding lifestyle and attitude expressed in the previous section may be very important to them as a balance in their lives rather than as something which they are wholeheartedly committed to. This can be expressed in two particular ways, as a part of their identity, and as a therapy. For these people, snowboarding dominates their life, even though they are not snowboarding for the majority of the time. It is the central experience in their lives. RD (UK male, 30, expert), revealed "The lifestyle is important to me. I had to give up snowboarding for one year, and it really hurt – it felt like a loss of freedom – it was very

odd." For another respondent, the snowboarding lifestyle has been therapeutic in enabling him to escape from a city lifestyle. DA (UK male, 25, advanced) says "Snowboarding has mellowed me out. I couldn't escape the destructive lifestyle of drugs and bars and clubs in Austria. But here I've moved on. I can dream again. On drugs I couldn't dream".

There is another, more superficial sense in which the term lifestyle is understood, and that is the clothing and accessories associated, even indirectly, with the snowboard industry, as IF (UK male, 30, expert) reveals. "Yeah, there's a whole lot of things that are part of snowboarding that I like, the clothes and the approach to clothes that's relaxed and practical. I love the graphics and the designs on boards, and the music is really good." It is interesting that IF is accepting that there is such a thing as snowboard music, alongside these other specifically snowboard branded products. He also describes an approach to clothing rather than brands of clothing. Thus IF demonstrates a mixture of values and products in his concept of lifestyle.

8.3.3 Lifestyle as an 'alternative' part of life

As in the community section, this signifies both something radical and different to the mainstream, and which brings balance into their lives. For those growing older, and even for those younger people who see themselves as located in a conventional environment, snowboarding is a way of being 'cool', of still having a non-conforming part. One of my interviewees was a dentist who feels that he "Identifies with the rebel part of it, back in the day when it was rebel to be a snowboarder. I kinda like the rebel part." (PO, Canadian male, 40, expert).

There were fewer interviewees responding to the question about lifestyle with a response about snowboarding being the alternative part of their life. This may be

because the issue of community was raised before that of lifestyle, so they may have given the answers that pertained to the alternative part of their life. What was noticeable was that two Canadian snowboarders responded to the issue of lifestyle with the suggestion that snowboarding gave them an alternative part of their life. This is in contrast to the Canadian response to the community question, where none of the snowboarders identified the snowboarding community as an alternative part of their life. Thus it may be that the concepts of lifestyle and community in the UK and Canada are slightly different, and that Canadians were able to locate the alternative part of their life in the lifestyle rather than the community section. This would locate the alternative lifestyle as a much more individual part of identity for Canadians than for British snowboarders, where the alternative part of life means being part of an alternative community. In other words the alternative fits into a slightly different discourse in Canadian society than it does in the UK

8.4 Purpose in interviews

I have shown how snowboarding is an important part of the lives of most snowboarders. They often structure their year around opportunities to go riding. They view themselves primarily as snowboarders, or at least see snowboarding as a highly significant fragment of their persona. Thus, whilst they might not initially agree that snowboarding gave meaning to their lives, this might be interpreted as the result of their orientation. Others, however, were clear about snowboarding's significance for them. It was notable that most of the UK snowboarders (fifteen out of twenty-four) did not find snowboarding to give meaning and purpose to their lives, whereas all but one of the Canadian snowboarders did. I will suggest below that this is due to another societal frame, the hobby frame, which is particularly British.

ML (UK female, 35, expert), a UK snowboarder who does find meaning and purpose in her riding, said

> Has it changed my life? Yes I think it has, it gave me purpose and direction which I really needed. It's made me come out of my shell a bit, and reassess myself. It's kind of like a tool to do things I never thought I could do. I realize how lucky I am. It's been all consuming.

Snowboarding gave respondents purpose in a number of different ways. It gave perspective on life, it became the centre of their lives, it had been the prime motivator in significant parts of their life, and it gave direction and identity.

The most common response to the topic of meaning is that snowboarding gives a sense "of who I am" (KP, JK and PO) NJ puts it as "It helps me to find my character. It does help define me" and EH expands it to "So it's changed my self-perception, my self-esteem". CU (UK male, 35, expert) says "It reminds me where I am and who I am". Here snowboarding is constructed as active in the process of identity generation. Further the snowboarding frame seems to have a particular and lasting presence in the snowboarder's primary framework.

For some it can become a clear purpose in life as for PB (UK male, 20, expert) "I get out of it everything I enjoy in life". For PH (UK male, 30, expert) it has become the centre of his life.

> It's directed where and when I travel and holiday. I put my mountain biking and guiding on hold, so I could do snowboarding. It's focussed what I do with my spare time, and what I'd like to do with my winter – working in the industry as an instructor or guide. It's completely directed my life, certainly for winter.

Whilst they might not have identified with this perspective, it was clear that almost all of the interviewees gave snowboarding a high priority in their spare time and in their spending.

A different approach came from AC (Canadian male, 35, professional) who said

> I think your meaning and purpose in life comes from you. I have my own direction and snowboarding happens to be part of it. Meaning and direction is why I snowboard, rather than snowboarding giving me meaning. That's a part of what I want to do. It's a big part of who I am, because I love the feelings you get from it, it's my meal ticket. It just allows me to have a really high quality of life.

In this context "high quality of life" appears to mean primarily the opportunity to snowboard and be in the mountains. AC's emphasis is that snowboarding provides the means for the life that he enjoys, rather than being in itself a raison d'etre.

8.4.1 The hobby frame

There were a number of respondents who replied that snowboarding was just a hobby, however much time energy and money they were prepared to put into it. DM (UK male, 35, expert) puts it baldly "Not from snowboarding. It's just a hobby".

This perception is in contrast to the huge significance that snowboarding has for them. IF (UK male, 35, expert) is a clear example of this when he says "You've got to remember that it's only a hobby. I keep my feet on the ground. But if I had a car accident and I couldn't ride any more then it would be the end of the world for me".

Thus for some snowboarders there is a clear tension. Snowboarding is more significant for them than they are prepared to acknowledge IF again "On a purely practical basis, I

spend all my holidays and more out snowboarding, and I'm planning on taking two months out of work next season to go to Whistler." This is more than 'just' a hobby. IF's life is centred around snowboarding rather then snowboarding being peripheral to his life. JK (UK female, 25, expert) puts it as follows:

> With other, non-snowboarders, you relegate it to the realm of hobby. But for the vast majority of people who get to a certain level snowboarding is expressing something about them. It's more than just a nice way to spend your wages, it's more fundamental than that.

This understanding of snowboarding seemed to reflect a social frame, the 'hobby' frame, with associated views of what was acceptable for something that was 'just' a hobby.

The social anthropologist Fox, in her book on the English, (2004, p62) writes "an underlying rule in all English conversation is the proscription of 'earnestness'". Alongside this runs a determination not to take oneself too seriously. It is this combination which I suggest leads to the hobby paradigm, the societal frame that enable activities about which one cares a great deal, and in which one invests considerable effort and resources, to be 'just' a hobby. When a UK snowboarder says that snowboarding is "just a hobby" they are evoking a societal discourse which is continuing within themselves. They are saying that they are not *too* serious about this activity.

8.5 Snowboarding as source of spiritual identity

In this section it has been clear that for many snowboarders, snowboarding provides a sense of identity, at least as a complement to other areas of their lives. It is a source of

values which affect the whole of their lives, and provides. if not meaning, then at least a significant structure to their lives. Snowboard communities are important to many snowboarders for more than simply people to go snowboarding with. In these communities they discover like-minded people who can form friendship and support networks beyond snowboarding. Snowboarding offers a number of lifestyles which individuals may adopt partially or wholly. Snowboarding also provides a sense of direction to the respondent's lives, which some acknowledged as meaning and purpose within their lives.

Chapter 2 demonstrated a number of definitions of spirituality in which identity was a key element or the centre of the definition. The focus here is on a spirituality of the identity rather than experience. It is particularly interesting to pick up Mead's understandings of the I and the Me (1934, p173). Broadly, the I is the internal self constructed from our personal sense of history, whereas the Me is the socially presented self, which Mead calls the "organized self". Some of the snowboarders interviewed might be interpreted as saying that their 'I' needed to be expressed in a number of 'Me's'. These various 'Me's exist in various social contexts, of which snowboarding is a significant context for the snowboarders. There was a frequent sense within the interviews that snowboarding provided a complementary identity to their normal life.

Thus snowboarding has the potential to provide a sense of identity which the individual understands as being spiritual. As noted in chapter 2, the focus in the spiritual identity is on the individual rather than the group. It relates to viewing essential existential questions such as "who am I", "why am I here?", "how should I live?" as spiritual questions. Community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose are exactly giving answers to these questions. In providing these facets to the snowboarders' lives snowboarding can

be seen as a source of identity and of spirituality. One snowboarder. PB (UK male. 20 expert), was explicit about the way that snowboarding strengthened his spirit and his self image.

> Yeah I definitely think there's a spiritual side to snowboarding. Not so much when you're on the piste with all the other people. which is very much an industry, but when you're out so on your own with your mates in the backcountry. You're out there for the pure enjoyment. When you're in the park and you do a new trick, it's good for your ego. You improve and it makes your spirit stronger. There's a lot of fear in snowboarding and overcoming your fears makes you stronger. There's believing in yourself and having confidence.

This is a focus on the development of the individuals' human spirit and thus their identity. However, this was very much a minority voice within the interviewees. Many interviewees recognised these elements as significant, but they generally did not frame them as spiritual. This is in contrast to the experience elements, where many interviewees recognised the elements as both significant and spiritual.

Furthermore, none of the snowboarders identified snowboarding as a primary spiritual identity, although one respondent, ML (UK female, 35, expert) explicitly said that snowboarding had "replaced religion" in her life. One snowboarder (JK) mentioned that time spent in a group "effervescing" about their days riding was significant as spiritual time for her. This is a notable echoing of Durkheim's term for the start of religious experience. This joining together is a common feature as snowboarders gather at the end of the day to share their experiences and to enjoy the common bond of culture and place. Within this buzz of the apres-ski socialising there are opportunities for reality

construction within the various groups. These understandings may be traced back to Durkheim's focus on religion as having an essentially social function – to unite into a single community those who adhere to the religion.

This absence of a sense of snowboarding identity as a spiritual identity is a significant absence in the perceptions of the interviewees. The next chapter will consider the interviewees specific responses to spirituality and to soulriding.

Chapter 9 - Spirituality and soulriding

This chapter is the final analytical chapter of this thesis. It is concerned with the overall perspectives of the interviewees on spirituality and soulriding. In particular I will consider what factors may incline an individual to frame snowboarding as spiritual or not. I will also examine the connection between framing snowboarding as spiritual and having a positive view of soulriding.

The three previous chapters have considered ten elements of snowboarding which were identified as having a potential spiritual significance. Within those chapters I have shown how each of the elements is framed. The context element chapter showed how even those elements which appear to be objective are actually framed, and it demonstrated some of the societal frames which are applied, the nature frame and the escape frame. The interviews also demonstrated how some frames can promote other frames, so the nature frame can promote an understanding of snowboarding as spiritual. Other interviews showed how some frames can exclude other frames, thus the play frame was for some interviewees a frame which excluded spirituality, whereas for others it promoted spirituality. The experience chapter considered the 'flow' experience, and showed that this too was a framing of experiences. The two frames of 'moments' and 'the zone' were considered as native frames within the broader frame of transcendence. Finally the way that snowboarding contributes to the interviewee's identity was considered. Particular frames within this chapter included understanding snowboarding as therapy and as 'just a hobby'.

