The Downhill Mountain Bike Subculture in New Zealand

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Masters in Physical Education

at the University of Otago, Dunedin,

New Zealand

21 December 2012

Abstract

This research examines the experiences and meanings that elite downhill mountain bike racers assign to their involvement in the New Zealand downhill mountain bike subculture. The research is located in postmodern subcultural theory which embraces the fractured nature of modern lifeworlds in which transitory and unique cultural features such as music, style, fashion, objects, and images are becoming increasingly important and valued. Firstly, the research maps the downhill mountain bike subculture in New Zealand. Secondly, the research documents key components of the subculture and investigates the effect that belonging to the downhill mountain bike subculture has on the participants' lives.

This research follows a qualitative methodology that draws on a social constructivist epistemology. Semi-structured interviews were the predominant method for gathering data from five elite level participants who have raced in the downhill mountain bike world championships. The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed inductively to allow themes to emerge. The researcher's reflexivity aided the research process and acted as a point of reference for many of the findings. It is hoped that this research will contribute to knowledge by helping progress postmodern subcultural theories within a sport and recreation context. In addition, this study may provide practitioners with a deeper understanding of their sport and subculture.

Keywords: downhill mountain biking, subculture, postmodern, lifestyle.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my utmost gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Mike Boyes for his continued support, encouragement, and friendship throughout the writing of this thesis. Mike's unquestioned trust and belief in this work gave me the confidence to persist and expect the highest level from myself. The past year at the University of Otago has increased my appreciation of good academic writing, and this is something that I will value and practice forever.

This project is representative of 15 years immersed in the downhill mountain bike scene both in New Zealand and internationally. I am the product of the lessons learnt through belonging to an extreme sport community of practice. For this feeling of belonging, I am indebted to my downhill friends, mechanics, managers, and other supporting members of the subculture. I owe a special thank you to the five participants who willingly provided their insights for the purpose of this research. You opened yourselves up to critique the sport that you all love, and I am grateful for this.

Additionally, Mike Jacobs, Sally McArley and Dr. Anna Thompson deserve a special mention for helping in the final stages of this research journey. Also, thank you to my parents, Viv and Rus, for supporting me with each new goal.

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The aim of this research was to examine the ways in which the New Zealand downhill mountain bike community operates as a postmodern subculture. The downhill mountain bike subculture represents a close-knit sporting group who travel around New Zealand attending races each summer. This research highlights significant components of the downhill community and provides the first academic insight into this extreme sport subculture. This research explores the extent that the downhill subculture fits within postmodern subcultural theories. Because of the fractured and incoherent nature of postmodernism, this study accepts that many of the findings do not fit within the proposed postmodern ideals. Many of the findings in this study resemble qualities that are typically found in traditional subcultures. Postmodernism elicits fewer boundaries and therefore this research helps document a postmodern extreme sport subculture in the 21st century. In doing so, I draw attention to how subcultural involvement influences the participants' quality of life. The catch all phrase, *quality of life* has been interpreted from the participants' responses, descriptions, and perceptions. No understanding of quality of life would be complete without appreciating the subjective nature of the subcultural experiences as well as the duration of time spent within the subculture. Therefore, these avenues have been explored through the use of three parts that emerged throughout the research process: these are work, life, and leisure.

Subcultural research is at a crossroads and theorists have been critical of postmodern subcultural theories (Williams, 2011). Many theorists have suggested that traditional subcultural theories are outdated, while others suggest that traditional subcultural theories remain appropriate for 21st century subcultures. Wheaton (2007) suggests that sociologists need to pay more attention to postmodern subcultural theory, as it has been overlooked in sporting genres. In this paper, I respond to this plea by examining how the downhill mountain bike subculture fits within postmodern subcultural theory. I draw attention to the demographics of the subculture including; age, race,

ethnicity, class, gender, and residency. I also examine the material goods central to the development of identity and authenticity, and decipher the hierarchies, social structures, and political stratifications within the subculture.

No understanding of postmodern subcultural theory would be complete without an appreciation of the historical context in which it was born. William's (2011) describes how early theorists developed the word *subculture* as a term to describe small communities of people whose behaviour was seen as morally deviant by mainstream society. Work by (Torkelson, 2010, p. 259) suggests that subcultures were seen as "...non-contradictory, static, and necessarily lower-class entities from which members were afforded little agency regarding their subcultural affiliations". In the current societal climate, subcultures are continuing to evolve in relation to both time and place. These non-normative, minority, or dysfunctional cultures are vulnerable to processes of cultural appropriation, where trends are determined by mainstream and dominant society (Williams, 2011).

A subculture is a culture that is shared and actively participated in by a cluster of people within a broader culture. A subculture can be organised around a common activity, occupation, age, gender, status, race, religion or ethnicity. Fincham (2008) suggests subcultures can be used to refer to relatively distinctive and autonomous lifestyle groupings which are important to a member's sense of identity and to which is exhibited a significant level of commitment. There is considerable literature that documents the unique subcultures of extreme sports, such as: Wheaton's (2003) exposition on surfing, Beal and Wilson's (2004) work on skateboarding, and Thorpe's (2004) examination of snowboarding. In a similar light, this research will add to knowledge by examining a substantial and prolific subculture; that of downhill mountain biking.

Consistent with a postmodern society, postmodern subcultural theory incorporates social constructs that reflect fast-changing youth cultures (Torkelson, 2010). Postmodern

subcultural theory appreciates the fragmented lifestyles that are common in the 21st century. It contributes to understandings of the cultural dynamics of small communities in which music, style, fashion, objects and images are becoming increasingly viewed through online media and social networking. More attention is paid to the individualistic lifestyles which are popular in extreme sport pursuits. Actors are able to construct their own socio-cultural identities (Bennett, 2011) and the subculture becomes a contested site of temporary belonging and learning (Buckley, 2011). Current sociological literature places subcultural participants as temporary, liminal social beings who are transient in nature and travel between a range of subcultures. These individuals lack dedication and are not loyal to their subcultural group. Such understanding of subcultures comes as no surprise as society sees individualism become normative and valued. However there is also contrary evidence to indicate that some subcultures exist in more traditional ways and hold on to committed adherents for many years. These trends appear to contradict many postmodern predictions and Wheaton (2007) points out that assumptions such as this have not been considered in the context of sporting subcultures. This research will examine the consistencies and contradictions that are present in the literature and in the field surrounding the subculture debate.

The central question for this research is:

1.　　What are the practices and material culture of the downhill mountain bike subculture and how do these impact on the lives of the members?

The search for answers to this central question will involve the investigation of the following sub-questions:

1.   What are the reflections, experiences and meanings attached to affiliation within

        the downhill mountain bike subculture?

2.   How does the downhill mountain bike subculture align with postmodern

        subcultural theories?

3.   What effect does belonging to the downhill mountain bike subculture have on

        participants' quality of life?

4.   What are the stages and changes that occur throughout the participants'

        involvement in the downhill mountain bike subculture?

Having grown up in the downhill mountain bike subculture over the past 15 years, I have developed into the person I am today. I believe that involvement in this subculture has had a profound impact on almost all areas of my life. Authentic membership into the subculture was accidental, and grew out of an unstoppable passion and love for the sport and all that it encompassed. This pure passion for riding downhill led me to become Junior World Champion in 2004, and subsequently I gained numerous world cup podium medals. What started as a dream had then become a profession where I represented two of the United States of America's largest bicycle race teams. Having now retired from racing downhill, my focus is academic, where I continue this love for the sport through new means. This project represents something that is close to my heart, and something that will hopefully aid the development and progression of downhill mountain biking into the future.

As the primary researcher in this project, reflexivity has been a useful tool to help explore the social structures within the data. Being a subcultural insider, I was able to

analyse the data by self-referencing the information in the interview transcripts. This insider status provided me with an ability to compare the findings with my knowledge of the downhill subculture. Reflexivity appreciates that the researcher is often biased in their analysis of the findings, and therefore their values are often reflected in the work. Nonetheless, this epistemological stance was effective as I was able to understand the foundations, causes and effects associated with the participants' responses.

The research is based on an interpretive paradigmatic framework that uses a qualitative methodology. Because of the socially constructed nature of the downhill mountain bike subculture, a social constructivist epistemology has been used as a framework to guide the research processes. Purposeful participant selection was undertaken to include five athletes who were most likely to provide the researcher with knowledgeable and accurate information. Each participant was chosen because of their extensive experience within the subculture, and the long duration of their involvement. The research data has been gathered through semi-structured individual interviews with five New Zealand downhill mountain bike racers. The use of inductive data processes allowed themes to emerge throughout the data collection process. Data was transcribed verbatim and analysed to qualitative research protocols.

This project begins with a review of literature. The review justifies and locates the research project by providing readers with necessary information in five main sections. Initially the review defines subcultures by guiding readers through the historical evolution of subcultural theories. This section links with the next as it examines the elements of extreme sport that ensure their classification as subcultures. Downhill mountain biking is then introduced in order to explore how downhill mountain biking is both an extreme sport, and a subculture. Following this, the importance of subcultural experiences is highlighted in order to begin to understand the meanings entwined in being a subcultural member. The review then turns to define quality of life. This part is important as it links

with both the experiences and key themes that occur in the lifeworld of subcultural members. The literature review concludes by suggesting how experiences in subcultures change across stages of an individual's life. It embraces the evolving nature of subcultures and attempts to define common stages that link to people's experiences in different groups. The next major section presents the methodology that guides the research. This includes a methods section that documents the important steps in the research journey.

The data analysis section of this project synthesises the participant responses with the literature review, and my experience as a downhill mountain bike racer. As the primary researcher, I discuss the responses collected in the interviews, and analyse the themes that became apparent. The thesis then concludes with a findings chapter that highlights important components that have been explored in the research process.

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter begins by defining the range of research approaches that have been used to study subcultures. Research initially identified subcultures as minority groups of people who were considered deviant. Contemporary research has progressed to include postmodern subcultural theory, where there are numerous terms to define social patterning consistent with the social structures of postmodern society. In this review postmodern approaches to subcultures are considered, and are linked specifically to the downhill mountain bike subculture. The final section in this review examines different kinds of experiences for individuals involved in extreme sports. It could be presumed that individuals are involved in extreme sports to bring about changes in their emotions and feelings. Therefore subcultural involvement is discussed in relation to quality of life and life stages.

Defining Subculture

The term *culture* has many interrelated meanings, nevertheless in sociology and anthropology it refers to set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterise an institution, organisation or group (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). A subculture is a culture that is shared and actively participated in by a group of people within a broader culture. A subculture can be organised around a common activity, occupation, age, gender, status, race, religion or ethnicity. These factors help to unify the group as each member takes on the attributes appropriate for the social conditions in the subculture. The group may have distinctive sets of behaviours, norms, beliefs and values that help the group to be identified as a subordinate group when compared to the dominant society. Giddens (2001) suggests that a "Subculture is any segment of the population which is distinguishable from the wider society by its cultural pattern" (p. 700).

The noun *sub* is a term used to change consonants into something that means inferior and subordinate. In this research, subculture means a group of people within a culture that is a collective and united entity that is different or unique when compared to the norms within the dominant culture. The common thought within the subculture often differs in some way from that of mainstream society. This definition becomes problematic when trying to decipher what separates mainstream society from a subculture. For the purpose of this research, I choose to adopt (Williams, 2011, p. 9) definition, "...the boundary between subcultures and mainstream culture exists wherever and whenever people collectively agree it exists". In this sense, a subculture is a socially created phenomenon where individuals can perceive a certain level of involvement. Williams' (2011) definition appreciates that members of a subculture can be both a part of the hegemonic culture, while at the same time belonging to minority subcultures. Thus a hegemonic culture often contains numerous subcultures and individuals can be simultaneously members of many cultures.

Stranger (2007) suggests that now, more than ever, subcultures need to differentiate themselves from dominant culture to maintain their existence through resisting subsumption and maintaining a cultural identity that is distinct from mainstream society. This can be seen when members of a subculture embody a specific subcultural aura or sense of identity in dominant aspects of their lives. To increase this aura, the subcultural collective often separate themselves from mainstream society by adopting practices that differ radically, often acquiring a name of their own in order to achieve status and recognition. This is shown in the narrative which places subcultures as deviant, non-conformist and alternative (Gelder, 2007). Hodkinson's (2002) research on gothic subcultures points to four defining characteristics that can be used to identify a subculture. A genuine subculture has: 1) consistent distinctiveness, with shared values that remain consistent over time; 2) a shared sense of identity; 3) commitment, where participation in

the subculture takes up a substantial part of a person's life; and 4) autonomy, in the activities that are undertaken by the participants.

Most research on subcultures has been completed in the fields of sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. Three prevailing theoretical schools are attributed with developing the last 70 years of knowledge surrounding subcultures. These are: American subcultural studies, Birmingham School, and postmodern subcultural theory. First coined in the 1940's, the term subculture has undergone many transformations and remains a controversial term within academia (Fincham, 2007). "For decades, subculture has come under intense scrutiny by social science scholars who claim that the term is too broad, too biased, or simply out of date" (Williams, 2011, p. 3). In the 21st century, the use of subcultural theory is problematic because cultural phenomena are more unstable, heterogeneous and transitory than American and Birmingham theories indicate (Torkelson, 2010). However, it is inevitable that this term is socially contested due to the nature of the postmodern world where the theory is studied and applied. "Researchers have struggled to explain the shared sensibilities and practices of groups of people identified within larger cultural formations" (Fincham, 2007, p. 189). Work by (Bennett, 2010; Fincham, 2007; Muggleton, 2000; and Wheaton, 2004) suggest that the traditional term subculture is problematic, and discuss how postmodern subcultural theory provides the most accurate and relevant understanding of subcultures in the 21st century. Yet, many are mindful that subcultural theory still provides a significant historical framework for researching extreme sports. Williams (2011) states that there is no need for debate in categorising and criticising subcultural studies, as all terms help to develop the theory and provide useful tools for studying a range of different groupings, "...multiple layers of analytic concepts may be usefully employed to make sense of the incredible diversity of cultural phenomena being studied today" (Williams, 2011, p. 36). Much of the literature is focused on comparing the terms head to head, however, I believe the best option is to use

all concepts so that they complement each other to develop a stronger base for future research. William's (2011) states, "(post)-subculture scholars might instead focus on the cleavages and boundaries among these concepts, recognising and exploring how they may be used in concept to better understand youth cultural activities today" (p. 36).

Despite advancements in subcultural studies, and challenges to the notion of subculture over the past 90 years, Coates, Clayton and Humberstone (2010) used empirical evidence to suggest that there is still a place for the term subculture when studying lifestyle sports. Fincham's (2010) work aligns with Hodkinson's (2002) book on gothic subcultures by suggesting that the term can be used to refer to relatively distinctive and autonomous lifestyle groupings which are important to their members sense of identity and to which their members exhibit a significant level of commitment. Similarly, Williams (2011) agrees that the term subculture as a sociological concept should not be overlooked and plays an important role in postmodern subcultural theory. Williams (2011) believes the term subculture acts as an anthropological term that represents a collection of perspectives which include modern societal progressions. The depth of subcultural research from both American and English scholars provides a coherent and well established foundation for postmodern subcultural theory advancements.

The following sections address the most influential theoretical progressions that have occurred through the history of defining subculture. This section is discussed in chronological order of progression and offers further information about how postmodern subcultural theory has evolved.

American subcultural studies.

The earliest research into subcultures was carried out by sociologists at the University of Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s (Williams, 2011). Following this, American subculture researchers such as Becker (1951) and Cohen (1955) were attributed

with establishing and defining the term subculture within academia throughout the 1950s. These early theorists developed the word subculture as a term to describe small communities of practice whose behaviour was seen as morally deviant by mainstream society. "When groups that are somehow limited in their access to dominant cultural resources try to collectively solve their problems by alternative methods, a subculture is likely to emerge" (Williams, 2011, p. 7). This initial paradigm for subculture formed as a response to prevailing 20th century psychological interpretations of deviance (Torkelson, 2010). Subcultures were seen as "...non-contradictory, static, and necessarily lower-class entities from which members were afforded little agency regarding their subcultural affiliations" (Torkelson, 2010, p. 259). Therefore, those who were most susceptible to social problems initially formed the alternative cultural groups in America.

The Birmingham School.

The American subculture theory, which was initially thought of as a paradigm for positivist researchers was developed further by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s. Dick Hebdige arose as the most prolific researcher on subcultures with the release of his book *Subcultures: The meaning of style (1979)*. The book, published over 33 years ago, provided the first account of cultural studies research into the punk, hippie and skinhead subcultures. Hebdige (1979) presents two especially useful terms in the description of subcultures: 1) Conjuncture, and 2) Specificity. These terms imply that subcultures are representative of specific historical and cultural conjunctures (Hebdige, 1999). Each subculture is representative of the specific time period and location in which it is based and operationalised. Hebdige believed that the dominant ideology was unequal in its distribution and that class, ethnicity and gender were reasons for an individual's inclusion into subgroups or exclusion from others.

Also influential in the subculture debate was Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. This concept represented a social construct that acknowledged the power that dominant classes held. "Hegemony is a social construct that recognises that as capitalism progresses, dominant groups or classes gain power through the consent of the subordinate group or class to prevailing values" (Coates et al., 2010, p. 1083). In Gramsci's twelve years in prison, he wrote about the cultural processes that ensured the ruling class maintained a position of power because the working class see the power distribution as normative and natural (Williams, 2011). Additionally, Torkelson (2010) discussed how Neo-Marxist theorists believed cultures could not be understood without acknowledging the state and other institutions that encourage capitalism. The theory of hegemony was applied in Coates et al. (2010) paper that explored the exchanges of power that occurred in the subculture of snowboarding. Despite providing a cohesive argument and effective use of subculture theory, the paper ignored recent post-subcultural progressions and lacked inclusion of the latest subcultural progressions that are discussed below.

Postmodern subcultural theory.

The term *postmodern* is used in this thesis to represent all things beyond modernity, representing approaches to social change such as advanced capitalism, late modernity and liquid modernity (Stranger, 2007). "Traditional, modern, and postmodern categories are theoretical constructs..." (Stranger, 2007, p. 295). "Key elements of postmodernism include: 1) a weakening of modern societal categories, such as class, gender, and the distinction between the public, private, political and religious spheres; 2) the infiltration of the economy into almost all aspects of our daily lives; 3) a weakening of the all pervasive (at least symbolic) dominance of rational calculation and a decline in the authority of knowledge and institutions based on it; and 4) a level of individualisation whereby each person is involved in the deliberate and ongoing construction of his or her

own identities and social formations" (Stranger, 2007, p. 295). Postmodern theories do not suggest that social constructs such as subcultures need to fit into the perfect boundaries of postmodernism. Therefore it is acceptable, and imperative that a subculture embodies the characteristics of many theoretical categories. Thus, many aspects of a subculture continue to take the form of more traditional or modern theories of society. Stranger (2007) suggests, that postmodernism is so fragmented, that no single ideal postmodern approach to subcultures exists.

Recent research suggests that subcultures are best viewed through postmodern subcultural theories. Despite this, American and Birmingham subcultural theories have been influential in directing the progressions within postmodern subcultural theories. The academic advancements in postmodern subcultural theories are partly due to the strong theoretical base that is grounded in subcultural theory. The socially contested nature of the term *subculture* has needed to morph with the changes reflected within society. Over time, subcultural theory has fragmented into more specific domains. Each new theoretical domain occurs because of the strong depth of information that is available in subcultural theory. Therefore, as society develops, postmodern theorists have tracked the changes that continue to occur in postmodern subcultures. This simultaneous interaction helps strengthen both traditional and modern theories of subculture to provide the most relevant theoretical contributions.

The term subculture was coined due to the fragmentation of subcultural theory that occurred between the 1980s and 1990s (Bennett, 2011). "The term post-subculture was introduced by Steve Redhead (1990) in response to what he perceived as an apparent breakdown of previous youth subcultural divisions..." (Bennett, 2011, p. 494). The development of postmodern subcultures contributes to newer understandings of the cultural dynamics of small communities in which music, style, fashion, objects and images are becoming increasingly viewed through online media and social networking.

Postmodern subcultures represent groups of people who are more likely to have chosen to be included into specific subcultures, rather than being placed there like traditional subculture theorists believed. Additionally, there is less emphasis on class, and more appreciation of gender, race and sexuality (Williams, 2011). The postmodern subcultural theories move away from relatively fixed and localised theories to incorporate more recent social constructs that reflect fast changing youth cultures (Torkelson, 2010).

Postmodern subcultural theories pay more attention to the individualistic lifestyles that are popular in extreme sport pursuits. The term incorporates several new concepts and theoretical strands that make this theory increasingly incoherent as it continues to fragment. "...in effect, both subcultural and post-subcultural approaches are derived from a broad range of theoretical traditions, with the effect that each embodies a range of different analytical perspectives..." (Bennett, 2011, p. 497). The pick and mix style evident in subcultures is due to the increasing proliferation of youth styles with an increase of individualistic styles where actors are able to construct their own sociocultural identities (Bennett, 2011).

The fragmented discourse of postmodern subcultural theory.

The fragmented discourse of postmodern subcultural theory can align itself with other credible concepts such as counter-culture, contra-culture, lifestyle theory, scene theory, idioculture, neo-tribe, social world and youth culture. However, many of these refined terms have received little academic attention since the 1990s and postmodern subcultural theory appears to be the most progressive term used in cultural studies currently. Each concept provides a slightly different approach to the term subculture and helps strengthen academic knowledge in this context. There are a large range of terms that help to define the multi-faceted context of subculture, yet the scope of this review is such that all segments cannot be discussed in detail. However, the continual development of

each subcultural term helps in re-modelling postmodern subcultural theories and provides an exciting domain for research in the area of extreme lifestyle sports. The theories surrounding counter-culture, lifestyle theory, scene theory and neo-tribe have received the most academic attention and will be discussed below.

Counter-culture is a term commonly associated with subcultures that is used to describe a cultural group whose ideas, opinions and thoughts run in opposition to mainstream society. A counter-culture is often seen as deviant and members' behaviour, values, norms and beliefs challenge those of the dominant culture. Both counter-culture and contra-culture are terms that were in popular in the 1970s and 1980s, but these terms faded out with the end of the hippy movement (Williams, 2011). A key factor in counter-cultures is their ability to reject the common social norms. The downhill mountain bike subculture does not appear to run counter to mainstream society, and therefore this theory appears too radical for this research.

Lifestyle theory proposes that "...lifestyles are creative projects which rely on consumer competence" (Bennett, 2011, p. 945). It is now common for people to live a lifestyle that incorporates a juxtaposition of styles and tastes where individuals can transition between different subcultural identities.