This chapter will address the two key terms in the research, spirituality and soulriding. As in the previous chapters the intent here is to understand what the interviewees

understood by these terms, and what the significance of the terms was for them. These two topics will be approached in two different ways. Spirituality, the central topic of this thesis, will be approached particularly, although not exclusively, using a narrative analysis. The topic of soulriding will use the thematic approach to the interviews which has been used in the previous three chapters.

The reasons for using a narrative approach to analyse the topic of spirituality have been covered in section 5.9. The aim is to discover through the narrative analysis the whole understanding of what an interviewee got out of snowboarding, and if they understood snowboarding to be spiritual what the overall content of that spirituality was. Four interviews are used here. Each represents separate quadrant of a grid based on whether the interviewees did or did not find snowboarding spiritual, and whether they did or did not have a Christian faith. This was intended to demonstrate competing frames of snowboarding which exclude the possibility of spiritual experience. Quotes from these interviews will sometimes have been used elsewhere because they provide a good illustration of points being made. However, in this chapter they are placed in the context of the other significant statements made by the interviewee so that the whole emphasis of the interviewee's understanding can be clear. Within each interview analysis, the three dimensions of spirituality are considered, in as much as the interviewee discussed these dimensions within their comments.

9.1 Snowboarding as 'spiritual'

9.1.1 Numerical approach

The UK and Canadian groups of interviewees each gave a strong majority of those who felt the snowboarding was spiritual for them in some way. In the UK group this was eighteen of twenty-four interviewees, in the Canadian group it was seven of nine

interviewees. As will be discussed below, these respondents saw spirituality in a number of different ways, and collecting and assessing these different perspectives were exactly the point of the research. Two logical steps are involved in considering snowboarding to be spiritual. Firstly, the statement presumes the existence of the spiritual as a potential category. Secondly, snowboarding has to be seen to fit into this category. Some snowboarders explicitly did not accept the existence of the spiritual as a category. Others accepted the existence of the spiritual, but did not accept that snowboarding fitted into this category.

What is notable from this research is that approximately 75% of the interviewees found snowboarding to be spiritual. For the snowboarder to take this step is to have a view of spirituality which can include snowboarding, and suggests that some kind of personal affirmation of the engagement between snowboarding and spirituality would also be involved. This is not to say that the individual snowboarder would necessarily have had an experience of spirituality within snowboarding, but to say that they are aware of it as a possibility.

An obvious issue would be whether this data set is skewed in some way. This issue has already been addressed in the methodology chapter, but it is worth re-emphasising that the only way in which the data set appears to vary from the typical population of snowboarders is that the snowboarders were possibly from the older fractions of the snowboarder population, and that these snowboarders also have a higher than average level of experience and commitment.

The high proportion of those affirming snowboarding as spiritual was an unexpected result of the research. What the result implies is that those without a particular view to the contrary, saw snowboarding as spiritual in some way. Why should they do so? Two

obvious possibilities present themselves. Firstly that there is something inherent in snowboarding which inclines individuals to view it as spiritual, or secondly that snowboarders are enculturated into seeing snowboarding in a particular way.

The first might suggest that there is particular source of spirituality within snowboarding. Somehow snowboarding gives people a spiritual experience or perspective that they would not otherwise get. Such a source is not particularly evident, as has been seen from the lack of overt spiritual content in the snowboard media. The second, almost converse, possibility is that snowboarders are enculturated into having a spiritual perspective on their activity. This might imply that there is an agenda in some parts of the snowboard media to spread the concept of snowboarding as spiritual. There is some evidence of this agenda in the interview held with the magazine editor in the pilot study who said that part of the role of the magazine was to be "inspirational". However, this reflects the approach of a single editor, and does not account for the wide understanding of snowboarding as spiritual. None of the other magazines show any evidence of having taken this approach.

Each of these views, put as crudely as above, seems unlikely, leaving the question as to what it is about snowboarding that gives the high accordance with the idea of snowboarding being spiritual? It is, of course, significant to ask what the content of that spirituality is. The rest of this section will be therefore be primarily concerned with examining the nature of the spiritualities of the interviewees.

9.1.2 Narrative approach

ML (UK female, 30, expert) gave evocative descriptions of a number of facets of snowboarding which demonstrate general themes of the interviews. Her comments are expressive of the whole range of the interviews, although she expresses some aspects in

a more intense way than many of the interviewees. Near the beginning of her interview she described one of her best days snowboarding.

> I could do the powder run. I could do it perfectly. There was the rhythm. I had that feeling when you float and it's completely effortless. And the scenery, and nobody had been there, we were the first people on this mountainside. This was textbook stuff that you see in the films, there was no friction, it was totally orgasmic. Three hours up for a 20 minute ride, but it was worth it.

Her description starts with a sense of her competence and the flow sensations of floating and effortless rhythm. This is all clearly experiential. She goes on to link it with the context of the nature paradigm and of a pristine environment. Her next statement shows how this was framed for her "The textbook stuff". ML is experiencing what she has hoped and expected to experience. The contextual frame existed for her *a priori*. She has entered into the experience she expected. When asked if snowboarding has any kind of spiritual dimension for her, ML replied

> Yes There's a kind of zen afterwards, such a high, even months afterwards. It's zen 'cos everything comes together. The only time I really feel focussed. I'm not a spiritual person, and riding makes me feel spiritual. It's a spiritual thing, but it's not about God. It's about the environment, the geography, the weather. I become more aware of myself. It make me feel alive. The danger, the avalanches, the storms, how dangerous and so beautiful. You have to have respect for it. When you're out there you have moments when you're not running around. Well I could sit there all day, breathing the mountain. There definitely a physical achievement. The adrenaline rush, riding over all terrain, the trees, the skill. The environment is the spiritual bit. There are pockets

during the day, and then you're on it. It goes by so quickly when you're there. There's no boundaries on the mountain, you never ride the same way twice. And there's a real silence on the mountain, It's funny it all goes quiet too, even tho' the wind is rushing. You're super-sensitive. The sensation is liberation, effortless. A zen moment – it all comes together. These are the moments I was talking about. Part of the experience is being at one with yourself. It's escaping. It's being immersed in the moment.

As has already been noted, this is an understanding of spirituality which is rooted in individual experience. God is explicitly excluded. The individual is centre-stage, but the stage itself is significant. The spirituality includes being focussed, feeling alive, being super-sensitive, being aware of one's self. It is a spirituality of individual experience. ML has a sense of being at one with herself as well as of being in the moment. All of these suggest a framing of the experience as personally integrative, as bringing wholeness and completeness. This in turn suggests a lack of that integrity, an internal alienation, in 'normal' life.

ML states that "The environment is the spiritual bit". By this she clearly means that it is the environment which enables the spiritual experiences she is having. In the terms of this thesis, ML has framed the environment in particular ways, and then has had the experiences she was anticipating. Many elements have come together to enable these moments into which ML can immerse herself. These moments continue to be a resource for her when she returns to 'normal' life.

I take photos because they remind me of being in that state. I remember how it felt. It's like meditating on it. And associating it with how I'm feeling. Trying to connect with those moments. We're very short of time. You re-run

it to sort it out. They're a liberation, rhythm, calm, control, pure. It's coming together of a mental and physical peak. In riding it happens really quickly. The aftershock takes you and you have this moment. It's a high, you're happy, you have this feeling the "I did that".

The last sentence suggests the ML is able to re-experience those moments through reflecting on her pictures, and to re-gain the emotional highs she had in those moments. Snowboarding thus has an ongoing significance for ML even when she is not doing it. Snowboarding is an explicit spiritual resource for ML than for any of the other snowboarders interviewed. A section of her interview explored the way that snowboarding helped her.

> I guess that snowboarding replaces religion for me. It make me feel confident, happy, a bit like yoga. Helps me deal with the chaos (At this point ML became tearful). It gets me out of bed in the morning. It motivates me, it brings all the elements together. It's like therapy. No greater moment for me happens in my life. It's been consistent, it's helped me through these situations. It's kind of like prozac – helps me keep the balance. To me it feels spiritual but to other people.....? Religion is about other people, but this is total indulgence.

What ML appeared to be saying was that the spiritual experiences of snowboarding were a resource for the rest of her life. Remembering them, meditating on them, enables her to feel positive. Whilst she deprecates them as "total indulgence" they are obviously fundamental to her way of being. This is the identity dimension of spirituality, that of the human spirit. To an observer this in itself might well be labelled spirituality, but ML is not making this connection.

ML's interview shows all three dimensions of spirituality at work. The experience appears to be primary, but it is itself framed and is predicated on a framing of contextual elements such as nature, and risk. The third dimension of identity is acknowledged, but not as a form of spirituality.

9.1.3 Christian snowboarder

SC (Canadian female, 20, expert)

SC identified herself as having a strong evangelical Christian faith, but her comments showed little contrast with the majority of the interviewees. She was happy to talk about snowboarding being a form of meditation, and could identify with snowboarding being a transcendent experience. SC finds herself close to God through her riding.

Snowboarding is very positive in a number of ways:

> Builds confidence in a big way. It's relaxing. Its meditative almost. Helps me to realise that my problems and my issues are just one aspect of something so much bigger. It's really cool. Everything's very clear, everything's very calm, you can just listen to music or be totally quiet. It's calming, it's like a focussed thinking on something positive and something beyond the normal thoughts.

SC is happy to describe snowboarding as spiritual because of the feelings she gets from it, and because it is something she is passionate about "You feel like your heart, you're passionate about it ...your spirit is involved. Anyone who has some sort of passion in them is closer to God than someone who has none at all." For SC her snowboarding is something which enables her to feel close to God, because of her engagement with it.

SC is connecting her religious frame and her snowboarding frame. She is finding complementary territory between them.

A major part of that spirituality is the rhythm and flow of snowboarding . SC was the only one of the interviewees to explicitly connect the term 'flow' with Csikzentmihalyi. although that connection happened outside the recorded part of the interview. Her perspective was that:

> I definitely experience flow, sometimes you get to the end of the day and you're kinda "how come it's the end of the day". You're just so involved you're not thinking anything else, just about exactly what you're doing. I think that's what makes it so cool. You have to put so much focus and energy into it that you're not thinking about anything else.

Nature is also very significant for SC, as has already been noted "Here, it's just so beautiful. I think about it all the time." SC has also thought that the mountain environment is one in which she would like to bring up children "I would want this to be a part of my kid's life, because of how happy it makes me. It's healthy, you're getting out there. You meet people who are into the same thing you are. The whole culture of it is amazing."

The snowboarding lifestyle and community are also important for SC.

> That's a huge part of it for me. Before I came out here I worried about it a lot. finding people who wanted to ride. I was worried about finding people who just wanted to party. It's been a blessing to find people who just wanted to ride. That community is so important. It's such a big part of who I am. I still dress that way when I'm off the hill. You love it.... you want it to be a part of you.

As noted in chapter 8 these identity elements are framed as highly significant but not in themselves spiritual. The explicit identity statements, and the desire to be part of a snowboarding community are both revealed here. There is a spiritual element in that SC describes the community as a "blessing", a gift from God. Thus, in itself the community is not spiritual, but it has a spiritual source. This is further evidence of an integration of SC's religious faith and her snowboarding. She frames the community as something that God has provided for her, and thus something that is good in terms of SC's religion. If the snowboarding community is good then snowboarding itself is good.

In her description of soulriding, SC says:

> I guess that means you're snowboarding with your heart, with a feeling inside of you that's more than what you do when you do your normal daily things. You feel some sort of a passion, you feel sort of ... enlightened, lifted. Lightweight. I think anyone that's passionate about snowboarding or skiing is soulriding cos that's your soul, that's where the passion comes from.

SC's use of 'passion' bears some examination. She seems to be referring not just to a feeling, although this may be the primary sense, but to a committed emotional engagement. Passion is a positive thing for her, with no puritan suspicion of such emotions. Passion is sourced in the soul. The understanding of soulriding that SC gives fits well with the other understandings which stress autotelic snowboarding. However, SC's model is unique within this research in that she uses spiritual terminology to express that understanding.