Scene theory implies that people use certain spaces to bring together their styles and aesthetic sensibilities in a transient manner (Williams, 2011). This theory appears to be less rigid and more progressive than the original theories of subculture proposed during the 1950s to 1970s (Williams, 2011). Scene theory encompasses a hotchpotch of conceptual strands and lacks specificity. When interpreting postmodern subcultural theories such as these, it must be noted that postmodern cultures are typically more liberal and fragmented when compared to traditional cultures. Therefore, when interpreting postmodern subcultural theory, there must be an appreciation of the current social climate

in the 21st century due to the simultaneous interaction between the theory and the historical period in which it developed.

Although similar and for the most part consistent with postmodern subcultural theory, neo-tribe provides agents with a uniqueness that allows for taste, aesthetics and affectivity as the primary drivers for inclusion into subcultures (Bennett, 2011). The neo-tribe concept offers more flexibility in its approach as opposed to traditional subculture theory that implied individuals were forced into subcultures by such factors of class, race and gender. "The neo-tribe is without rigidity of the forms of organisation with which we are familiar, it refers to a more certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form" (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 98). In a neo-tribe, dedication and commitment are less valued when compared to traditional subcultural theory. People who take part in the activities or movements of a neo-tribe are less likely to commit, or have continued engagement with the neo-tribe (Williams, 2011). Postmodern theorists ignore the meanings that subcultural members may attach to their activity and membership, by suggesting all members are only temporarily authentic members of a neo-tribe and all are transient in nature (Blackman, 2005; Williams, 2011).

Postmodern subcultural theory and extreme sport practices.

Postmodern subcultural theory and extreme sport share many similarities. Research in both disciplines has shown an increase in individualistic lifestyles for people in the 21st century (Lyng, 2005). There has been growth in the consumption of global trends such as style, jargon, aesthetics and media, which has made new extreme sport activities increasingly accessible to wider populations (Wheaton, 2003). Williams' (2011) work highlights how subcultures no longer need to be thought of as minorities and are more inclusive than in previous decades. Nonetheless, regardless of subcultures being more available to a wider population, there are only a limited number of extreme sport

participants who become experts and authentic subcultural members. The section below will discuss links between extreme sport, subcultures and mountain biking.

Extreme Sport Subcultures

      A brief history of extreme sport.

      It is suggested that extreme sport emerged in the 1950s and 1960s (Kay & Laberge, 2002). Many of the technological advancements in extreme sport can be traced to the Dangerous Sports Club, founded in Oxford in the 1970s. Through purposeful invention, extreme sports such as bungy jumping and hang gliding were born (Laviolette, 2011). Through the intentional introduction of new extreme sport ideas, the field was given a vision and people were deliberately inventing new extreme sports ideas. Booth and Thorpe (2007) discuss how the purpose for these extreme pursuits was an escape from social control, conformity and modernity. The precise origin of the term extreme sport is unclear, however it was adopted by marketing and media corporations to promote extreme sport competitions during the early 1990s (Cho et al., 2010). Sports are often characterised into extreme because of a lack of inherently uncontrollable variables. "These activities often involve great speed, height, a high level of physical exertion, highly specialised gear, and spectacular stunts" (Cho et al., 2010, p. 2051). "Extreme sport refers to sports activities with a high level of inherent danger, such as extreme skiing, snowboarding, mountain biking, motocross, aggressive in-line skating, wake-boarding, and paragliding" (Cho et al., 2010, p. 2051).

      Dangerous adventure activities are experiencing continuous growth, and there is a plethora of literature related to these activities (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). The meaning of extreme sport is continually evolving as each activity is renewed and reformed (Coates et al., 2010). Lyng (2005) describes how in society, risk taking individuals have emerged. "Dangerous games and adventure tours have shifted from being marginal, exotic or even

plain crazy to being more than merely accepted" (Laviolette, 2011, p. 1). Despite the popularity and ease of the term extreme sport, it does not explain its scope in sufficient detail. Uses and representations of extreme sports are multi-dimensional and have undergone many changes throughout history. Ideologies that have aided in developing the extreme sport term includes: religious beliefs, romanticism of adventure, the sublime and the American frontier. The wilderness was once approached with uncertainty and fear, it was viewed as dangerous and unexplored. In many instances there are apparent contradictions between the beauty and peacefulness of the environment, with the physically challenging and extreme activity. "...there might be a sense of being at risk of serious injury combined with feelings of being ultimately safe" (Willig, 2008, p. 697). The subjectivity of the term *extreme sport* means that it is open to much interpretation and what constitutes extreme often differs between subcultures.

Extreme sport demographics.

It is crucial to keep in mind that, "To reduce a subculture to its so-called core is to lose sight of the fact that subcultures are in constant flux, shifting across time and space (Williams, 2011, p. 39). Willig (2008) suggests that the demographic of participants in extreme sports has increased to include a wider range of ages and increasingly more women. Figures from America suggest that participation in alternative sports increased by 244.7% between 1978 and 2000 (Puchan, 2004).

Age.

Subcultures are frequently discussed in the literature as youth cultures (Gelder, 2007; Jenks 2005; Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003; and Williams, 2011). Extreme sport subcultures appear to attract younger generation participants who are predominantly male (Lyng, 2005). Cho et al. (2010) states how extreme sports tend to have a younger than

average age demographic. The media has a large impact on these youth subcultures and is primarily responsible for the development and expansion of subcultures. Despite the preoccupation with youth cultures, there appears to be no limit or definition of what constitutes a subculture where the people involved are not youth. Work by Willig (2008) that was based in England states that 5% of the adult population take part in extreme sport, and 12% of the population would like to take part. Likewise, Fincham's (2008) paper presents a group of working age cyclists who are part of the bicycle messenger subculture. Participants in his research had an average age of 28, which begs the question, how is a youth culture classified? There is a gap in the literature here as despite thorough searching, I could not find any articles that discussed age limits for subcultural inclusion. However, it is difficult to generalise the limits on chronological age as each specific subculture has their own standards, beliefs and norms.

Race, ethnicity and class.

Edensor and Richards (2005) identified that those involved in the snowboarding subculture are overwhelmingly white and middle class. These results are controversial and there is debate between theorists as to whether class, ethnicity and gender are still responsible for inclusion of individuals into subcultures. Information from Gelder (2007) and William's (2011) suggests that less than 12 years ago race, gender, ethnicity and class were defining factors in the study of cultures and subcultures. Regardless of this debate remaining topical, it is more widely accepted that people are more readily able to choose their subcultures and identities than ever before.

Postmodern subcultural theories have changed their focus, "...research has moved away from the study of marginalised groups in favour of non-normative groups where habit, style and other such practices make for more appropriate objects of study" (Williams, 2011, p. 45). There are two reasons for this change in thinking from traditional

social stratification concepts of race, class and ethnicity. Firstly, there is a larger emphasis on style and consumption within subcultures, where dominance can be gained through financial benefits. Secondly, identity is more important than class in understanding social behaviours (Gelder, 2007; Williams, 2011). Regardless of income, Gelder and Thornton (2005) discussed how people can come from a working class background with similar circumstances, yet through their individual choice of dress, activities, leisure and lifestyle pursuits they can choose to be part of different subcultures. Thus, by choosing to portray a certain identity, a person is able to choose to identify within a certain subculture. "Members of a subculture may walk, talk, act, and look different from their parents and from some of their peers; but they belong to the same families, go to the same schools, work at much the same jobs, live down the same streets as their peers and parents" (Gelder & Thornton, 2005, p. 95). This postmodern subcultural view of subcultures appears much less constraining and more tied to the actions and choices of individuals.

Gender.

There is little debate that extreme sport subcultures remain male dominated domains. Research by Huybers-Withers and Livingston (2010) confirmed how "mainstream sport is characterised by competition and physical domination which contributes to a particular form of idealised masculinity being celebrated by society" (p. 1204). Current trends in academic sporting literature confirm that extreme sport subcultures contribute to the construction of dominant structures within society. "Authentic subcultural participation is consistently defined in ways associated with masculinity" (Donnelly, 2006, p. 223). As stated in Donnelly (2006), the construction of snowboarding as a male dominated sport suggests prevailing ideas about gender differences that exclude females from aspects of the subcultural group. The gender differences make a subculture more exclusive and increasingly difficult for female

inclusion. Huybers-Withers and Livingston's (2010) paper reiterates the gender inequalities that are present within extreme sport. Their extensive research on mountain bike magazines found that male members of the sport were the main focus and that women were marginalised. "Mountain biking is portrayed as a male-domain whereby mountain biking products are to be developed and used by men" (Huybers-Withers & Livingston, 2010, p. 1204).

Lois's (2001) research examined the emotional differences between male and female members of a search and rescue group. Through examining the emotional highs and lows of the group, she was able to compare the psychological gender differences in edgework experiences. Her findings supported gender stereotypes such as the males were more macho and excited in the prospect of adventure, whereas the females were more anxious and calculated in their actions. There is little doubt that gender differences exist in extreme sport subcultures, however postmodern subcultural research suggests that because of the more transient sociality's, there may be less constraint placed upon gender and more choice for all (Wheaton, 2007).

Locations.

This section synthesises the limited research regarding the relationship that extreme sport participants have with certain settings such as meeting bases, gathering spaces and event areas. Fincham (2008) and Wheaton (2004) suggest that subcultural members often meet at certain locations that contribute to the subculture's development. Specific locations provide spaces for the subcultures to expand, and provide sites where people can develop feelings of ownership. For example, Fincham's (2008) paper discusses how subcultural members are often internationally linked by feelings of commonality when they share a base. His paper uses examples where the bicycle messengers work at the same place, party at the same houses and travel in the same circles around parts of

England. Thus the riders have similar experiences and develop similar understandings of their lifeworld. In downhill mountain biking, riders are able to exchange ideas, discuss riding locations and learn the networks of tracks throughout the world in the security of an international downhill mountain bike subculture. Examples of this include the competitive world cup circuit which sees racers travel to the same eight locations throughout the world annually. The racers build a familiarity and sense of place with each location, which provides a temporal home base for each participant at each event. Fincham's (2008) research found this in the study of bicycle messengers where "...people were able to travel the world with their bicycles secure in the knowledge that they will have an established network of friends and access to employment" (p. 623). The value and importance of different locations appears to be an area that is overlooked in the literature of subcultures.

Natural environments.

It could be hypothesised that downhill mountain bikers share a similar appreciation for specific tracks and mountain bike environments throughout the world. However, there is a lack of academic information that examines mountain bike riders and racers care for, and connection with tracks and environmental spaces. The most relevant research on mountain biking is Taylor's (2010) work on cross-country riders. Findings concluded that there are numerous reasons for continued mountain bike participation, including social aspects, and site attributes. Taylor's (2010) paper suggests that mountain bikers in the 21st century seek sophisticated mountain biking on well groomed trails that have been purpose built.

Brymer et al. (2010) examined the role that outdoor environments play in the development and maintenance of lifestyle balance and well-being. The article builds on previous research which explored the benefits for human health through contact with nature. The article specifically looks at improvements in physiological, emotional,

psychological and spiritual health. Brymer et al. (2010) suggests that "there are five significant parts necessary in ensuring someone has a balanced life. These are: 1) emotional wellness, 2) social wellness, 3) intellectual wellness, 4) occupational wellness, and 5) spiritual wellness" (p. 22). The authors discuss how an individual's experience in nature leads to a healthier, more balanced life. People need to spend more time in the outdoors to enhance well-being in order to reconnect a fundamental human relationship with the natural world. Being active in nature improves self perception, improves self concept and aids occupational, emotional, physical and intellectual well-being, therefore increasing the perception of a positive lifestyle (Brymer et al., 2010).

Brymer et al. (2010) examined the dialogue interpreted from extreme sport athletes shortly following a series of extreme sport activities. The information from this research showed how the participants' emotions changed when they were immersed in natural settings. The research examined whether people need to go into natural settings to positively influence their emotions. Wellness was interpreted through a holistic mixed methods approach, and covered all information relating to quality of life and wellness. The authors found that human experiences in natural or green spaces do benefit wellness. Nonetheless, the outdoors is only one of the various dimensions needed for optimal wellness. However, a balance needs to be sought between several aspects within one's life for optimal wellness to be achieved. Lifestyle balance is a continuous journey towards optimal health that can only be realised through the integration of multiple dimensions (Brymer et al., 2010).

Edensor and Richard's (2005) work links with Brymer et al. (2010) as they examine the impact that specific locations have on individuals involvement in lifestyle sports and the effect this has on identity formation. Subcultures choose to use natural spaces in different ways and for different activities, and it is this distinction that gives subcultures unique ways of experiencing space. "We show how different users reproduce

relationships between space and identity through transmitting meaning about performing in and experiencing space" (Edensor & Richards, 2005, p. 99). In downhill mountain bike racing, this process is represented by networks of tracks that are dispersed, yet well established in different countries throughout the world. "Large areas of the countryside are increasingly territorialised by leisure seekers...and certain symbolic landscapes have become stages for an extensive cast of actors ranging from...practitioners of lifestyle sports, including windsurfers, climbers and mountain bikers" (Edensor & Richards, 2005, p. 99).

Quester, Beverland and Farrelly's (2006) research highlighted how participants felt belongingness to the social group, and a strong sense of connection to a certain natural place. Similarly, participants in Celsi, Rose and Leigh's (1993) study found that increased camaraderie helped participants to develop technical skills that increased feelings of inclusion and social status within the subculture. This was also found by Jung-Hwan and Ridinger (2009) who recorded that participants felt that they could be more involved and felt a connection to the group and community. Similarly, in a common environment, Lois's (2001) participants felt that they could contribute to the group through emotional support, and this helped them to better manage their place within the subculture of a mountain rescue group.

Future research in this area could focus on the relationship that subcultural members have with their environments. There is the potential to examine practices such as track building, trail maintenance and environmental care to see the effect that working with the earth has on extreme sport participants. An obvious gap in bicycle research surrounds the possibility of using power meter cranks to analyse data to see what tracks and terrain conditions are most preferred by mountain bikers. These cranks provide a rider with information detailing speed, track gradient, power output, revolutions per minute,

and other such data. From this, research could be completed that guides the development of track designs that are most popular.

Extreme sport experiences.

There is an abundance of literature that discusses the psychological motivations that inspire individuals to practice extreme sports (Burkitt, 2002; Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Lois, 2001; Lyng, 2005; Varley, 2006). Extreme sports experiences appear to be subjective, yet there are similarities and patterns in the literature that suggest some experiences are common or typical in specific activities. It is likely that people belong to a chosen subculture in order to experience similar sensations and experiences. "It could be argued that the desire to encounter new and stimulating experiences such as sensation seeking is a necessary pre-condition for the initiation of extreme sport involvement" (Willig, 2008, p. 692).

The following sections discuss many of the sensations that extreme sport participants experience when taking part in a range of activities. These experiences often provide the motivation for participants to keep returning to their chosen sports. Physical engagement in extreme sports often gives those who take part feelings of self-reward and satisfaction which increases their quality of life.

Relaxation.

Contradictory to common understandings of extreme sport, many participants discuss how extreme sport helps to relax and calm them (Wheaton, 2004). Schneider, Butryn, David, Furst and Masucci (2007) recorded that relaxation, a sense of calm and peace of mind occurred through dangerous adventure involvement. "Several participants noted a sense of calm or relaxation just prior to going into a risky situation or as a result of high risk" (Schneider et al., 2007, p. 344). The research suggests that participants feel

anxious in the weeks and days leading up to their chosen extreme sport, yet feel confident and calm right before the extreme sport engagement. One female participant quoted, "I use a kind of mind relaxation. Like I'll go up and ski really hard today...and come home totally relaxed" (Schneider et al., 2007, p. 344). This was similar to Celsi et al. (1993) findings which recorded that skydiving, base jumping and climbing brought on a feeling of release as a relaxant. This finding was also true for Larkin and Griffiths's (2004) paper which stated that bungy jumping provides what seemed like a well deserved reward and acted as an escape route from self consciousness. Quester et al. (2006) also stated that, "...evidence of anti-establishment and getting free from the daily grind that is society, work, or school and being part of something not subject to rules, processes or structure of mainstream and commercialised sport..." was a key reason for participating in dangerous adventures (p. 22). Celsi et al. (1993) also commented that "informants made numerous mentions of the tension emanating from the workplace and the catharsis they gained from skydiving" (p. 9), with one participant quoting "skydiving is a release, it relaxes me" (p. 9). The immediate demands of extreme sport situations are such that participants are engrossed in the requirements of the moment. These experiences offer participants with an escape from the normalities of their lifeworld and provide participants with liberating experiences that transfer into other areas of their lives (Lyng, 2005).

Challenge and transfer.

After synthesising a range of studies, it is apparent that extreme sport participants often take part in their chosen sports to challenge themselves. From this challenge, the participants enjoyed the transfer that occurred in other areas of their lives. Quester et al. (2006) discussed how participants enjoyed challenging themselves and conquering the goals that they set themselves. Willig's (2008) paper found that participants relished their opportunities to "...push themselves to the limits, possibly beyond, both mentally and

physically" (p. 695). By conquering the challenges, the participants were rewarded with feelings of control and achievement. A similar desire for control was seen in Kay and Laberge's (2002) paper which stated that adventure racers saw competing as a self actualisation and management exercise. The adventure racers got feelings of self-reward, where they felt better about themselves and their work having completed the adventure race. Rising to the challenge was a common trend across the extreme sport papers and was often followed by a sense of achievement and then positive transfer into other areas of participants' lives. "The triumph over one's limitations generated feelings of satisfaction and pride, and these were experienced as pleasurable" (Willig, 2008, p. 695). Often extreme sport challenges bring about transformations in the participants experiences, processes and perceptions. One participant in Willig's (2008) work "...describes how learning to skydive involves the challenge of undergoing physical and mental transformations" (p. 695). This was seen in Kay and Laberge's (2002) paper where transferability was a sought after benefit of adventure racing as the participants stated "learning about themselves and how I operate under stress" (p. 32) as a benefit of the dangerous adventure.

Happiness.

Price and Bundesen (2005) recognised that happiness was an outcome in the sport of skydiving. Measures of happiness in Price and Bundesen's (2005) paper included participants recording feelings including happy, cheerful, pleasant, excited, satisfied and loving. The authors suggest that, "...positive emotions begin relatively low and increase dramatically after the jump" (Price & Bundesen, 2005, p. 1209). The article stated that as the participants became more experienced at skydiving, they sought more abstract emotional experiences. The excitement and adrenalin rush never entirely disappeared, however levels diminished over time. This finding was also true in the work of Schneider

et al. (2007) where experienced sensation seekers felt more comfortable with increased levels of risk. The motives that initially attract participants to extreme sport often evolve as the participants transcend through the stages of experiment and thrill, mastery and identity, and community and self fulfilment. Additionally, Buckley's (2011) paper discusses 14 different motivations for adventure recreation and describes the combination of these motivations as rush. The term rush signifies all motivations for adventure activities which fall under the headings: 1) internal performance of activity; 2) internal and external place in nature, and; 3) external social position within the culture. In many ways, the study of subcultures ties in with the motivations for participation and continuation of subcultural belongingness (Buckley, 2011).

Celsi et al. (1993) and Price and Bundesen (2005) examined the emotional differences between novice and expert skydivers, where the extreme sport experiences changed depending on the participants' level of ability. This research showed that duration of time in a subculture may affect the experiences and sensations that participants have. Additionally, reasons for belonging to a subculture may affect the experiences and feelings that participants have within an extreme sport subculture. Jung-Hwan and Ridinger (2009) recorded that participants experienced a range of positive emotions, sport satisfaction and sport enjoyment. The report found that those who were intrinsically motivated to windsurf showed more persistence, positive emotions, greater interest and sport satisfaction. Jung-Hwan and Ridinger (2009) found that three key powerful predictors of activity commitment were sport enjoyment, involvement opportunities and personal investments. In addition, Donnelly's (2006) paper simplified the extreme sport experiences by stating that the main reason that snowboarders snowboard is for fun.

Unpleasant experiences.

Subcultural experiences are not all enjoyable, and it is suggested in Lyng (2005) that participants need to pass through stages of fear, exclusion and failure in order to eventually become a part of the subculture and have enjoyable experiences. "Suffering is necessary because it constitutes tangible evidence of the fact that one is really pushing up against limitations and breaking through boundaries" (Willig, 2008, p. 696). Laviolette (2011) discusses dangerous, deviant and unpleasant rituals that hopeful subcultural members must undertake in order to become part of a specific extreme sport subculture. Schneider et al. (2007) noted nausea, nervousness and horror sensations which occurred from adventure racing experiences. "Nick, for instance, compared his feelings to those who experienced danger in war situations" (Schneider et al., 2007, p. 344). This was similar to Larkin and Griffiths's (2004) results which found that ambivalence, fear, anticipation, unpredictability and unpleasantness occurred when participants felt a lack of control. The paper discussed how some participants only persevered with dangerous adventures in the hope of understanding and experiencing the enjoyment that others were demonstrating. In this sense, extreme sports have a phase of initiation before an individual is accepted into the subculture (Willig, 2008). As stated by Larkin and Griffiths's (2004) paper, the desire to be included in the subculture may be connected to identity management and is one part of subcultural enculturation. In this sense, participants try to pass through the unpleasant states in order to become part of the subculture and increase a chosen identity.

Mountain Biking as an Extreme Sport Subculture

Mountain biking has many sub-disciplines with distinct characteristics and different cultural patterns. The multi-faceted sport includes disciplines such as downhill, cross-country, four cross, free-ride, single-speed, short track cross-country, enduro, super-

D and ultra-marathon. Each discipline within mountain biking attracts a collective of individuals who show obvious and distinct subcultural attributes. The Union Cyclist International is the international governing body for cycling and organises both world cup and world championship events. "The UCI represents the interests of more than 170 National Federations, five Continental Confederations, 1200 professional riders, 600,000 licensed riders, millions of cycle sport enthusiasts who train on a regular basis and more than a billion bicycle users" (Union Cyclist International, 2012).

This section of the review focuses on the downhill mountain bike subculture within New Zealand. Academic literature on downhill mountain biking is thin and it appears that the stereotype of deviant downhillers still remains. In New Zealand, downhill mountain biking has a strong subcultural following that is continually growing in popularity. Downhill mountain bike racing involves a timed race run down a thrilling single track with jumps, drops, steep shoots and sharp corners. "The racer who covers the course in the least amount of time is the winner" (Schneider et al., 2007, p. 212). Research from Dodson (1996) notes how "mountain biking is as exciting, intense, physically challenging sport in which riders are constantly faced with opportunities for self discovery through the testing of mental and physical limits" (p. 317). Feelings of elation and personal excitement are common, influenced by exceptional performance, overcoming adversity and skill limitations or riding surrounded by pristine wilderness environments (Dodson, 1996). Mountain biking is a cult sport that symbolises virtues of ruggedness and individualism where daredevil personalities are common (Patrick, 1988). "Mountain biking is a complex, high intensity sport which requires affective focusing...over rocks and logs, through trees, sand, and mud" (Kabush & Orlick, 2001, p. 40). "Due to the demanding technical terrain, there is also an element of risk and fear in the sport of mountain biking with the potential for serious injury or death" (Kabush & Orlick, 2001, p. 40).