9.1.4 Summary of perspectives

Having looked at the understanding of two interviewees in detail, this section will

examine the wider perspectives of two groups of snowboarders who saw snowboarding as spiritual, those from the UK and those from Canada. This will identify both the commonalities, and the differences in how those snowboarders understood spirituality.

a) UK snowboarders

Escape seemed to be a significant understanding of spirituality within snowboarding of the interviews of the UK snowboarders, both as an escape *from* the pressures and difficulties of 'normal' life, and an escape *to* a very different mental and physical environment. This suggests that the sense of spirituality within snowboarding was framed particularly around the escape frame, although the nature frame was also significant. For CC the escape *from* particularly includes the lack of perspective which he finds inherent in city life. The escape *to* is particularly to a feeling and to spiritual moments in his riding. In EH's case the escape is simply from the rest of everyday life. Snowboarding is a precious vital experience which has been transformative in her life, and which continues to nourish her. She is clear what that experience involves and will go to great lengths to obtain it. For PB the escape is from his worries and into an environment of pure enjoyment which is both spiritual and gives him "everything" he enjoys. RD's escape is from the mental environment of his work to a place of peace and happiness. He also occasionally experiences moments of transcendence within his riding but the sense of peace is an expectation, and reason for riding. There is a clear implication that this is a most significant part of his life. RT's experience of escape is from her everyday thoughts into a solitary stillness. TD does not express snowboarding as an escape, but as a compulsion, something he has to do, and which frees him and touches him on a deep level.

All three types of spirituality are clearly visible in these perspectives. The experiences

of riding, a spirituality of identity, and the contrasted contexts of the escape and nature. It is also clear how the snowboarders constructs involve the nature and escape societal frames. Play is also present, but risk is not an overt factor. It is notable that the sense of community and lifestyle do not seem to feature strongly. The UK interviewees' ambiguity about these elements has been noted in section 8.2.2. This suggests that for these respondents the spiritual identity is more privatised than communal.

b) Canadian snowboarders

The sample of Canadian snowboarders provided varying accounts of what they get out of snowboarding. The meditative aspect to snowboarding was significant for all of them, but other aspects, like the lifestyle and the natural environment, were also important. For AC the benefits identified in the ten elements were significant, but they did not get to the heart of why he rides. For some reason or group of reasons, he just loves to snowboard. KE was able to identify escape and flow as being particularly significant for him, whilst for PO the meditative aspect had become his main reason to ride.

9.2 Snowboarding as not 'spiritual'

Whilst the majority of the interviewees felt that snowboarding was spiritual for them, there were a number of snowboarders who did not experience snowboarding as having some spiritual content. Just as the snowboarders who have transcendent experience find a frame which enables the experience, so these groups have a frame which competes with the framing of snowboarding as being spiritual. The most obvious is a frame in which spirituality does not exist as a reality for the person involved. One interviewee (DM UK male, 25, expert) said simply "I'm not a spiritual person". Others didn't know what spirituality might mean in this context. It was notable that none of the interviewees

dismissed the spiritual as a category, rather their response was personal. Spirituality was understood as an individual choice or characteristic that one might make or have.

Other interviewees accepted the possibility of the spiritual but not within this context. Two particular competing frames emerged. These two frames were those of 'techriders', and those of conservative Christians.

9.2.1 Techriding

IF (UK male, 30, expert)

IF is someone who likes to ride in a "very aggressive way", there is a "real adrenaline flow" to his riding. This is one of the characteristic forms of techrider, someone who is riding with a focus on the techniques they are using. IF can see the possibility of spirituality, but it is not his frame of snowboarding. IF frames the snowboarding environment in a unique way. "The mountain is like a motorway with no speed limits. No-one can tell you what to do, there's no bosses" The freedom offered by the mountain is an opportunity to go as fast as possible. This is an escape and a release for IF. However he does also value the elements of the nature frame. Snowboarding has "given me a real appreciation of nature, wildlife and weather." Here two different frames of the environment are operating in parallel.

IF is also a techrider in his enjoyment of teaching others to ride "I also love teaching. On a purely practical basis, I spend all my holidays and more out snowboarding. But I also enjoy teaching other people to ride. There's a great sense of achievement in helping someone to ride." At no point did IF suggest that he had taken a course or had qualified to teach. This teaching is primarily about IF's achievement and IF's needs, rather than the achievements of those he is teaching.

Snowboarding is very important for him and if he could not ride "then it would be the end of the world for me", but he believes it is important to "remember that it is only a hobby". As I have suggested elsewhere, the dichotomy shows the hobby frame to be disingenuous. Snowboarding is more than merely an insignificant pass-time, but IF struggles to acknowledge this.

Snowboarding is not spiritual, but is about a feeling of being contented, particularly if there is an opportunity to be quiet and still in the mountain environment.

> I get a real sense of contentment from riding. Not just when I've done a run, but at the top before I ride. It's about being there, appreciating where you are, the silence, the beauty of the snow, everything. Snow makes everything look perfect. It's a kid thing I guess, white is pure, it looks like a big cake with icing on it.

For IF the mountain is framed as that 'other' environment, pure and unsullied, beautiful, silent. IF's contentment arises from being in and engaging with this environment.

In an interesting parallel with ML (section 9.1.2), IF takes photographs to look back at and remember the moments of contentment.

> If I could sit for a couple of hours in the snow then that would be spiritual I guess, being with nature, but only if I was on my own and I could get that peacefulness. Mostly for me it's not spiritual but contented, just the feeling that "This is as good as it gets". I take a lot of photos so I've got stuff to look back at, and they're 90% landscapes. I've got plenty of moments to remember.

The photos are of the views that IF enjoys before he starts on his aggressive journeys

down the mountain. His perspective on those views seems to include a significant element of achievement, the idea that his experience was "as good as it gets". Superficially this is a much less emotional engagement with the experience than ML's reflection on her photographs. However, it demonstrates the same need to find a contented point in what is, by implication, a discontented home environment.

IF connects his understanding of spirituality within snowboarding onto his understanding of soulriding:

> Yeah, that's the guys who choose to live in the mountains, either they're born there or they move there, and they really know the mountains. They're content to be in the mountains. The contentment, that is the soul part, just being content with where you are, they've found what they're looking for.

This re-enforces the idea that a snowboarder's understanding of spirituality within snowboarding will be reflected in their understanding of soulriding.

IF has framed his snowboarding and the natural environment as not being spiritual. His experiences seem similar to those of ML, but what is framed as spiritual for ML is framed as contentment for IF. IF's comments support the significance of elements of snowboarding from the other dimensions of spirituality, but he does not frame them as spiritual. In particular he takes on the nature and escape frames from the context dimension. He also values snowboarding as a major part of his identity. Thus IF demonstrates that it is the framing of elements as spiritual which is significant, rather than any inherent quality of the elements.

9.2.2 Christian snowboarders

KPi (Canadian male, 30, expert)

One notable feature of the Canadian interviews was a young married couple (KP, KPi) who self-identified as committed Christians, and who were from a conservative church background. Each of their comments allowed no space for the experiential elements of snowboarding to have any spiritual validity. Both of them were members of "Snowboarders for Christ", a network of Christians committed to using snowboarding as a means to evangelise.

I married a girl that's interested in the same thing. I live in a spot that I can go anywhere. I picked a job for the winter so that I can ride every day. I get 100 to 125 days a year. Plus my other job is as a paramedic. I look at snowboarding a bit different to other people. I'm a devout Christian, I use it as a means to meet other people, as a ministry. It's a big thing for me. Obviously, God being the most important person to me, it's not by chance that I take 100-120 days to do this. I think that He's the kind of God that says, 'you love doing this so I'm going to bless you in this'. I guess my faith has directly influenced my snowboarding because I've been able to use my faith to talk to people. Snowboarding is the connection I make with them.

KPi's highest perspective on snowboarding is that it is "a means...a ministry". He would appear to be justifying, both to himself and to others, the large amount of time he wants to spend snowboarding. Furthermore he uses the term bless to describe the opportunity he has to snowboard. SC used the term bless in her comments about finding a snowboarding community, but here there is an ambiguity. KPi seems to associate the blessing with ministry within snowboarding, rather than with snowboarding on its own. He does not say himself that he loves snowboarding, rather he puts those words in God's mouth.

Snowboarding is not spiritual in itself for KPi, although he is aware that others find it spiritual.

> That's not how it is for me. I know people say that, but for me it's just something to do. It's like playing a guitar. I love going out there. I love pushing myself, trying to learn new tricks. I love the people I get to hang out with and do this with. It's addictive, the more you do it the more you want to do it. It's like a drug. And I get to use it as my ministry. I think too many people expect people to come to the church, I think we should leave the church and go to them.

There is a tension expressed here between whether this is "Just something to do" or whether KPi loves "going out there". This is also evident in his relationship with people. KPi claims to "love the people I get to hang out with", which may be all snowboarders or it maybe those who share his Christian understanding. Certainly KPi also experiences a degree of alienation from those in the resort "I know everybody, I'm part of it. But I wouldn't say I fit in. My beliefs are so different."

It is significant that KPi is one of the few respondents not to identify with the idea of rhythm and flow, simply dismissing it in the interview. He does however find both play and nature to be significant for him. He views what he is doing on the mountains as play "Definitely – I come out here and play all the time". He accepts and values the nature frame in an unexceptional way. "The mountains are beautiful. Its something that I hope I never take for granted."

He is dismissive of the idea of soulriders, describing them as a "Hippy – somebody that's lost, new age. Almost using that as their idol. You can't snowboard to find

yourself." The last statement displays a revealing tension. In saying that "you can't snowboard to find yourself," KPi is evidently using an existent concept from within snowboard culture. The fact that this concept has existed strongly enough for KPi to react to it, suggests that he is aware of people who believe that they *might* snowboard to find themselves. Thus KPi's dismissal affirms the existence of the concept he rejects.

KPi demonstrates a religious frame which competes with that of snowboarding as spiritual. For KPi, spirituality involves a particular understanding of God. He accepts some elements of snowboarding as being significant, but frames them with non-spiritual frames.

9.2.3 "Snowboarders for Christ" and spirituality in snowboarding

The analysis of the understanding of SC and KPI in sections 9.1.3 and 9.2.2 suggests and interesting difference. Both SC and KPi are members of Snowboarders for Christ (SfC) and of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, (C&MA). However, they have different views on the possibility of spiritual experience within snowboarding. This section will examine this difference.

In order to understand the difference it is necessary to locate the theological background of SfC and the C&MA. SfC describes itself as "a network of Christian riders who love God and love to shred. Collectively we are trying to be a bridge that connects snowboarding culture to Jesus" (http://sfc-usa.com/about-us). SfC claims a presence ("chapters") in the USA, Canada, the UK, Switzerland, New Zealand and Japan. Their aim is explicitly evangelistic: "We dream of a snowriding culture that revolves around Jesus Christ." (http://sfc-usa.com/about-us). SfC has a conservative neo-calvinist theology including substitutionary atonement and corrupt humanity (www.sfc-canada.com/about-sfc/faith). This view rules out any valid spiritual experience except

through "God's faithful saved people" (www.sfc-canada.com/about-sfc/faith).

The C&MA is also a conservative Christian denomination, based in the USA and Canada. Its theology is less Calvinist and more influenced by pentecostal theology (http://cmalliance.ca/beliefsc 1421.php). The C&MA is a US and Canadian denomination. As it's title suggests, the C&MA is highly focused on evangelism. Thus the differences between the theology of the two organisations would not be significant at a grass-roots level.