Racing is held on different mountains throughout the world where chairlifts or gondolas operate. The world cup circuit sees mountain bikers travel to eight countries annually to attend a series of races (Union Cyclist International, 2012). Gravity mountain biking is the broader name that encapsulates the discipline of free-riding. Free-riding participants do not race, but enjoy the feeling of riding downhill at a time and place that suits them. In free-riding the competition is not necessarily between competitors, but between the individual and the environment. These free-riders make up a significant part of the downhill mountain bike subculture. Puchan (2004) states that these sports are not mainstream or traditional, and include elements of risk, danger, unconventional rules, and are activities requiring technique.

Mountain bikes were invented during the mid to late 1970s, originating in Marin County, Northern California in the United States of America, with mass production of mountain bikes beginning in 1977 (Rosen, 1993). The first Union Cyclist International World Mountain Bike Championships was held in 1986 (Kabush & Orlick, 2001). During the 1990s downhill mountain biking underwent extensive growth due to increased interest from the media and due to formalisation of rules and governing bodies. Similarly to snowboarding, the lifestyle subcultures were accepted as professional competitions which represented the ethos and characteristics of capitalist sport (Coates et al., 2010). Most of the subcultural development occurred in the United States of America where large sponsors were supporting racers to compete and represent specific brands, which in turn helped to give mountain bikers a sense of legitimacy. The development of subcultures such as this are not spontaneous and, "...are carefully constructed by participants who commit to it over long periods of time" (Willig, 2008, p. 696).

A familiar debate in many extreme sport disciplines is whether Olympic inclusion would be beneficial or detrimental to their activity. Because fun is a major part of extreme sport, participants fear that inclusion into the Olympic Games would lead to their sport

becoming too commercialised to the detriment of the subculture (Laviolette, 2011; Lyng, 2005; and Wheaton, 2003). Thus far, downhill mountain biking has not been included in to the Olympic Games. In a similar subculture, snowboarding resisted inclusion into the Olympic Games as riders publically shunned the 1998 event and refused to compete. This ethos represents a subculture's resistance in becoming involved in the cultural ideals of western sport (Coates et al., 2010). Moments of resistance such as this may help to strengthen the subculture as the riders work together for a common cause. Nonetheless, resistance to the Olympic Games means that the sport does not get as much financial assistance from government organisations and therefore racers get less endorsements and support. The snowboarders in Coates et al. (2010) paper felt that their sport would promote anti-snowboarder principles such as nationalism and professionalism if included into the Olympic Games. This idea both adheres to and contradicts opinions offered by mountain bike managers and stakeholders. Mountain bikers appear to be undecided regarding Olympic Games inclusion and thus far only cross-country mountain biking has been accepted into the Olympic Games.

The Subcultural Experience

 Power and hegemony.

  Power and hegemony is an extensive and vast reaching field for subcultural exploration. Specific types and meanings of the manifestation of power differ across a range of sport and extreme sport activities. Research from Coates et al. (2010) discussed the fluidity of power within the subculture of snowboarding. "Snowboarders seek to control meanings or ideas that are portrayed about their activity" (p. 1084). The paper suggested that snowboarders and subcultures are better off to resist inclusion into mainstream society by resisting and preventing inclusion into dominant groups. Thorpe's (2004) also examined power dynamics and "...implicitly views the body as a social

phenomenon, that is, it conceptualises the body as a possessor of power, a form of status, a bearer of symbolic value and a form of physical capital" (p. 181). Thorpe's (2004) paper confirms Coates et al. (2010) outcomes by suggesting that subcultural participants' language, fashion, cultural tastes and bodily deportment are a means of producing and reproducing power within the social group. "Like those in many other former and existing youth cultures, snowboarders dress, speak and behave in distinctive ways" (Thorpe, 2004, p. 182). The mechanics of style in Thorpe's (2004) research offers an area worthy of further study as subcultures become increasingly influenced by the media and commodified.

Subcultures are sites for the production and reproduction of identity and role adoption which can be pursued by a range of people who each play differing roles within the subculture such as active participants or spectators. "Identity reinforcement can be found through membership in a sports group, a particular sporting role, a sports performance or it can be experienced vicariously as a sport spectator, either live or through the media" (Weiss, 2001, p. 393). Donnelly and Young (1988) suggest that this need for subcultural identity and status is a deliberate act in which someone adopts mannerisms, attitudes, style of dress, speech and behaviour in order to be an accepted member of the subculture. To help with inclusion into subcultures, hopeful members rely on material objects which help reinforce the social structures, communal aspirations and subcultural goals of each individual, and the subculture as a whole. Early research from Merton (1938) stated that the social structures within subcultures are not in equilibrium and therefore strain, stress and social stratification is created in cultures. The following sections discuss the facets that comprise a subculture and the contextual links to power and politics.

Reputation.

Reputation and recognition are factors that often motivate people to remain involved and active in sport. Weiss (2001) states that there are five types of recognition that most people desire. Firstly, individuals aim to be recognised as a member of a group. Secondly, people like to be recognised for doing an assigned role. This needs to be a public role in which others can see that they are productive and successful. Thirdly, it is necessary that the individual is continually improving in the task and developing new skills so that other people can see them improving. The fourth category of recognition refers to a person's need to be recognised as attending public functions within society. Weiss (2001) stated that this may include religious festivals, meetings or crowds at a market place. The final category for social recognition refers to a person's desire for individuality as each person hopes to be seen as unique. "As far as sport is concerned, this might be reflected in individual sports such as skiing, tennis, golf, or riding" (Weiss, 2001, p. 395). In accordance with these findings, the subculture of downhill mountain biking is a suitable extreme sport that may fulfil all five categories to provide social recognition for an individual.

Identity and authenticity.

Certain influences often help mould individuals, and provide the foundations for the development of self identity (Giddens, 2001). While acknowledging the role of biology, the process of socialisation helps mould the child into the person that they choose to be. While appreciating the fact that not all children have the same choices or opportunities, they develop in accordance to what they see as necessary or appropriate for their life. Giddens (2001) appreciates that these opportunities may be restricted by factors such as biological, genetic and natural boundaries. Sociological processes are important to appreciate when exploring how and why some people are accepted as subcultural

members. The act of becoming a subcultural member can be an intentional decision, unintentional process overtime, or a person can be born or placed into a subculture. This section of the review will focus predominantly on individuals who consciously decide to become subcultural members. Wheaton (2003) proclaims that, "becoming a windsurfer involves proclaiming a subcultural identity through their leisure consumption and its attendant value system and lifestyle" (p. 76).

A wide range of academic research has focused on the development of identity within the sporting realm. Identity within sociology can be defined as individuals adhering to and following trends or patterns within a group or subculture. "In a two way process, authentic stylistic resistance occurs through bricolage, an act of transformation by which a new and original style is formed through plunder and re-contextualisation as a challenge to the hegemony of the dominant culture" (Muggleton, 2000. p. 131).When investigating subcultures, there is a need to distinguish between two kinds of identities within subcultures. Firstly, "categorical identities that create insider or outsider distinctions", and secondly, "status identities that negotiate rank or prestige within a subcultural scene" (Williams, 2011, p. 15). For example, many people feel that they have a range of identities, and each is necessary for different roles. These can include a role identity where people are competent in their activity in social settings, compared with a self identity, where they see themselves in a different light to how others view them. Additionally, there are those who create certain identities through new styles and fashions, and those who follow the fads and trends. The identifying feature tends to be that particular individuals consider themselves to be included members and label themselves as they see necessary, in order to fit into the specific group. Identity and individuality appears to be a well documented motivating factor for why people choose to participate in sport. Willig (2008) found that those who maintained their involvement in extreme sport "...were

motivated by a combination of the desire to achieve mastery and status and the opportunity to construct a new personal identity" (p. 692).

Respondents to Quester et al. (2006) survey relished the individual performance and challenge that arose from participating in their chosen adventure. Often participants build self-actualisation and management skills, while learning about themselves (Kay & Laberge, 2002). Generation Y people are said to be fascinated with the individuality, risk and excitement of dangerous adventure activities (Bennett & Henson, 2003). This may help identify reasons why snowboarding, surfing and skateboarding emerged from the new leisure movement imbued with an individualistic, anticompetitive and capitalist ethos (Donnelly, 2006). Findings from Bennett and Henson (2003), Donnelly (2006), and Larkin and Griffiths (2004) noted that participants felt increased personal development and a strengthening of their identities when they were snowboarding. "In contemporary society, the symbolic values attached to bodily forms are critical to many people's sense of self" (Thorpe, 2004, p. 181). Donnelly (2006) confirmed this by stating that through gaining a new identity, the participants felt that they had a new voice within the subculture of bungy jumping. Similarly, Larkin and Griffiths (2004) found that, participation grants access to identity. Findings were similar for Donnelly (2006), where the consumption of the right products contributed to the development of the participants identities through the accumulation of subcultural capital. As the participants established themselves within the subcultural group, they developed knowledge regarding which products to buy, and what not to buy. Larkin and Griffiths (2004) discussed how acquisition of a good collection of experiences demonstrates commitment to a specific subculture and means that the participants can make a more substantial claim to subcultural membership. Larkin and Griffiths (2004) suggested that, "It seems logical to suggest that opportunities for expression, fulfilment and agency will be connected to risk taking behaviour" (p. 228). Participants in this study commented on how they knew that as their skills developed and

as they took more risks, their place in the subculture was further developed. As the participants learnt to like the activity of bungy jumping, they became increasingly accepted into the subcultural group (Larkin & Griffiths, 2004).

Quester et al. (2006) stated that the participants valued the belongingness and social bond that transpired from subcultural inclusion. In the same way, Celsi et al. (1993) described it as shared experiences. Celsi et al. (1993) stated that, "...acceptance into the skydiving community is marked by rites of passage. These milestones are experience based and are celebrated in ritual fashion" (p. 7). This was also seen in the study by Quester et al. (2006) which documented an increased expression of one's creativity and individuality. For Quester et al. (2006), being able to express one's creativity and individuality was a key factor for participating in dangerous adventure activities. This area of creativity and artistry appears to be a new research area and there is a gap in the literature surrounding this theme.

In Celsi et al. (1993) the participants recorded a new self identity through skill mastery. Quester et al. (2006) wrote that the participants often defined their identity around the activity. Weiss (2001) reinforces the role that sport plays in the construction of identity and role adoption. Weiss (2001) discussed how sport is a visual activity which allows for people to judge others who are participating. Therefore, extreme sport participants are inclined to ensure their reputation is maintained or improved in the activity. "The mechanism of role adoption is a constituent of identity reinforcement or social recognition in sport" (Weiss, 2001, p. 393). Trends across the literature show that the perception of identity increases with a prolonged duration of time spent in a subculture. Other factors do contribute to increased identity formation, however duration and performance are the two predominant factors that lead to authentic subcultural inclusion.

Style.