KPi's position reflects that of both the SfC and the C&MA. His role is to evangelise in a culture where no valid spiritual experience can be found. SC's position is more that of contemporary culture. It was noted that her opinions differed little from the majority of the interviewees. This would suggest that SC is less strongly enculturated into the SfC/C&MA theology than KPi. Her primary framework includes a more general understanding of Christianity and of God's presence in the world than KPi's. SC is more comfortable in snowboard culture than KPi, although she does experience tensions. Section 9.2.2 noted KPi's alienation from snowboard culture. This echoes a more general discomfort with secular culture implicit in the theological anthropology noted above.

The range of opinions would not be surprising in an Anglican context, where a width of theology has always been a facet of the Church. The position of church leader as 'expert' does not mean that the theological positions of the leader will necessarily be accepted and followed by the congregation. These aspects are slightly more surprising in a conservative theological context where the assumption is that 'truth' is being conveyed. However some contemporary commentators are noting that members of even conservative churches are affected by a variety of theological understandings (for

example McLaren, 2004, p64). Furthermore this highlights the issues of methodological agnosticism which have accompanied this research for me as an Anglican priest and researcher. It is frequently my position, both as a priest and as a researcher, not to criticise a position even though I might not just disagree with it but also have reservations about the conceptual integrity of the position. The differences between the theological position of KPi and the cultural position of SC is one which I find myself crossing within my own experience. My theological perspective and my cultural awareness of the ways that spirituality is seen are sometimes divergent. The frame model is helpful in this, as in different contexts I am able to consciously adopt frames on the nature of spirituality which I judge to be appropriate.

9.3 Soulriding

Soulriding is the key native term in the research, and the responses to the question on this showed the most diversity of any topic studied in this research. Significantly there was a high correlation between those who dismissed spirituality in snowboarding and those who had a negative attitude to soulriding. There were a large number of both the UK and Canadian responses which focussed on the idea of soulriding as being about having a passion for the sport, and doing it for its own sake. In addition there were over 10 other approaches to what soulriding means, some of which had a degree of overlap. These included viewing soulriders as hippies (KPi), believing that in soulriding there was a 'purifying notion' (RT), seeing soulriding as meditation (JA), considering it a 'roots' snowboarding for older snowboarders (TW), and thinking it is about riding powder (JA). Many of these were the response of only one interviewee. Most were supportive of the idea of soulriding, but some were very unsympathetic.

9.3.1 Negative understandings of 'soulriding'

The two snowboarders who actively dismissed the term 'soulriding' were Canadian snowboarders (KPi and RS) who had no use for the term spiritual within snowboarding and who were quite aggressive in their own riding. They both associated soulriding with a type of snowboarder who smoked cannabis and who took a laid back approach to their riding. Thus the soulriders were, for these respondents, an 'other' group within snowboarding, and one with whom they felt no empathy. Although this is a small number of respondents, the fact that they both had the same concept of soulriders gives a general validity to the perspective.

In snowboarding, just as in other cultures, there are a number of sub-sets (or sub-cultures), associated with different styles of riding or approaches to riding. Snowboarders may focus on freestyle or freeride snowboarding. They may be using riding to challenge themselves physically or mentally, or to comfort themselves or escape. The snowboarders who dismiss soulriding seem to see it as a "lesser" form of riding than their approach, soulriders might take the contrary view. Those who dismiss soulriding may also be including other aspects into their frame of soulriding, for example, the connection with taking drugs. None of the snowboarders I interviewed who associated positively with soulriding made any connection with taking cannabis. In fact they seemed to suggest that this was an activity which would preclude the use of such substances, at least while they were riding.

Those who dismissed the soulriders seemed to be perpetuating a crude stereotype which did not apply to any actual snowboarders. This might in turn suggest that the soulriders presented some form of threat or competition to the anti-soulriders. As suggested above in the analysis of KPi's comments, for the strong evangelical Christian, the threat

may be that the 'soulriders' were finding some kind of spiritual fulfilment which undermined or opposed his beliefs.

9.3.2 Non-existent understandings of 'soulriding'

There were a number of respondents who had not heard the term and for whom it meant nothing. These were all British snowboarders, reflecting a difference in the culture between the UK and Canada. Some of these were prepared to guess at what it might mean. Their guess appeared to be informed by their understanding of snowboarding and snowboard culture. The guesses they made were all positive in tone, associating soulriding with aspects of snowboarding which they would aspire to. It was not always clear which of the snowboarders who responded positively to the term were responding from their own understanding and which were responding from a wider use of the term. This is, of course, the nature of a less well-used term within popular culture (as opposed to a technical or archaic term). The meaning is open to a variety of uses and may or may not consolidate around a few of those uses. Thus the snowboarders interviewed were to a some extent explaining their expectations of what the term meant, of how they would use it should they choose to do so.

9.3.3 Positive understandings of 'soulriding'

For other interviewees soulriding was a highly aspirational term. For some this expressed a significant aspect of why they ride. JA said:

> For me it's being with the mountain, almost like meditation, while moving really fast on a piece of board. You let go and go with it. It's more about an internal feeling that I can't really explain. I don't think I could express it. It's relaxing, eye opening. It's almost an instinct that comes to life when everything comes together. It's almost dissolving with nature. People get it

in all kinds of different ways. It's a way of expressing myself and getting in touch with what I feel and believe without too much complication.

This description would accord well with descriptions of 'flow' as it includes engagement, centring of attention, loss of ego, control and the autotelic nature. This is a very experiential approach which reveals JA's aspirations for snowboarding. For others soulriding is the simplest, purest form of riding as MA says

> I guess riding and just enjoying the moment for yourself and the feeling of at one or sense of peace. Things can become a lot clearer when you're snowboarding, or when you're doing something like that. There's a lot of people out there who are doing other things that does exactly the same thing for them. You're not thinking about the things you've got away from. It makes things seem a lot more simple. For me.

Thus snowboarding is a way of getting away from the clutter and confusion of normal life. There is a sense in which this enables the problems and issues one has to be resolved in the background whilst one is riding. On return from snowboarding one is better able to deal with the issues, because they have been clarified whilst riding.

RH ties this simplicity in with the theme of 'old guys'.

> It's being at one with yourself. Just doing it for yourself, riding from your heart. Riding because you want to. It's something I want to do myself. You see these old guys with the bright multicoloured trousers that they've had since 1982, and the board they've had since 1982. that's soulriding to me. The people I look up to never bothered with competitions and just go riding. It's the way it should be.

There is a slightly ambiguous use of the term to refer to the 'old guy's' who first started snowboarding. This may combine with some of the other positive elements of the sport mentioned above. Soulriding may thus become a synonym for retro-style snowboarding. Mostly this is a positive reference "The way it should be". but there is a slight degree of mockery, and certainly of alienation. Here then, the soulriders are a 'them' group, but not a threatening one.

RD was able to give soulriding a wide context, to describe it as the essence of snowboarding, and to hold it as an high aspiration.

> It's a surfing expression. Free riding is free riding – it's associated with peace and the balance you feel in your soul. You're not riding alone, but you're more in tune with what you're feeling. It would encompass a lot of things we've already spoken about like respecting the environment, other snowboarders other users of the snow. That's soulriding, that's the essence of snowboarding. I'd be stoked to be described as a soulrider. I'd think soulriding is something you could aspire to in much the way that monks meditate.

A number of snowboarders understood soulriding as a pure attitude to the sport. This was expressed as "having a passion for the sport" (SC), as doing it "for the love of the sport"(WA), or as doing it "with your heart" (RH). In contrast to the respondents in section 9.3.1. this group of snowboarders are ascribing good characteristics to soulriding, and are contrasting it with those who are riding with some ulterior motive. In this it seemed that the interviewees were including themselves in the 'soulrider' category, and using the term to exclude those who were snowboarding because it was 'cool' or because they wanted to impress others by doing tricks or in some other way.

Crudely put then, 'soulriding' means 'good' snowboarding as opposed to 'bad' snowboarding, 'pure' snowboarding as opposed adulterated snowboarding, and maybe 'our' snowboarding as opposed to 'their' snowboarding.

Some snowboarders associate 'soulriding' with using snowboarding as a spiritual exercise of some form, which enables them to reach a particular mental state. This is particularly clear in the instance of the snowboarder who connected with a form of meditation through riding, however, other snowboarders reported similar experiences. Snowboarding is generally not the only activity which can enable those concerned to achieve this state, but it may be a key activity. For some snowboarding enables them to access the desired state most easily, for others it gives a particular quality to the state.

Another approach was to understand 'soulriding' as a very aspirational term. In this, soulriding was the ultimate form of snowboarding, maybe taking elements from the understandings above, but combining them with a sense that the degree of purity required was too much to be achievable, and the spiritual state involved would always be a theoretical possibility. Soulriding then is a form of the sport which is 'out there' for most snowboarders, maybe enjoyed by the 'blessed few', but not for the ordinary. In this it fits into the image of the sport as enjoyed by the top professionals, riding perfect snow and amazing mountains in ideal conditions.

9.4 The meaning of 'soulriding'

The variety of responses to the core term of the research, soulriding, could perhaps have been predicted. As was made clear in the section on snowboarding in chapter 1, the term 'soulriding' is not in frequent use. A number of the snowboarders in the research had not encountered the term at all. Even for those who had heard the term, there was not clear single understanding of it. So soulriding is not clearly defined. It means a

number of different things to a number of different people, and to some it means nothing at all. These different understandings include the concepts of attitude to snowboarding, the experience of snowboarding, and the expectation of a form of spirituality associated with snowboarding. Many of the responses suggested that the interviewee had a number of overlapping understandings of soulriding.

What is particularly interesting is the way that those who felt they had some understanding of the term were polarised by it into 'pro' and 'anti' camps. It was notable that the interviewees who were dismissive of soulriding were also those who were dismissive of the possibility of spirituality within snowboarding. The term 'soulriding' seemed to be a touchstone of a set of attitudes towards snowboarding and what it was about. In this sense 'soulriding' is about the essence, the soul, of snowboarding.

9.5 'Soulriding' and 'spirituality' conclusions

A key issue identified by this research is the high percentage of individuals who believe that snowboarding has a spiritual dimension. This suggests that there is something in snowboard culture or the snowboarding experience which evokes this perception. This is not the same as suggesting there is an agenda at work, merely that some element, or combination of elements creates this possibility for snowboarders.

In the introduction to this chapter I suggested that there were potentially two reasons why the high proportion of snowboarders understood there to be something 'spiritual' about snowboarding. Either there is something inherent in snowboarding itself, or there is something in the culture which snowboarders are socialised into and which inclines them to perceive snowboarding as spiritual. The evidence of the interviews is that both of these are present. The experience, which many interviewees associated with

concepts of flow, of being in 'the zone', and of 'moments', is framed by those interviewees as spiritual experience and was significant for them. The cultural factor which inclines snowboarders to perceive snowboarding as spiritual is provided by the escape and nature frames, part of the mental context of snowboarding for almost all the snowboarders interviewed. These frames are not just part of snowboard specific culture, but also of general western culture. However, identity spirituality did not appear to be significant for the interviewees. Whilst many interviewees identified the significance of snowboarding as an identity, and for some it is a form of therapy, there was no explicit link made to spirituality.

Individuals appeared to relate to the issue of spirituality in two ways. For most of the snowboarders there was an element of spirituality present in snowboarding which they could relate to. These elements were in a wide range of varieties, but they were present . Sometimes snowboarders would shy away from the actual word 'spiritual', but would substitute another similar word, for example 'contemplative' or 'meditation'. This suggests that there may be some concern about the use of the term 'spiritual' for these snowboarders, whereas the similar word did not have those connotations. Secondly there were those who accepted that spirituality was a possibility, but who said "I'm not spiritual". For this group spirituality was a characteristic of a person, maybe as concrete as the colour of one's eyes, maybe a character trait like interest in sport. Whatever it was they did not feel that they had it, and they were not interested in spirituality as a result. This fits with Bruce's diagnosis (2002, p240) of the likely future of religion as meeting not opposition, but apathy, the 'spiritual gene' dying out in modern societies. However, this voice was the minority opinion within the interviews.

Some interviewees wanted to make a clear distinction between the term 'spiritual'.

which they seemed to see as acceptable, and the term 'religious' which they did not. Even where this distinction was not made explicit, it seemed to be implied. In this there seems to be an agreement with those like Tacey (2004, p38) who see spirituality as the new superset, and religion as the subset. This was taken to a further level by some of the interviewees who wanted to exclude God from their understanding of the spiritual. This fits with some of the definitions of spirituality discussed in chapter 2. Somehow the term spirituality seems to continue to be seen as valuable even though religion has negative connotations and God is a very uncertain term.

One interesting contrast in this context is between the two Canadian Christians who dismissed the idea of spirituality outside of their religious context, and other Christians who were perfectly happy to allow spirituality outside religion. This may reflect a difference between those whose religion has tightly defined dogma and those with more openness to other approaches.

The contrasts between the cultures of 'soulriders' and 'techriders' have been mentioned throughout this thesis. They suggest that two styles of snowboarders, whilst they are sharing the same activity and physical environment, frame the activity and the environment in slightly different ways. The evidence on how snowboarders relate to nature, and other context elements, suggests that soulriders share a frame of snowboarding which facilitates an incorporation of the spiritual. To caricature this difference: the soulrider is flowing with the mountain in a spiritual activity, whilst the techrider is conquering the mountain in an athletic activity.

The section on spirituality demonstrated from the narrative approach to the four interviews how all three of the dimensions of spirituality were present, but how the interviewees were only aware of experience elements as explicitly spiritual. The context

elements were present, particularly the nature and escape frame, and these contributed to the possibility of spiritual experience. The identity dimension was significant for the interviewees, but was not framed as spiritual.

The search for a single understanding of 'soulriding' has revealed that the term is too rarely used for it to have a coherent meaning. It is clear that it is associated with a different approach to riding which often includes an explicitly spiritual element. Soulriding frames snowboarding as a form of spiritual experience, but also as riding for one's self and riding to find peace and balance in the whole of life. The change in emphasis between the understandings of spirituality in their own experience, and the understandings of soulriding seem to reflect a shift from the personal to the more general, abstract and aspirational.

Chapter 10 "It's special but is it spiritual?"

The issue at the heart of this research can be expressed in the question "It's special. but is it spiritual?", from the interview with WA. What is it that makes snowboarding a spiritual experience for many of its participants? If it is spiritual for some, why is it not spiritual for others? This thesis has developed and explored a model of spirituality which helps to understand the answers to these questions. This model identifies the significance of context as the third dimension of spirituality alongside experience and identity. The model locates spirituality as a subjective frame of reality. In this chapter I will first summarise the argument I have made in this thesis, and consider whether the model is effective. I will comment on issues of constructionism and circularity within the thesis. I will then clarify how this thesis contributes to the sociology of religion. Finally, I will suggest areas of further research on the model of spirituality I have presented here.

10.1 Summary of the thesis

My research has examined the snowboarding concept 'Soulriding', to discover more about contemporary understandings of spirituality. The thesis started by introducing the three dimensions of spirituality (experience, identity and context), and the frame model of spirituality. It then situated the term soulriding in snowboarding culture. Next it examined some of the definitions of spirituality in a variety of disciplines. Classic accounts from the sociology of religion were used to identify the significance of context for spiritual experience. The dimensions were then developed using the paradigm of constructionism developed by Berger and Luckmann and used a term from Goffman to give an understanding of spirituality as a frame of reality. Elements of spirituality within each of the three dimensions were suggested within snowboarding. This

theoretical model was explored in the understandings which experienced snowboarders have of their sport. The approach was that of interviewing snowboarders to find their understandings of soulriding. The results of these interviews were compared with the theoretical model in the four analytical chapters. Each of these stages will now be reviewed in more depth, and this part will conclude by considering whether the model is effective.

10.1.1 Why 'soulriding'?

Snowboarding is a relatively new sport with an increasing participation and some counter-cultural or sub-cultural association. Whilst the activity takes place in the same environment as skiing, snowboarding has a its own culture and practice. This culture may be observed in assorted types of media, and products, and the associated cultural elements of norms, symbols, values, and language. Snowboarding has become not just a sport, but a "lifestyle" activity, one in which the products and "codes of behaviour" are as significant as the activity, and one can live life through one's sport (Mintel, 2001, p7). This places snowboarding in a small group of "lifestyle" sports, such as skateboarding and surfing.

Soulriding is a little used, but demonstrably extent, term within the vocabulary of snowboarding. The etymology of the term might suggest that there is some spiritual referent within it and it was the discovery of this term which was a particular prompt to investigate the connection between snowboarding and spirituality. As a little used term, there is no exact understanding of what the word means. Part of the aim of this research was to discover the range of meanings and to see what light this might shed on the understanding of spirituality within snowboarding and in wider culture.

Snowboarding is a particularly appropriate environment to study spirituality. It is not

obviously a spiritual context. It does not have any links with organised religion. and thus forms a good location for the study of the possibility of spirituality outside religion. yet there are features, including the term 'soulriding'. which might point to a form of spirituality existing.

10.1.2 The nature of spirituality

The research is located in the debate about the nature of the term 'spirituality' within the sociology of religion. Whilst other disciplines have been working with the term spirituality for a number of years and have established working definitions, sociology of religion is engaged in a debate about how the term should be understood and its significance for the discipline. The study of spirituality within sociology of religion fits into a wider discourse around the topic of secularisation, and the future of religion. which has been the major theme of sociology of religion since its inception.

Consideration of two disciplines revealed some useful understandings. Within education there is a range of understandings of spirituality which generally focus on the psyche of every human being. This is in sharp contrast with the religious studies definition where spirituality is understood to be concerned with prayer and the life of faith. These understandings can be characterised by the dimensions of either experience or identity spirituality. Identity spirituality refers to spirituality as the essence of being human, whilst experience spirituality refers to a connection with some 'other'. whether that is the divine, or the greater conciousness, or the ecosystem of which we are a part. Identity spirituality is generally understood as a universal spirituality. whereas experience spirituality is an individual, or communal. choice.

Within each disciplines there is a different history of the use of the term which is in itself revealing. The different disciplines have clearly defined the term spirituality in a

way that fits their agenda. The difficulty with this is that the understanding from within the discipline is then presumed by members of that discipline to be a universal understanding, rather than a technical and restricted understanding. The education definition is shaped to include all students, irrespective of the personal beliefs of the individual. The religious studies definition is shaped to restrict the study of spirituality to that academy. Thus the definitions in use by the different academies are shaped by the agenda of each academy, and serve the interests of that academy. The education definition gives teachers a model for engaging with their role as social and moral educators in a pluralist environment. The religious studies definition functions as academic protectionism, denoting spirituality as the exclusive field of study for religious studies academics. A more recent area of development has been in sport and spirituality. Religion and spirituality are seen as resources to enable athletes to better achievements, thus locating the spirituality within the identity dimension. The growing work on flow locates the spiritual experience within the experience dimension.

There is an associated debate within the sociology of religion about the relationship between spirituality and religion. This is of course partially a debate about the meaning of each of these terms, both of whose meanings have been in transition over at least the last fifty years. This debate is focussed around the popular perception that one can be 'spiritual but not religious'. Sociology of religion has generally assumed, with religious studies, that spirituality is a sub-set of religion, but there is evidence that spirituality may be becoming the superset, or the complement, or a substitute term for religion.

10.1.3 Context and the frame model of spirituality

A consideration of three formative analyses of religion within the social sciences, those of James, Durkheim, and Weber, showed a focus on spiritual experience, and a

disregard for the significance of context. James' work, although that of a social psychologist, was formative for all of the approaches to religion of his time. His particular genius was to focus on religion in the subject, the believer. rather than the object, the divine. He looked to the distinctive quality of religion and found the mystic state of conciousness, which would correspond to a spirituality of experience. Durkheim picked up this theme in his work, and suggested that the "collective effervescence" experience was basis for the religious impulse. However. whilst Durkheim includes accounts of the experience in his work, he does not give the context for the experiences any significance. The contexts are transparently artificial, both through the use of man-made objects, and through the use of facets of the environment. like holding rituals through the night. Weber also focuses on ecstatic experience as the root of religion, and particularly includes both drugs and music as prompter for this experience. Of course, Durkheim and Weber take their theses in different directions from these common starting points.

The premise of this thesis is that the significance of context is overlooked in these theories. Context is not a neutral part of an objective reality, but is a constructed part of a subjective reality. James, Durkheim and Weber argue that religion emerges *a posteriori* from certain experiences. But the contexts are constructed *a priori* in order to provide a religious experience. A religious expectation is required for the experiences to have a religious significance. In other words religion is *a priori* to experience. as Otto (1923) suggests.

This understanding finds a theoretical background in the social constructionism of Berger and Luckmann, and a terminology in Goffman's "Frame". In this understanding. spirituality is a perspective, a set of lenses with which reality is viewed. such that it is

itself a frame, a subjective reality. The spiritual is not located in what we see, it is how we see. It is part of a number of frames which humans, particular modern, urban humans use. This is an extension of Simmel's understanding that "Religiousness is the fundamental quality of being of the religious soul" (1997/1911, p10).

Frame spirituality relates to both experience and identity spirituality. As I have suggested above, frames form the basis on which the experiences may be interpreted as being spiritual or religious. Frame also forms the basis for seeing the "essence of being human" as spiritual. This is more than a 'simple' contextualisation. This is the creation of reality. If constructionism can be defined as the reality construction activity of humans (section 3.3.1), then frame spirituality is a significant part of that constructionism.

The three dimensions of spirituality arise from this analysis. These three dimensions are context, experience and identity. The three dimensions may not all be explicitly present in any particular understanding or definition of spirituality. Each of the dimensions or the elements within them elements may or may not be framed as spiritual by an individual. Context is the external dimension, and includes those elements or aspects of spirituality which appear have an objective existence. This thesis has considered nature, freedom, risk, and play as contexts. Whilst the existence of the elements may appear to be objective, this thesis has also shown how the elements are socially and individually constructed. Identity is the internal dimension of spirituality. It involves the shaping of one's sense of self. Here, community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose have been considered. Experience is the interface between the internal and the external. It is the dimension which is most commonly perceived as spiritual.

In the main body of this thesis, background theory was suggested for many of the ten

elements. However, in this final chapter, the theoretical perspectives will be reviewed alongside the interview areas to which they relate, in sections 10.1.5 6/7/8.

10.1.4 Interpreting snowboarding as spiritual

The central question for this research started by being a general investigation into the relationship between snowboarding and spirituality and evolved in the light of the initial research into the following: "What is the spiritual content of 'soulriding' within snowboarding and how significant is 'framing' for this spirituality?" It is clear that this assumes both that snowboarding has a spiritual content, and that 'framing' describes a potential approach to this spirituality.

The research is located within a constructionist ontology because the theoretical structure of 'framing' is constructionist. Generally constructionism can be contrasted with realism, and there is an ongoing debate between proponents of these two views within the sciences. I have made the argument that the nature of this subject places it clearly in the scope of a constructionist approach. I have further argued that whilst there is a further debate on the actor/structure, constructivist/constructionist divide, this research clearly involves significant input from actors.