Style for subcultures is more than just the way that members dress. "Style is very clearly cultural and symbolic" (Williams, 2011, p. 69). Style includes the argot, demeanour, and the image (Williams, 2011). The *argot* is part of the image and refers to the specialised jargon and gestures that subcultures produce over time. The argot is only understood by subcultural members and can be secret or hard for mainstream society to understand. This is seen by how a person presents themselves each day, including how they express themselves, as this often reflects subcultural affiliations. Style is inextricably linked to identity, where the style that someone adopts helps define their subcultural belonging. There are power dynamics embedded into everything that the subculture does, including the actions, possessions and practices which help a culture to define themselves and their power status in society. Subcultural symbols are interpreted and used in different ways in each significant subculture (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). "Communication is built upon a shared understanding of sign systems, the study of which is called semiotics" (Williams, 2011, p. 27). Signs include objects and styles that represent and signify powers that are greater than the object itself.

Additionally, style is linked to consumption, where subcultural trends are adopted by the dominant culture and sold to mass markets. "Through diffusion, the subversive potential of subcultural style is sanitised, commercially, through commodification of subcultural form: the turning of gestures and signs of refusal into mainstream fashion" (Muggleton, 2000, p. 132). Resistance through style appears to be diminishing as society moves away from the radical styles of the 1970s and 1980s. Styles that were once seen as outrageous are now seen as high fashion, and society appears to be more tolerant of extravagant dress. Muggleton (2000) suggested style is losing its potential for resistance, as extreme styles are now seen as increasingly mundane.

Image.

Cho et al. (2010) investigated the characteristics of extreme sport participants' identities through an examination that compared the fashion differences between extreme sports participants and traditional sports groups. Outcomes revealed that extreme sport participants are more likely to seek out distinctive, conspicuous and the latest sportswear (Cho et al., 2010). The study revealed that the lifestyle characteristics of extreme sport participants are more expressive, distinctive, fashion orientated, conspicuous, and more brand orientated than more traditional sport characteristics (Cho et al., 2010). Research by (Donnelly, 2006; Park, Kim & Joung, 2008; and Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003) stated that the clothing and music related to extreme sport subcultures is very fashionable and is a style that is adopted by non-participants who want to imitate athletes such as surfers or skateboarders. Wheaton (2003) found that "the windsurfer's identity is marked by numerous signs, ranging from clothes and fashion and vehicles driven to the equipment used..." (p. 77).

Gelder (2007) highlighted the way people use their bodies with visual symbols such as tattoos and body piercings to help represent themselves to others around them. These visual identifiers help to distinguish members of the subculture from mainstream society, which in turn helps to develop the supremacy of the subculture. Similarly, Fincham (2008) stated that if people choose to adopt the fashion in a specific subculture, this indicates they are taking their role in the subculture seriously. In the bicycle messenger subculture, "rather than the fashion creating the culture, the work provides the arena for the possibility of the culture, and that, in turn, informs the fashion" (Fincham, 2008, p. 623). In this sense, visually the individuals appear to belong to the subculture. The participants of each subculture have a common link and are bound by a visual identity. "It is through these small things that people who have never met can feel commonality" (Fincham, 2008, p. 623). Nonetheless, there is debate surrounding the level

that someone can be included into a subculture as an authentic member for looking the part, but not physically taking part.

Another attribute associated with image is the role that music plays in the subculture. (Gelder, 2007; and Gelder & Thornton, 2005) provide a chapter dedicated to the nexus that occurs between music and subcultures. In Gelder's (2007) book, music symbolises racial issues that link subcultures to their historical roots. In this case, music represents numerous meanings and provides the subculture members with deep connections. The fashions, language, beat and expression in the music represents more than just music for those who are involved. Music is part of the subcultural experience with examples such as deviant jazz musicians and localised American rap artists. The chapters in Gelder's (2007) work overlook the possibility that subcultures use their chosen music to distinguish themselves from dominant society. These chapters reference only traditional subcultures, nonetheless the importance and use of music may be a promising area of study for postmodern subcultures.

Language.

Language is the linchpin that ensures cultures are constructed and reproduced (Mean & Halone, 2010). Language provides a common means for the subculture to communicate as an entity, and with others outside of the subculture. Mean and Halone (2010) argue that, "...language, representations, and other discursive practices are pivotal for the construction and enactment of sport..." (p. 253). Various signs and symbols help strengthen sport, with examples such as rules, scoreboards and many forms of jargon between players, referees, coaches and fans. "Language is one of the most important components of the distinctiveness and cultural identity in sport" (Liponski, 2009, p. 19). "Language is perhaps the most basic and yet important social structure in human life; it shapes how we define our reality and everything in it" (Williams, 2011, p. 27). Within a

subculture, the language used is often referred to as the code. "Cultural codes are ideological, structured, pragmatic representations of the everyday life of the people who create them" (Williams, 2011, p. 53). These codes are not easily understood and need to be deciphered and learnt. Therefore they provide a method for a subculture to develop social status as the code becomes a source of power (Williams, 2011).

Extreme sport subcultures have highly specialised languages that the athletes use for informal discussions. Within each sporting subculture there are numerous levels and types of jargon. Examples of this include, "...coaching jargon, terminologies of training methodology, the language of sport science, sport medicine and the athletes and fans slang" (Liponski, 2009, p. 19). In downhill mountain biking the riders use terms such as; berm, pre-jump, drift, rail and knuckle to describe aspects of riding a bike. On the downhill mountain bike world cup circuit, the riders travel together, stay in the same hotels and attend the same events. This mix of international athletes means that the process of communication becomes universalised (Liponski, 2009). This linguistical code continues to develop as the subculture progresses, and thus subcultural members need to continue to be involved in order to understand the new language progressions (Williams, 2011).

"The cultural patterns of a civilisation are indexed in the language which expresses that civilisation" (Liponski, 2009, p. 19). Therefore, the jargon of certain subcultures largely reflects the national language and distinct features of the dominant community. Subcultures adopt, invent and develop specific jargon which extends their cultural positions within society. Examples of this are numerous in extreme sport, where jargon to describe the elements of activities such as rafting, surfing and skateboarding are common place (Laviolette, 2011; Lyng, 2005; Wheaton, 2004). In this sense, the communal jargon produced through the subculture is representative of the participants lived experiences.

Nonetheless, there is a dearth of research that focuses on sport jargon and linguistics. "None of the innumerable academics of physical education have carried out any systematic research on sports linguistics, even on a basic level" (Liponski, 2009, p. 20). "...social and cultural significance of sport continues to be underestimated" (Mean & Halone, 2010, p. 254). There is a multitude of information that centres on linguistics and the use of jargon within all possible regional dialects except sport (Liponski, 2009). It is as if academics have underestimated the importance that linguistics plays in providing insight into cultures and this shows a clear and unforeseen gap in the literature.

Mean and Halone (2010) suggest that researchers are overlooking the significance of sporting cultures because of the common presence that they have in everyday life. Researchers need to examine the ideological underpinnings of these social groupings as this is an important site to direct theoretical attention. "As an entity that has become routinely embedded and interconnected with how we define ourselves, the cultures we inhabit, and the language we use to achieve both, sport remains not just relevant but highly consequential" (Mean & Halone, 2010, p. 257).

Technology and consumption.

Technology and consumption is a modern and relatively new strand in the study of subcultures. William's (2011) states how consumption is now an important concept in contemporary studies of youth. Two interesting papers are discussed in this section that highlight the importance of brands and authenticity in selecting appropriate products. "The postmodern consumer often finds authenticity in communities of consumption including those that are based around a focal brand" (Quester et al., 2010, p. 698). Recent research suggests that in postmodern markets, individuals find authenticity by consuming commercial objects. With the decline of traditional markers of identity, such as local communities and institutions, consumers have renewed links to time, place, and culture by

engaging in communities of consumption, including those focused on a single brand. In this sense, lifestyle sports have become embedded with the need for consumption in order to be a part of the chosen subcultural lifestyle. Now, more than ever, it is easier to purchase products that are indicative of an individual belonging to a certain group. Quester et al. (2010) separates those who are involved in consummative subcultures into two different categories: 1) those who are authentic subcultural members and are engaged in being, and 2) those who are seen as just *doing* the lifestyle, who adopt the trappings of the subculture without embracing the authentic way of life. "Debates about *being* verses *doing* relate to sincerity of motive, which is often equated with authenticity (Quester et al., 2010, p. 700). There are differing opinions on this subject, where some writers suggest that purchasing subcultural equipment shows commitment to a subculture, whereas others state that buying the gear is an example of, "young people doing rather than having identities" (Williams, 2011, p. 37). This finding correlates with consummative subcultures such as surfing, snowboarding and skateboarding, where it may be possible for people to buy their way into subcultures.

Sherlock and Weller (2005) explore how knowledge is passed between subcultural members regarding what products and brands to consume in order to be accepted into the subculture. A process where individuals learn to critically filter out some brands is learnt through localised socialisation, where prolonged time in the subculture reflects the product judgement of each member. This hierarchal process of consumption provides members with recognition of their level of subcultural authenticity. "Unlike many other subcultures of consumption, where access to the objects and activities of the subculture is relatively straightforward, becoming a biker in Ireland needs prolonged commitment" (Sherlock & Weller, 2005, p. 1). This finding provides insight into how subcultural identity can be established over time and how a critical ability to correctly consume is developed through experience over time in a subculture.

The sections above have highlighted many of the components that help retain extreme sport participants. The overarching factor appears to be that each or some of these sensations increase participants' quality of life. In downhill mountain biking specifically, the racers continue to live the chosen lifestyle to increase their well-being and life satisfaction. The following section summarises the broad and subjective context that comprises quality of life. Because of the vast nature of quality of life, this section will focus on just some of the factors that typically lead to positive life quality.

Defining Quality of Life

Christiansen and Matuska (2006) described lifestyle balance as "...a consistent pattern of occupation that results in reduced stress and improved health and well-being" (p. 50). Furthermore, in 2008 they suggested that lifestyle balance is, "...a perceived congruence between desired and actual patterns" (p. 9). The writers propose that people perceive lifestyle balance when they are content in life's activities that are virtuous and balanced to the interests, goals, values and capabilities of the individual. Similarly, Hornquist's (1990) report postulated that quality of life covers life as a whole, as well as different sub-domains of life. "Life quality is defined as perceived global satisfaction and satisfaction within a number of key domains with special emphasis on well-being" (Hornquist, 1990, p. 69). The perception of lifestyle balance appears to be the defining factor for whether someone is living a satisfactory quality of life.

Approaches for understanding quality of life are varied as each study attempts to incorporate the necessary categories for depicting this elusive term. Matuska and Christiansen (2008) state, "...there exists no consensus definition of lifestyle balance, even though the concept appears regularly in the popular press" (p. 9). However, quality of life is an umbrella term that can be fractured into numerous micro categories that each contribute towards a person's lifestyle balance. In the New Zealand context, Hauora is one

concept of well-being that encompasses physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions of well-being. Each of the concepts included in Hauora work in unison and influence one another to bring about quality of life for an individual. The inter-linked concepts follow a similar pattern to Matuska and Christiansen's (2008) model by adding in a dimension termed whenua. The Māori term whenua signifies the importance of the people inter-linked with the land and environment. This link between the four elements of well-being and the environment has strong connections with downhill mountain bikers and their use of the land. Downhill mountain bikers rely on access to a range of tracks throughout New Zealand. Each track spirals down different geographical terrain and presents a range of obstacles. As the racers travel down each track, they open themselves up to experiencing new land forms, which they may judge as enjoyable, challenging or too dangerous. Through these judgements and feelings, the racers build relationships with the land, regardless of whether it may be a positive or negative. The relationship between extreme sports participants and different settings is an area of academia where there appears to be little research.