In order to gain understanding of an individual's subjective reality, the most effective way is to ask them. Such research is termed interpretivist, and a number of specialised areas exist within this general field. However, the generalised approach has an academic pedigree, and it is this general interpretivist approach that was adopted here. The research then is premised on a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology.

A pilot study was undertaken to establish both the content and structure of the method

for the main study. By examining the various snowboard media it was possible to see that the term soulriding had a small, but distinct presence. It was also clear that overt references to spirituality were few within the mainstream media, although some associations were made. Unstructured interviews with three diverse sources helped the clarify the elements of spirituality which might be present within snowboarding.

The ten elements of spirituality which were derived through the pilot study formed the basis for semi-structured interviews with around thirty snowboarders from both the UK and Canada. The ten elements identified were, risk, freedom and escape, community, lifestyle, play, rhythm and flow, nature, peace, transcendence, and meaning and purpose. These ten were chosen to incorporate features of snowboarding which might also be construed as spiritual. For analytical purposes they were divided into three sections which reflected the three dimensions of spirituality identified above. The first group were those elements which provided a context for snowboarding. These were the context spirituality elements and in this type were nature, escape, risk, and play. Each of these elements emerged in the interviews as part of the mental approach of the snowboarders to their snowboarding. The second type was elements which consisted of some immediate spiritual experience whilst the snowboarder was snowboarding. These elements were flow, peace, and transcendence. The third type was elements which in some way contributed to identity, the elements concerned being community, lifestyle, and meaning and purpose. Whilst the pattern of responses to the second and third groups was varied, the pattern of responses to the first was highly positive, almost every snowboarder identified all of the elements in the context group as being significant for their riding.

10.1.5 The context dimension of spirituality

The central argument of this thesis is that for an element of experience or identity to be perceived as being spiritual, requires that element to first be constructed as spiritual. Spirituality, by this argument is an *a priori*, not an *a posteriori* aspect of those elements. Thus the context chapter included a number of elements which were demonstrably giving context to the other elements of snowboarding studied. Some of these elements, nature and escape, appeared superficially to be objective contexts, but can be shown to be subjective. The other two elements, play and risk, might be conceived as experiences, but will be shown to be approaches to experience, in other words mental contexts. It was notable that these four elements were highly significant for almost all of the interviewees.

In order to establish this it was necessary to show how context is constructed rather than objective. This is most clearly shown in the case of nature. MacFarlane's (2003)research shows the changes in the way that nature is perceived and thus of the construction of nature. For almost all of the subjects, nature was a significant and positive part of their snowboarding. The perceptions attached to this were repeated frequently through the interviews, and this suggested that a particular social frame was being rehearsed by the interviewees. I have termed this the 'nature frame'. It is not unambiguous but is a clear reflection of a societal discourse, and of the positive values attached to 'nature'. There were some snowboarders who viewed the resort environment not as part of the natural environment but rather as an incursion on the natural environment, however, this is still to evoke the 'nature frame'.

One element was used to express a pair of related ideas, those of freedom and escape. Freedom referred to the opportunities created by snowboarding, escape referred to the

move away from the urban environment. The concepts were hard to distinguish within the interviews as interviewees would move from one to the other. The two are connected theoretically in conceptions of places that are "set-apart" where different rules apply. Again these elements were almost universally felt to be significant, and again, they seemed to tap into a particular frame which I termed the 'escape frame'.

The element of risk was one the interviewees felt more ambivalent towards. It was part of the snowboarding experience that the snowboarders had from the day they started, but it was not a positive part for most snowboarders, at least not at a conscious level. Most snowboarders were dealing with the risk element by suggesting that they were managing it effectively. This reflects part of the nature of risk as a social construct. Some welcomed risk as part of their experience, others expressed reservations about it. Giddens' conception of risk as a colonisation of the future is significant in seeing that even negative conceptions of risk may well be welcomed. They may enable snowboarders to feel that they are not victims of random events, but are active in deciding where and how they face risk.

Play was the final context element, and was conceived as a very positive factor in their riding. Again, this connected with the escape frame. Snowboarding enabled the interviewees to do something they were "not allowed" to do in the normal world, and this opportunity was significant to them. Play was theorised first through examining a variety of definitions, and then particularly as an educational activity and as a central feature of humanity in Huizinga's conception.

10.1.6 The experience dimension of spirituality

Spirituality experiences are those which have the most obvious connections to religion. In particular those experiences which can be termed transcendent. It was discussion

about this type of experience on an email group which had been a prompt to this research. However, it was not expected that many interviewees would respond positively to this element as being significant for them in their riding. Thus transcendence was one of the last elements to be discussed in order that the interview might build to that point. It was surprising that a significant proportion of snowboarders described transcendence as significant, and for at least one snowboarder, these experiences were a main reason why they snowboard.

A less intense and more common experience was of having a sense of peace whilst snowboarding. This came in four distinct forms. For some there was a sense of peace simply because they were in the mountains. Although this was clearly an experience it also fitted into the analysis of nature as a frame. The sense of peace with nature explicitly combined these two. Again it was suggested, this time as part of the pilot study, that the connection with nature and the mountains was the reason that some people were involved in snowboarding. The other senses of peace were more connected with the escape frame. The sense of peace individuals had with themselves seemed to be based particularly on getting away, both physically and mentally, from the pressures of their everyday lives, whether the life was in the city or in the mountain resort. This escape could be transformative and therapeutic for some.

The flow experience was the most commonly valued element in this section. This was described in the interview question as being about rhythm and flow, but the responses of the interviewees clearly evoked the flow experience as expounded by Csikszentmihalyi. Each of Csikszentmihalyi's elements could be identified in the interviewees responses. This then provided the most directly experiential of the three experience elements. Of course this is not to say that the experience is unmediated.

Elements such as feeling 'in control' again suggest a contrast which fits with the escape frame.

Associated with the experiences were two native terms, 'moments'. and 'in the zone'. Both of these occurred repeatedly within the interviews, not as terms suggested by the interviewer, but as terms the interviewees used unprompted. The term 'moments' appeared to refer to particular times of perfect stillness, much as suggested by Csikszentmihalyi's suggestion of the transformation of time. Being 'in the zone' seemed to connect with have complete focus on the activity, such that all other thoughts appeared to be absent from one's mind. Both of these were highly attractive states of being for the interviewees.

Three categories of snowboarder did not connect well with the idea of snowboarding as an experience with spiritual elements. Those who were still in the process of developing their skills, and those whose understanding of snowboarding focussed on technical skill and aggression, found connecting with concepts of flow difficult. Those who had a strong conservative Christian faith were more likely to understand their faith as the only valid means of spiritual experience.

10.1.7 The identity dimension of spirituality

Themes of identity from sociology were discussed which suggest that the "reflexive project" of the self (Giddins, 1991, p75) is a key issue for contemporary humanity in a greater sense than it has been in the past. The identity is not singular but plural, as Foucault shows, and leisure can be significant in these identities.

Community was discussed initially as a conflicted term within sociology, and then by drawing on Bauman's understanding of "cloakroom communities" (2000, p199). This

was contrasted with Maffessoli's model of neo-tribalisation. Both of these models emphasise the variety of communities in which urban living sites the individual. and with which the individual connects. The snowboarding communities are of three types. For many a significant element in their snowboarding is the opportunity to be part of a friendship group of like-minded individuals on holiday for a period. echoing Bauman's cloakroom communities. For others the wider snowboarding community provides a tribal identity in Maffessoli's understanding. This can be extended to the third type which is the culture, the shared values and ideologies. This was related both to Maffessoli, and to Thornton's work on subculture.

Lifestyle was distinguished from community by being concerned much more clearly with behaviour and patterns of life, even though the cultural aspects of community and the norms inherent in groups will obviously affect lifestyles. Snowboard lifestyle in the commercial understanding is the extension of the sport into a variety of products which consumers, even those who are not practitioners of the sport. can be invited to purchase. These products and the associated branding can often command significant profits because of their association with the sport. Two types of lifestyle were described as having particular associations for UK snowboarders. One is the seasonaires lifestyle of living through the winter in a ski resort, and thus compromising career and other life opportunities. The other is the weekend warrior, using available resources to snowboard as much as possible whilst maintaining a home-life and a career. Some Canadian snowboarders had taken the further step of moving to the mountains permanently. For many of these snowboarders snowboarding provided another important facet of their life. an alternative to the 'normal' rest of their lives. In this snowboarding was most clearly an identity element for them.

Although all of the snowboarders were highly committed to their sport there was for some a significant reluctance to describe the sport as giving meaning and purpose. In this there seemed to be an element of denial, as if it was not acceptable to themselves or to others for their lives to be structured around snowboarding. These would often describe snowboarding as 'just a hobby' and thus suggested the possibility of a 'hobby' frame.

A significant finding of this research was that the interviewees did not generally recognise the identity elements to be spiritual. This is in major contrast to the theoretical frames from education, which identified the identity dimension as either a or the primary understanding of spirituality. As has been noted, many of the interviewees recognised the significance of snowboarding for them and for their identity. The elements within the identity dimension were accepted by many as important. However, they were not framing this significance as spiritual.

10.1.8 Spirituality and soulriding

The majority, around 75%, of the snowboarders interviewed felt that in some way snowboarding was spiritual for them. However, the qualitative patterns of response to the questions about the elements of snowboarding did not correlate to the response about whether snowboarding was spiritual. Individuals with the same patterns of response to the "elements""questions would be on each side of the "Spiritual" question. One quote seemed to sum this up - "It's Special, but is it Spiritual? No" The question that the above quote raised was 'what was it that made the experience Spiritual rather than Special?'. The research was not premised on any particular understanding of the term "spiritual", and interviewees who asked for some definition were invited to use the term as they saw fit.

In the analysis of the interviews a narrative approach was taken which condensed the interviews down to look for the main themes of the interview and the connection between these and spirituality. Consideration of this in the UK snowboarders showed particularly well how the escape frame was significant in creating a sense of spirituality within the riding. The Canadian snowboarders had a wider set of understandings, but the escape and nature frame were again significant.

Consideration of the interview data suggested competing frames which inclined individuals to be less likely to find snowboarding spiritual. First were those whose riding focussed on technical competence of some kind, maybe riding fast or learning tricks. Second were those who had strong religious views, including strongly anti-religious views. These did not account for all those who did not see snowboarding as spiritual, nor were all of those in these categories opposed to snowboarding being spiritual, but the groupings were significant and suggestive. The individuals concerned did not necessarily dismiss the spiritual within snowboarding explicitly on particular grounds, although some did. What was clear was that their perception of the activity excluded the possibility that snowboarding might be spiritual. They suggest that perception of spirituality may be related to the assumptions which snowboarders have about their snowboarding.

It was interesting to note that gender and nationality (and, on the basis of one sample, race) did not seem to be a significant factor in the interviews except in the significance of community. Women and men held positive and negative perspectives on each element.

Attitudes towards 'Soulriding' reflect both understandings of the term 'spiritual' and attitudes towards snowboarding in general. Those who were dismissive of the 'spiritual'

within snowboarding were also dismissive of the term 'soulriding', or understood it in a pejorative sense. Even for those who had positive associations with the term understood it in a wide variety of ways. Thus, probably because it is such an unused term, it is not clearly defined.

10.1.9 Does the model work?

The thesis started with the question "What is spiritual about snowboarding?" In order to answer the question, and for the reasons given above, I developed a two part model of spirituality, the three dimensions of context, experience and identity, and the concept of spirituality as a frame. This has been described in the first half of the thesis. The second half of the thesis applied the model in the culture of snowboarding, both to understand what is spiritual about snowboarding and to test the effectiveness of the model.