Christiansen and Matuska's (2006) paper developed four approaches for understanding lifestyle balance. These are: 1) time studies, 2) role studies, 3) need satisfaction, and 4) biological rhythm. These four themes are suggested to encompass the key areas necessary for lifestyle balance. Extreme sport links to all four of these themes, however, the need satisfaction is perhaps the most relevant for this research. After further inquiry Christiansen and Matuska (2008) revised these four themes and added other factors relating to lifestyle balance which are: 1) to meet the basic instrumental needs necessary for sustained biological health and physical safety; 2) to have rewarding and self affirming relationships with others; 3) to feel engaged, challenged, and competent; 4) to create meaning and a positive personal identity; and 5) to organise time and energy in ways that enables a person to meet personal goals and renewal. From these themes, it

could be suggested that downhill mountain biking provides participants with opportunities

to meet all of these further themes. After analysing the qualitative research from numerous

quality of life papers, Matuska and Christiansen's (2006) work appears to provide the

clearest and most established theoretical framework for conceptualising quality of life in

this project.

In a similar study, Tolhurst and Stewart (2004) used a qualitative methodology to

examine the ways that medical students in Australia achieved balance in different aspects

of their lives. Although this research has been undertaken in a field that differs largely

from extreme sport, there are many important factors that appear to be similar to the

lifestyles of downhill mountain bikers. Their paper found five dominant themes that were

important for each participant's quality of life: 1) resisting the workaholic tendency; 2)

achieving family balance; 3) ensuring time out or leisure; 4) resisting generational

imbalance of their parents' lifestyles; and 5) ensuring continued career choice. These

factors are all important for professional downhill racers, who may feel the need to train

excessively and sacrifice family time for mountain bike races. Professional racers may

miss opportunities for future employment and put off education until it is often too late.

Rapoport and Rapoport's (1974) model provides a clear depiction of the factors

that influence a person's quality of life. The writers suggest thinking of the three key

components of a person's life as a *triple helix*. Changes in career, leisure and family all

constitute critical turning points in a person's life cycle. Put simply, each event in a

person's life tends to originate from a single career strand and the inter-locking nature of

the strands occurs in such a way that we think of life balance as the summation of the

lifestyles throughout the life cycle (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1974). Their model appreciates

that transitions occur between stages of a person's life, and each transition needs

satisfactory arrangement in order for re-balance. With a satisfactory quality of life,

balance should occur between aspects of career, leisure and family in each individual's

life. Lifestyle balance occurs periodically across the life cycle and reflects the integration of various dimensions in a person's life (Brymer et al., 2010).

Regardless of the model chosen for depicting quality of life, there is no doubt that people are living more fragmented and dynamic lifestyles in environments and circumstances that are changing quickly. "Given the growing need for successful adaption to stressful lives in modern times, studying lifestyle balance is timely and useful for understanding important components in life considered necessary for reducing the consequences of chronic stress and for enhancing health and well-being" (Matuska & Christiansen, 2006, p. 50).

The following sections deal specifically with many of the themes relating to quality of life that are discussed above. Each of these sections have been chosen because of the links that often occur between the theme and downhill mountain biking. Extreme sport appears to act as a tool and outlet for enhancing specific areas of participants' lives. Yet in many cases, the goals sought after in extreme sport end badly, and are detrimental to each participant's well-being.

Biological health.

Matuska and Erickson (2008) propose that in order to have a good quality of life, people need to manage stress, nutrition, sleep patterns, exercise, personal security and safety in a satisfactory manner. They suggest resisting the use of addictive substances and recommend sustainable patterns of occupation. In order to maintain sufficient patterns of occupation, people need to ensure that they have adequate and beneficial routines in their life. Such routines include the sleep and wake cycle discussed by Reilly and Edwards (2007). Their paper examined the effect of differing sleep-wake cycles on physical performance in athletes. The sleep-wake cycle is important for athletes to consider as it influences their ability to maintain training patterns. The sleep-wake cycle is a

fundamental feature of human existence and adequate sleep is vital in ensuring lifestyle balance is maintained. "...behavioural and biological effects of sleep loss are fairly well defined and cannot be ignored by athletic practitioners" (Reilly & Edwards, 2007, p. 282). Despite this, there are many examples of athletes overcoming sleep disruptions to achieve excellence in sport. "The need for sleep seems to vary between individuals and may range from five to ten hours in normal people" (Reilly & Edwards, 2007, p. 281). The downhill mountain bikers used in this research all travel both nationally and internationally and need to consider the effect that sleep loss and jet-lag from travel has on their training and racing. Reilly and Edwards (2007) suggest that more research is needed to gain a deeper understanding into the human sleep-wake cycle and its effect on lifestyle balance.

Family support and friendship.

Matuska and Erickson (2008) suggest that individuals need to perceive that they live in socially supportive environments with family support and positive relationships where they are able to show others an equal amount of care and support. As discussed above, social well-being is one of the facets that comprise Haoura in Māori philosophy. "Social well-being includes family relationships, friendships, interpersonal relationships, feelings of belonging, compassion, caring and social support" (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 31). These support systems are evident in both cultures and subcultures, where authentic members are seen to work together to increase the status of the group.

The ability to build a support network is linked with Bordieu's theory of social capital (Bordieu & Wacqant, 1992). Social capital can refer to the process of individuals networking with others to increase social capital and reciprocity. In a subculture it is common for people to work together in order to complete extreme sport activities. The development of friendship networks is a necessary component in authentic subcultural membership (Willig, 2008). This theme has strong links to identity, where participants are

influenced by their peers in order to be seen as capable in the chosen extreme sport. As an individual shows commitment and continues to be involved in an extreme sport, they develop a greater network of friends and social capital within the subculture increases. "The rewards reaped by the individual in return for investing in such a process include emotional and social...such as communitas and inclusion..." (Willig, 2008, p. 693).

Need satisfaction.

Matuska and Erickson's (2008) paper suggests that people need to be challenged, engaged, competent and involved in an occupation that they find interesting. Each person needs to be able to develop mastery, skill acquisition and feel an increasing sense of control as they improve. This has strong links with competitive extreme sport, where participants are continually given opportunities for self-improvement. Kay and Laberge (2002) found that adventure race participants enjoyed the activity more when they set goals. Similarly, Jung-Hwan and Ridinger (2009) found that the challenge and excitement of windsurfing inspired participants to make a range of positive personal investments in their lives. This positive transfer from extreme sport to everyday life was discussed in Larkin and Griffiths's (2004) paper that suggested experience in bungy jumping increased participants' psychological collection of experiences and had a transferable impact on their normal day lives. The participants felt that the risk associated with windsurfing gave them life affirming confidence building properties.

Matuska and Erickson (2008) suggested that people need to have a life purpose and live a meaningful lifestyle where they can build a positive personal identity. Part of building a positive identity can include owning specific sport equipment that helps provide people with information suggesting their status within the subculture. Leisure studies research by Haggard and Williams (1992) discussed how sporting equipment such as a downhill mountain bike provides individuals with information that they are who they

believe themselves to be, and provides others with information about who they are as well. Therefore, certain equipment is often required for a person to identify with a specific subcultural group or sport (Taylor, 2009). Objects, such as a bike, remind the person who she or he is, and best exemplifies the individual's identity which represents certain attitudes and beliefs (Dodson, 1996).

A requirement suggested by Matuska and Erickson (2008) for a satisfactory quality of life is the need for continued learning. Learning through subcultures has received little academic attention in sport research. Members of a culture learn through participatory experiences which in turn increases their authenticity and membership in the subculture (Wheaton, 2000). Celsi et al. (1993) stated how skydiving participants in extreme sports are conscious of what others think of them and their level of ability. Therefore, "they learn quickly that inclusion on the most desirable dives comes with perceived competence" (Celsi et al., 1993, p. 10). It could be assumed that people would undergo vigorous learning on introduction to a subculture. Nonetheless, despite thorough searching, only two papers discussed learning through subcultures, therefore this area provides rich grounds for further research.

Time and role management.

Matuska and Erickson (2008) highlight the importance of adequate time management, role management and daily routines for living a balanced lifestyle. Inadequate time and role management can have incomprehensible effects on work productivity and can be detrimental to a person's work and life balance. In most employment situations there is a conceptual separation between work and life where there is both a social and psychological dislocation between being at work, and not being at work (Fincham, 2008). However, for many individuals involved in professional sport, there is little distinction between their work and their leisure. Fincham's (2008) paper

provided a "...rich account of a group of workers for whom the binary distinction between work and life is meaningless" (p. 618). Fincham's (2008) research provided relevant information that aligns with those who race downhill mountain biking for a living, where occupation, culture, and identity are not confined to the hours of work. Fincham (2008) stated how the bicycle messengers belonged to a subculture that applied to their lives all of the time, where they were able to express personal identity through their chosen employment. Interestingly, "...it is proposed that these processes of subcultural affiliation and identity construction through work are applicable outside of this particular employment sector" (Fincham, 2008, p. 620). Similarly, the work and lives of downhill mountain bikers are "...interrelated in ways that contradict the idea of a divergence between work and life" (Fincham, 2008, p. 620).

Unsustainable time and role management is said to lead to stress and fatigue (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008). In order to prevent stress and fatigue, Hill, Hawkins, Ferris and Weitzman (2001), discussed how job flexibility can be beneficial for individuals. Hill et al. (2001) work examined the influence of perceived flexibility in the timing and location of work and family balance. Flexibility refers to the workers ability to fit location of work and working hours into their lives in order to better suit their family, career and leisure desires. "Flexibility in the timing (flex-time) and location of work (flex-place) are two characteristics that are repeatedly seen as a way to achieve balance in work and family life in this challenging environment" (Hill et al., 2001, p. 49). Findings suggest that if more flexibility is sanctioned in an individual's career, then family time and leisure would increase, whereas stress, martial breakdowns and depression would decrease (Hill et al., 2001). This flexible working arrangement is something that could be expected for elite athletes and therefore will be examined further in this research project.

Tausig and Fenwick (2001) presented an in-depth research paper that stated both the benefits and detriments associated with flexible working schedules. The paper

documents how alternate working schedules affect the perceived work-life imbalance and increase "time-bind" (p. 101). The paper acknowledges that hours worked is the most consistent predictor of lifestyle imbalance, however states that flexible working hours does not necessarily prevent this imbalance. Professional downhill racers often have flexible working hours, where they are able to choose when to train. The race dates and times are set, however the remaining time is often flexible and scheduled by each athlete. Because of flexible work hours, professional athletes often feel the need to train excessively, and this over-training has negative consequences for other areas of life. Nonstandard shifts have significant effects on both family life and decrease time spent in family roles. Namely, "...increasing the level of family-work conflict and reduced level of marital satisfaction, marital happiness and family satisfaction" (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001, p. 102). The paper suggested that rather than seeing work and life demands as a competition with commitments, it would be beneficial if people better managed their roles by devoting time to each sphere exclusively. Regardless of whether someone works set hours or works flexible hours, Matuska and Erickson (2008) suggest that the most important part of the work-life relationship is that people can see themselves achieving their objectives. Individuals need to see opportunities being created, they need to feel that they are managing time and energy well and need to establish routines they can maintain.