The results of the analysis show that a clear understanding has been gained of what is spiritual about snowboarding. Snowboarding has been demonstrated to be an activity with a number of elements which enable it to be framed as spiritual. These elements were from the context and experience dimensions. No single element was uniquely significant. Particular among the elements from the context dimension are the societal frames of nature and escape. The flow element from the experience dimension was particularly significant, and the analysis demonstrated how this is framed rather than unmediated.

The use of the frame model uncovered competing and complementary frames. Particular complementing frames were the societal frames of nature and of escape. Particular competing frames were those of the techrider and of conservative Christianity. The tripartite division of spirituality into three dimensions uncovered the

significance of the context elements in framing spirituality as spiritual. This is notable as it might have been expected that the experience dimension would have been most significant in any such framing. It also demonstrated the lack of framing of identity as spiritual, in spite of the significance of the identity elements for snowboarders. Again this is significant given the prominence some disciplines have given to the identity dimension of spirituality.

Thus the model has been demonstrated to be effective in gaining understanding of spirituality within a particular culture. The model is not intended to be predictive, but interpretive. It helps the researcher to structure research into a field of inquiry and to analyse the data from that research. It sensitizes the researcher to the particularities or situated nature of spirituality in different instances. Examples of applying the model will be given in section10.3.5

10.2 Constructionism and circularity within the thesis

The process of researching and writing a thesis is a construction, not just in the colloquial sense of putting various elements together, but in the technical sense in which it has been used within the methodology of this thesis, that of artificially imposing an order on diverse material. A thesis is a construction of reality. Order has been imposed on the diverse and untidy data which was discovered in the research. In particular, within this thesis ten elements of snowboarding were derived and used to understand the ways in which snowboarding might be spiritual. I have suggested above (section 5.4) that a key issue in validating such research is transparency. What has become clear through the research process is the difficulty of creating such transparency. Interviews do not always work in a neat way with, for example, the valuable things being said whilst the tape is running. It has become more and more clear through the research

process how significant it is to account for each step, no matter how insignificant it may appear at the time, in order to create the transparency. This of course is not to avoid constructionism by the researcher, but to be clear where, when and how the ideas in the research have developed.

Another source of constructionism within the thesis is that of terms and their usage. This has been clearly seen in the ten elements of snowboarding which were identified and used in the research. One issue has been that of clarity and overlap between elements, for example between community and lifestyle and between peace and nature. Interviewees were understanding the terms in different ways to reflect different parts of their reality. Another issue has been where two terms were felt to be necessary to convey the sense of a question, for example, meaning and purpose or rhythm and flow. This constructionism has been addressed by using more than simple binary responses, but by working with longer answers to understand the sense in which the interviewees understood the realities. But the process has re-enforce for this researcher the recognition that an interview is a "construction site of knowledge" (Kvale, 1996, p42) at both a micro and macro level.

Consideration of constructionism within this research must address the issue of circularity within the research. At one level it is not surprising that research with a constructionist ontology suggests that the object of the research, in this case spirituality, is constructionist. It is worth remembering at this point that the reason that a constructionist ontology was used was because the subject of the research was a constructionist approach to spirituality. The thesis that spirituality had a constructionist facet arose from consideration of work in the sociology of religion, re-interpreted through constructionist theory. The research was attempting to validate this approach on

its own parameters. Secondly, whilst more realist or positivist approaches are taken in the study of spirituality, it was shown that in this subject area a generalised interpretivist approach was the most appropriate strategy for examining spirituality within snowboarding. Finally, the interviewees were not informed of the thesis behind the research, and yet it is their perspectives which support the thesis.

10.3 Contributions to the sociology of religion

This thesis makes four contributions to the sociology of religion. Firstly, it identifies the existence of different understandings of spirituality in various disciplines and suggests that sociology of religion needs its own model. Secondly, it distinguishes between the main existent models of spirituality in the academies, and suggests that experience and identity form two dimensions of spirituality. Thirdly, it revisits the work of classic social scientists, and Durkheim in particular, to show the significance of context in religion. Context enables *a priori* the mystical experience at the root of religion. Through this it creates a particularly sociological model of spirituality, frame, and suggests context as a third dimension of spirituality. Finally, it suggests ways in which frames work as complements and competitors, and identifies two frames which contribute to that frame spirituality in this case, nature and escape. At the end of this section I will show how the model might be applied in three areas where the term spirituality has been applied. These will be in Christian spirituality, in the spirituality of yoga, and in the spirituality of wine.

10.3.1 Various definitions of spirituality

I have shown that the academies of education and religious studies have a different definition of spirituality. This would not be an issue in itself, if those definitions were self-consciously stipulative, and if there was a recognition that the definition was not

universal and exhaustive. However, each of the academies has particular professional reasons for their definition which require that their definition is regarded as comprehensive. The definitions effectively create work both inside and outside academia for the practitioners of the discipline. This is not to decry the existence of these different definitions, but to recognise the situatedness of the definitions.

Sociology of religion has no such clear understanding. This perhaps reflects the contested nature of spirituality and the secularisation thesis within sociology of religion. The lack of a clear understanding of spirituality is resulting in further confusion, because protagonists within the debate can misunderstand and misrepresent one another. This is unfortunate at a time when both the terms spirituality and religion are changing in significance and meaning.

It is the contention of this thesis that a *sociological* understanding of spirituality would aid sociology of religion's engagement with the issue. Frame spirituality provides such an understanding. It is based on sociological theory, that of the social construction of reality. It concerns two sociological themes, that of culture and of the balance between the individual and society. It allows a move beyond the vagueness of spirituality as defined in the object by locating it in the subject.

10.3.2 Experience and identity spirituality

The research above into the four academies showed two main understandings of spirituality within the academies surveyed. The experience definitions were concerned with spirituality as connection with the 'other' in some form and generally with a divinity. They involve some kind of experience or practice through which the connection is made. The identity definitions involved the human spirit and related human development. These were therefore often defined as universal to humanity, but

may not be recognised by individuals outside of the academy as 'spiritualities'. Definitions were not necessarily confined to one of these, but might include elements of both. Neither of these understandings is inherently sociological in that they do not directly connect with sociological concerns. However, these have been the poles around which the sociology of religion has debated spirituality.

10.3.3 Context spirituality

Durkheim's work (along with James') has been shown in this thesis to include descriptions of spiritual experience which note, and then ignore, the context of that experience. These contexts are both directly and indirectly constructed, directly in that they were artifacts, indirectly in that humans were using natural phenomena to create an effect. This leads to the first theory of this thesis, that context forms a third dimension of spirituality. Certain contexts may be constructed as intrinsically spiritual. For example a Church building is for some a 'holy place', both in the sense that it is dedicated to religious activity and also that it is an environment in which adherents believe they encounter the divine. I have suggested that other physical contexts, such as 'nature', are also culturally constructed as spiritual. I have also identified non-physical contexts, such as escape, which have spiritual associations.

10.3.4 Frame spirituality and cultural frames

The second theory of this thesis is that spirituality is a frame of reality. It is mental framing of context that determines reality, and which enables or creates the spiritual experience. Spirituality emerges from this analysis as the frame, or perspective we have on reality. The frame model provides a simple yet effective way of considering spirituality and its relationship to other aspects of the individual's construction of reality. Through this thesis a number of other frames have been referred to which

interact with the spirituality frame. Some of these frames have promoted, or complemented, the application of the spirituality frame, others have excluded, or competed with, the spirituality frame. I have identified two "frames" which particularly contribute to the frame that snowboarding is spiritual, these are the nature frame and the escape frame. Frames which have excluded the spirituality frame have been the hobby frame and, for some snowboarders, the play frame. I have noted that some of these frames appear to be more tightly constructed within society (for example the nature frame) than others (for example the play frame). I am also arguing that such pre-existent frames have been significant for the construction of a frame of "spirituality" in this context. Other frames might be appropriate in other forms of spirituality, and a religious context in itself would form a frame, but the appropriation by the individual of such a frame is a necessity for the construction of a spiritual frame.

10.3.5 Frame spirituality in contemporary Sociology of Religion

Section 2.4 of this thesis examined understandings of spirituality within contemporary Sociology of Religion. At that stage of the thesis the main conclusion was to note the variety of understandings of spirituality which are current within the discipline. These were on both the experience and identity dimensions of spirituality. Particular attention was given to Wuthnow, Roof, the Kendal project of Woodhead and Heelas and Savage et al It is now appropriate to revisit these understanding with the results of this research.

Wuthnow and Roof, writing from a US perspective identified a shift from a spirituality of Habitation to one of seeking (Wuthnow, 1998, p3) or of questing (Roof, 1999, p35). For both of these writers the focus remains in the identity dimension. Indeed Roof suggests a quadrant based on religious and spiritual identity (Roof 1999, p178). Given the ambivalence with which identity spirituality is received outside of particular

contexts, I would suggest that the questing or seeking spirituality may be characteristic of a shift from the identity dimension to the experience dimension. Roof's discussion offers evidence for this (Roof, 1999, p177). However. Roof finding that there is a large group of those who see themselves as "spiritual but not religious" raises further questions about this self identification of a spiritual identity. This may be a facet of a growing post-christianity within the US. Again this is a feature of which Roof finds evidence (Roof, 1999, p203).

The work of both Woodhead and Heelas, and of Savage et al, raises questions of whom is framing an activity, or world view, as spiritual. I have already identified that Woodhead and Heelas are content to allow the provider to define the nature of the activity for the participants (section 3.4). I have also identified Savage et al's use of a stimulative definition of spirituality which allows the researcher to define the spiritual, rather than the subject (section 2.4.2). Savage et al's findings would seem to echo my own finding that outside of particular contexts, identity spirituality is not recognised by the subjects. This raises the question of whether it is appropriate to describe that aspect of identity as spiritual. I would suggest that the imposition of the spiritual as a frame of reality is itself an appropriate field of sociological enquiry, raising issues of power and of actor/structure balance.

It is worth re-emphasising at this point that this model of spirituality makes explicit some of the implicit direction that sociology of religion has been taking. In particular. as I noted in section 3.4, spirituality as frame fits with the social constructionist approach which Beckford (2003) applies to religion, which Woodhead and Heelas (2005) approach and which Guest (2007) suggests. Thus this approach to a core issue within sociology of religion merits further theoretical analysis and research. In section 10.4 I will suggest some avenues for that research. however the next section will show

the usefulness of the frame spirituality model through applying it to other areas of enquiry.

10.3.6 Applying the frame model in other areas

In order to demonstrate the value of the frame model of spirituality. I will briefly show how it might be applied in three fields of spirituality. I have chosen fields which are significantly different from snowboarding, these being Christian spirituality. Yoga. and the spirituality of wine. In each case I will identify elements within each of the three dimensions of spirituality and suggest how the elements are framed as spiritual.

Christian spirituality has many facets, and it is an area with which I am professionally familiar. Christian spirituality may be experienced in church services. in personal prayer, in study and in acts which might be termed charity. Even in these uncontroversial elements it is worth noting that if spirituality is primarily located in the individual, then each of the elements may not be spiritual for some. Context spirituality may be seen in the Church buildings, in the history and traditions in which the adherent is located, and in theological understandings. Again buildings may be seen as simply buildings, traditions may be conceived as purely human, and theology is often studied as an abstract intellectual exercise. The identity elements of Christian spirituality may include membership of the Christian community, certain lifestyle choices, and a sense of meaning and purpose. Two features of this are significant. Firstly these identity elements are explicitly linked with the individual spirituality in many churches. This is in contrast to soulriding and the other examples in this section where identity elements are not explicitly recognised as part of a spirituality. Secondly. and ironically given what I had just identified, the identity elements of Christian spirituality are present but often unrecognised within western society. For example approximately two thirds of the population of England are nominally Christian (Brierly. 1999. p2.7). and

"Christian" norms and values continue to significantly inform U.K institutions and culture, whilst less than 9% of the population are church members.

I identifed yoga as a second example area because it formed the largest single form of the "Holistic mileau" in Heelas and Woodhead's Kendal project (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p157), yet it is frequently understood as simply an exercise activity. Again this emphasises the framing of the activity as spiritual. Heelas and Woodhead chose to consider an activity as spiritual when it is so framed by the facilitator (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p38). As I am not an expert on, or practitioner of, Yoga. I have used an introductory book (Tomlinson, 2000) as a source for the following. Tomlinson states that "Yoga is fundamentally a spiritual path" (Tomlinson, 2000, p7) in which the main emphasis of the spiritual was in the practice of Yoga, both the postures and the breathing techniques. Tomlinson includes the contextual element of spirituality in descriptions of the history and philosophy of Yoga. Tomlinson also includes experiences of flow (Tomlinson, 2000, p6) and relaxation (Tomlinson, 2000, p12) which go beyond the immediate practice of yoga. Thus Yoga becomes a way of life, and changes the state of being of the practitioner. This is framed as an extension of the experience beyond the immediate, rather than understanding that the spirituality of Yoga extends into the identity dimension. Tomlinson's book showed no evidence of the identity dimension being framed as spiritual.

For my third example I chose a marginal example of spirituality, in fact a deliberate attempt to re-frame a common activity as in some sense spiritual. Tom Harpur is a well-known and reputable religious journalist and author in Canada. He has written a book on "The Spirituality of Wine" (Harpur, 2004). Again, Harpur's focus is on the experience dimension. He includes the taste of wine, the social communication which

he claims wine facilitates (Harpur, 2004, p39), the "ecstasy" which wine can produce ((Harpur, 2004, p40), and the transformation from juice to wine. Harpur is keen to emphasise the context of wine. He includes the places of wine production and wine consumption, and notes the exotic nature of wines. He places wine in a historical and cultural context, including religious context. Harpur also notes the identity dimension of wine. He starts his account with his own inclusion in the community of wine connoisseurs, he talks of the appreciation of wine and the love of wine, and of how wine becomes an element in one's lifestyle. Significantly, these are mentioned but not explicitly connected with the spiritual. Again, identity elements are significant, but are not framed as spiritual. This opens one of the areas for further research I would suggest.

10.4 Further research

Whilst the evolution of a new approach to understanding spirituality does of course suggest a large number of avenues for further research, there are four specific areas of research which I believe this thesis opens. The first avenue is the study of faith-affiliate sports clubs; the second is the significance of frames for the construction of spirituality as frame; the third is the lack of popular recognition of identity as spiritual; finally the term 'soulsports' merits further investigation to establish what light it might shed on the understandings of spirituality.

10.4.1 Faith-affiliate sports clubs

One key issue arising from this research is why different people frame the same, or at least a very similar, experience as either spiritual or not spiritual. In particular the tension between the practice and theory of the two snowboarders from "Snowboarders for Christ" was intriguing. At one level they were denying the validity of any spiritual experience associated with snowboarding. At another they were saying that

snowboarding was personally very significant for them. This internal tension seemed focussed around the comment that they "pray lots when they ride" (KP). The field of 'Christianized' sports and other activities seems to be a developing within culture, for example Christian motorcyclists, Christian surfers. These offer an opportunity to study how those with a religious world-view frame an activity as inherently spiritual. The evidence from the current research is that the perspectives will be very mixed, and a rich source of qualitative data.

10.4.2 Competing and complementary frames

The identification of the 'nature' and 'escape' frames which I have suggested as being significant parts of the spiritual framing of snowboarding, and the connection between these and other frames such as the 'hobby' frame and the 'happy midi-narrative' invites further research. This might be construed as attempting to identify such frames within other spiritual contexts, or connecting frames from wider society with spirituality.

10.4.3 The lack of recognition of identity as spirituality

It was noted in the analysis of the identity elements that few interviewees recognised these as spiritual. This result of the analysis was not one of the main directions of the thesis, but does accord with other anecdotal reports. Furthermore, the result is in contrast to some of the models of spirituality identified in the education academy, and in other areas such as healthcare. This contrast might be put in a question such as "If identity is such a key component of spirituality, why do few outside religions and academics recognise it as such?". Answers might lie in a social focus on experiences rather than identity, or in a culture of a lack of commitment.

10.4.4 Soul sports

The term 'soul sport' was discussed in section 1.3.4. It appears to be connected to the sports in which soulriding exists, but is also linked in the main source of the term (www.soulsports.co.uk) with other sports. This thesis has focused on 'soulriding' within snowboarding and has deliberately not followed this related term. Two possibilities are suggested by the existence of the term and the discussion in section 1.3.4 on what it might mean. The first is the recognition that the other sports which have 'soulriding' as an existent term within the vocabulary would be candidates for research which developed the theoretical framework created here. The second possibility would be more general research on the wider terms soul sports, examining what associations this term has with spirituality and what the criteria for inclusion as a 'soulsport' might be.

10.4.5 Other issues

There are further questions around the use of the frame spirituality model which have not been a direct part of this research, but which are significant questions. Among these is the place of validating spirituality in the sense of saying that something is a 'true' spirituality. Some of the definitions used in sociology of religion clearly have the potential to be validating, for example Wuthnow (1998, p3ff) and Savage et al (2006, p13). Secondly, I have made general suggestions about the potential relationship between spirituality and religion in the light of changes in understanding of both these terms (section 2.4.4). A frame model of spirituality further changes this dynamic, locating spirituality both particularly in the individual, and generally in the social frame creation. Both of these tend to dislocate spirituality from the religious communities, thus there is a question of the extent to which spirituality is becoming detached from religion.

10.5 Special or spiritual?

This research started with questions about the nature of spirituality and the possibility of spirituality within snowboarding. This was most simply focussed in the question "How might soulriding be spiritual?" The research was an opportunity to investigate the validity of the frame model of spirituality. It demonstrated how frames were involved in how individuals understood their snowboarding, and whether they perceived it a spiritual. The frame model and the three dimensions of spirituality were shown to be effective tools in understanding spirituality. In particular the individual's understandings of soulriding revealed the individual's frame of snowboarding. Thus the answer to whether snowboarding is "special or spiritual" is that it depends how you frame it. The research identified three dimensions of spirituality and ten elements of spirituality within snowboarding and discovered that they were all significant to many of the snowboarders, but no single element or combination of elements was fundamental to that spirituality. Soulriding was seen in different ways by different snowboarders. Soulriding, like spirituality, was a frame of the snowboarders' reality. Whilst there was no simple answer to the questions about the nature of soulriding and spirituality, soulriding seemed to be a mirror for perceptions of the essence, the spirit, of snowboarding.

JK talked of the gathering of snowboarders at the end of the day and of the group effervescence which takes place as stories of the day's adventures. I have often observed groups of snowboarders gather and frame and re-frame their days riding. At the end of a good day's snowboarding they look back over their journey, the runs they did, the places they went, the things they found. For these snowboarders, a good day's snowboarding means growing, discovering and having fun. A good day's snowboarding

is both social and personal. A good day's snowboarding involves encounters with both

expected and unexpected contexts. A really good day's snowboarding can form a

nourishing memory indefinitely. Is that spiritual or special?

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Appendix 1 Interview schedule

- *How did you get into snowboarding?*

This question was intended to be an effective way of mentally locating the interviewee in the snowboarding part of their memories. People talked about the various places that they had snowboarded, and where relevant I shared my experiences. Thus I intended to establish an atmosphere of self-revelation and trust.

- *Tell me your best and worst experiences snowboarding*

Reflecting on the best and worst experiences should enable the interviewee to continue the process of focussing on their memories of snowboarding experiences, rather than their current situation. It should also uncover the more intense moments of their snowboarding career. These moments may be the contexts of any spiritual experiences, thus focussing on them may remind the interviewee of the feelings associated with the experience. In doing this, the interview is intended to create the opportunity for these experiences and understandings to emerge without leading the interviewee to create them.

- *How has snowboarding affected your life?*

This question is very open ended and was answered in a number of different ways, sometimes different ways within a single interview. Some interviewees did not feel that snowboarding had affected their lives. For some the answer seemed obvious, for example when the interviewee had revealed that they had given up their career to snowboard. But the obvious answer was not always the forthcoming answer. This question enabled the interviewees, if they chose, to engage with their deeper

motivations and feelings about snowboarding. Thus the question was intended to be for some the start of a reflection of the 'spiritual' nature of their snowboarding. The question also opened up the possibility of a mismatch between answers which had already been given and the self-perception of the snowboarder. For example some snowboarders who clearly structured their life around when they can go snowboarding. but said that it did not affect their life. This was obviously a significant mismatch. and one that the interviewee would sometimes reflect on.

- *Does snowboarding have any kind of spiritual dimension for you?*

By this stage the interview was intended to have reached the point where the answers would be particularly useful to the research, as opposed to being introductory. . Although this question seems framed as a closed question, the fact that the previous questions had been open questions which invited anecdotal answers made this question too into an open question. The continuity of the line of questioning was significant in this being a semi-structured interview. The structure was sufficiently flexible to move between the above questions. In particular this question might trigger further reflection on the best or worst experiences.

There were occasions when the answer was that there was no spiritual dimension. In these instances, and given that the interviewee felt snowboarding had affected their life. then I would ask "What do you get out of snowboarding?"

- *The elements*

The order of elements was selected to move from those with a necessary and immediate connection (Risk) to those with a much less certain connection (Meaning or purpose in life). Some of the elements were similar terms with overlapping meanings. for example

"Feeling part of a community or culture" and "Lifestyle". There were also a number of possible interpretations of some of the terms used, for example "Lifestyle" was used in a number of different ways.

- *Does the term 'soulriding' mean anything to you?*

Again, there was a deliberate ambiguity in this question, particularly in the context of the interview. Some understood it as a factual question about whether they understood the term, others understood it as asking whether they identified with soulriding. This was the last question which demanded a high degree of interiorisation

- *Can you tell me something about your religious background and understanding?*

This question was intended to obtain any relevant background information, particularly where respondents had not revealed this in the course of the interview. The question was also intended to enable the interviewee to move back into facts and opinions rather than experiences and feelings.

Appendix 2 Demographic information

UK Interviewees

Name	Gender	Age (approx.)	Experience (See note 1)	Snowboarding spiritual?
DM	M	25	EX	No
IF	M	30	EX	No
MT	F	20	INT	No
SS	M	30	AD	No
TW	M	20	PRO	No
WA	M	30	EX	No
CC	M	35	EX	Yes
CU	M	35	EX	Yes
DA	M	25	AD	Yes
EH	F	30	EX	Yes
JK	F	25	EX	Yes
JA	M	30	EX	Yes
LS	M	25	AD	Yes
MiA	M	25	AD	Yes
ML	F	30	EX	Yes
MA	M	25	EX	Yes
NJ	M	35	EX	Yes
PB	M	20	EX	Yes
PH	M	30	EX	Yes
RD	M	30	EX	Yes
RH	M	30	PRO	Yes
RT	F	25	AD	Yes
RW	M	25	AD	Yes
TD (Note 2)	M	35	INT	Yes

Canadian Interviewees

Name	Gender	Age (approx.)	Experience (See note 1)	Snowboarding spiritual?
KPi	M	35	EX	No
RS	M	25	EX	No
AC	M	32	PRO	Yes
DS	F	40	EX	Yes
KE	M	30	PRO	Yes
KP	F	25	EX	Yes
PO	M	40	EX	Yes
PW	M	30	EX	Yes
SC	F	20	AD	Yes

Note 1 - Levels are INT (Intermediate), AD (Advanced), EX (Expert), PRO (Professional). See section 5.9

Note 2- TD was the only non-white interviewee