Defining Life Stages

There is a large amount of literature that documents youth subcultures and it is apparent that subcultures attract predominantly young populace (Gelder, 2007; Gelder & Thornton, 2005; Jenks, 2005; Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003; Williams, 2011). Much of the literature suggests that participants tire of subcultures and become less involved as they outgrow their youthfulness (Williams, 2011). This section of the review specifically focuses on the short time period elite performers spend actively involved in specific

subcultures. My research has utilised data specifically focusing on understanding each participants' lifestyle while they are an elite performer. It is noted that, "to study the course of a life, one must take account of stability and change, continuity and discontinuity, orderly progression as well as stasis and chaotic fluctuation" (Levison, 1986, p. 3).

The literature relating to stages in a person's life include terms such as, life cycle lifespan, life experiences, life course, life stages, and life line. It is assumed that each life stage is influenced and interconnected with the stage prior, where human development is a lifelong process including events, experiences, meanings and roles that develop over time (McPherson, 1984). Schinke, Bloom and Salmela (1994) suggest that life cycle is the chronological career stages experienced by each athlete. Levison (1986) discussed how life course is a descriptive term, and not an abstraction, that refers to the concrete character of a life in its evolution from the beginning to the end.

The following two sections examine two methods for examining a person's life stages. Both chronological age and life stage models have been considered in this review because although the athletes are of similar chronological ages, they may be experiencing different life stages.

Chronological age.

Matuska and Erickson (2008) proposed that chronological structures give people the ability to understand life in terms of past, present and future which unfold like a narrative in a story. "Therefore time creates a contextual backdrop that influences the selection of occupations and their meanings both prospectively and retrospectively" (Matuska & Christiansen, 2008, p. 15). For researchers, aging was initially considered to be a psychological phenomenon in which changes in the individual were analysed as they moved from one stage to another (McPherson, 1984). Theorists now accept that social

context and chronological age must be studied in order to gain a deeper understanding of a person's life stage. "...There are common patterns to the aging process whereby individuals born at about the same time (an age cohort) are influenced by similar historical or social events" (McPherson, 1984, p. 214). Freeman (1993) and Levison (1986) suggest that the stage and age dualism provide the simplest gauge for human development over time.

However, there is controversy regarding whether life stages should be linked to chronological age. Schuls and Heckhausen (1996) problematise the notion of a normative aging process because, "...what is observed to be normal does not necessarily tell us what is possible" (p. 702). Therefore they propose that successful aging is the best term for life stage development, and use this approach to study developmental phenomena in the second half of a life course. Their research accepts that there is inter-individuality variability in biological development, however there are consistent age related stages that show structured aging processes. They justify this by stating that, "lifespan psychologists and life course sociologists emphasise that all societies can be characterised as having age-graded systems that constrain and provide scaffold for life course patterns" (Schuls & Heckhausen, 1996, p. 703).

Levison (1986) uses a different chronological age model and proposes that researchers view life cycle as an assortment of macro-eras that each consist of five year long micro-eras. While accepting that this research was conducted some time age, it remains relevant and can be simply applied to research that utilises participants of different ages, or life stages. Levison's (1986) research proposed that each era has a two year transitional period where an individual develops from one stage to the next. "Each era and developmental period begins and ends at a well-defined modal age, with a range of about two years above and below this average" (Levison, 1986, p. 5). Similarly, Freeman (1993) discussed these transitional crises between stages. "It is a transition that

has to be coped with" (p. 256). Levison (1986) proposes that there are four macro-eras in an individual's life course. The first macro-era spans from birth until 22 years of age, the second from 22 years of age to 45 years of age, the third from 45 years of age to 65 years of age, and finally 65 years of age until death. This research project is primarily concerned with elite athletes that are aged 18-30 years of age. Therefore this research would fall within both stage one and stage two of Levison's (1986) research.

Participants in this research are all a similar chronological age, yet may portray a range of life stages. Therefore, the logical method for operationalising the age and stage debate is to allow the participants to discuss their personal views on this. In this sense, participants will be able to offer their opinions regarding what life stage they are at, and how that stage reflects chronological age.

Life stages.

Athletic progression in sport is researched through use of developmental models designed and used by researchers such as (Berliner, 1988; Bloom, 1985; and Cote, Salmela, Trudel, Baria & Russell, 1995). Elite development is characterised by momentous changes between significant parts of athletic careers. Bloom's (1985) research proposes an analogous three stage process. In the first stage, the athletes were introduced to the sport. In the second stage the athletes became self-directed in their learning and motivated to continually train in the activity with the help of a coach and mentor. In the final stage, the athletes were fully committed to their sport and were motivated to further their potential and refine their skills. Cote et al. (1995) research identified six stages of athlete and coach development which are "training, organisation, competition, coach characteristics, athlete characteristics and contextual factors" (Schnike et al., 1995, p. 50). Rather than compare the disadvantages of each method for selecting and defining an athlete's life cycle, it may be best to appreciate both methods in the data collection.

Life stage transitions.

Wylleman and Reints's (2010) review focuses on high intensity sports and examines the career transitions and key moments between each stage of an athlete's life. The article discusses how athletes describe their careers as if they were separated by different events such as team selections, significant wins, significant losses, injuries, or non-events. The paper discusses how key moments in an athlete's career bring about changes and developments in the athlete's lifestyle which either aid the athlete's performance, or detract from it. "Athletes will need to be able to cope effectively with these challenges in order to progress and make successful transitions to the next stage of their development" (Wylleman & Reints, 2010, p. 88). Christiansen and Matuska (2006) address this in their model where they state that adaption in a person's lifestyle is important for continual progression to ensure lifestyle balance is maintained. Nonetheless, Wylleman and Reints (2010) suggest that these transitional stages occur at different times depending upon the type of sport.

Wylleman and Reints's (2010) results proposed that there are four transitional stages in an athlete's life: 1) initiation, 2) development, 3) mastery, and 4) discontinuation. Each of the four transitions is marked by changes at a psychological level, psychosocial level, academic level and vocational level. The initiation stage is marked by the athlete's introduction to the sport at about six to seven years of age. This is followed by the development stage where the athlete is recognised as being talented and begins intensive training for competitions. However, it is the mastery stage of Wyllman and Reints (2010) lifespan model that is the most relevant for this review. Those who achieve at world level in their sport will presumably have gone through Wylleman and Reints (2010) stages one, two and three. Therefore, the stage of mastery is most applicable to my research project. In the mastery stage, athletes will consider in more detail the risk of career ending injuries, the disadvantages of unfulfilled academic potential, lack of

financial security and stability, or the opportunity to continue with some academic development into higher education. If they choose to continue with academic study or begin a career, they will need more systematic planning strategies, be committed enough to direct time into academic activities, and cope with continually changing social environments (Wylleman & Reints, 2010). The final stage proposed by Wylleman and Reints (2010) is the discontinuation stage of athletic development. In this stage, major changes to lifestyle occur and the athletes are, "suddenly like everyone else" (Wylleman & Reints, 2010, p. 92). In this stage the athletes need to adjust to new lifestyle patterns. Often athletes will miss the sporting atmosphere and competition, have to deal with bodily changes such as fat gain and muscle loss, change eating patterns, and adapt to a new social status with different responsibilities (Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Elite athletes are required to, "...balance elite sport, education, vocation, and personal family life in such a way that they are able to develop, sustain and maximise their well-being and level of performance throughout as well as after their elite career" (Wylleman & Reints, 2010, p. 93).

Prosperous development is seen as appropriate adaption between meaningful life transitions (Schuls & Heckhausen's, 1996). The stages occur throughout the continuous and dynamic stream of living, which has a beginning and an end (Schuls & Heckhausen, 1996). Viewed in this light, to achieve successful life balance, one needs to continually adapt to new lifestyle changes as he/she ages. "At any given point in an individual's life, the anticipated amount of time left to live may shape behaviour and affect it in important ways" (Schuls & Heckhausen, 1996, p. 703). Therefore, there is a time when someone has to settle for what they have and cannot entertain ideas about possible careers such as becoming a professional extreme sport athlete. In this sense, there is no doubt that the life cycle limits what lifestyles are possible depending on chronological age. "Thus it is

unlikely that an 80 year old will ever achieve a world record time in the 100 meter dash" (Schuls & Heckhausen, 1996, p. 703).

Schuls and Heckhausen's (1996) paper provides an in-depth overview of the challenges experienced at each stage of a person's life. Questions arise surrounding how much time and energy someone should invest in each specific life domain, and this is a challenge for most individuals. The paper concludes that, because of the limit on the length of life, people have little opportunity to make mistakes in their chosen careers. "Athletic performance in a specific sport is much riskier because failure to achieve professionally competitive levels of performance leaves one with few alternative domains to pursue" (Schuls & Heckhausen, 1996, p. 705). To achieve a balanced life, the authors propose four general principles for maximising development across the lifespan. The fourth proposed characteristic is most relevant to this research project. It suggests that an "...individual must manage tradeoffs across domains and sequential life phases and recognise that the allocation of resources to many may compromise the opportunity to develop others" (Schuls & Heckhausen, 1996, p. 705). Consequently, the author suggests, success in one domain may come at the expense of a lack of success in other domains.

The sections above have highlighted many of the important components necessary for a successful quality of life. Quality of life is difficult to study because of the scope of the field, and the subjectivity of it. This review has synthesised the work from many of the prominent theorists who are located in the context of lifestyle balance academia. The following chapter describes and justifies the methodology that I have chosen to complete this research project.

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to map the downhill mountain bike subculture within New Zealand. Using social constructivism, this study sought to discover the effect that subcultural participation had on quality of life, and reasons for committed downhill mountain bike involvement. Information gathered from participants helped decipher how this subculture aligned with postmodern subcultural theories. The research provides a case study of postmodern subculture theory by positioning downhill mountain biking within that genre.

Research Questions

The central question for this research is:

1. What are the practices and material culture of the downhill mountain bike subculture and how do these impact on the lives of the members?

The four sub-questions are:

1. What are the reflections, experiences and meanings attached to affiliation within the downhill mountain bike subculture?

2. How does the downhill mountain bike subculture align with postmodern subcultural theories?

3. What effect does belonging to the downhill mountain bike subculture have on participants' quality of life?

4.   What are the stages and changes that occur throughout the participants'

        involvement in the downhill mountain bike subculture?

Social Constructivism

A social constructivist epistemology espouses that knowledge is actively

constructed by each individual within a social context. In effect, "everyday realities are

actively constructed in and through forms of social action" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.

342). Social constructivist researchers seek to understand the interactive processes

through which reality and social order is constructed and maintained. "We invent

concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of the experience, and we continually test

and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000,

p. 197). In this sense, subcultures are developed in accordance with the processes that are

present and active in mainstream society. Subcultures are influenced by evolutionary

changes that reflect the developments and progressions of technological processes and

societal advancements; hence there is a historical and sociological dimension to this

construction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The changes that occur in a subculture do not

occur in isolation and represent the shared understandings and languages that take place

relative to the conceptual framework through which the world is described and explained

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this sense, subcultures simultaneously act upon society, in

the same way as society acts upon subcultures. For this research, social constructivism is

an appropriate philosophy to guide the research as it ties in with postmodernism and has

been influential in the development of postmodern subcultural theory.

Social constructivists argue that the world can be understood in terms of subjective

understandings and this is reflected through how people talk, write, and argue (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, this research holds the view that there is no such thing as

objective research and truth is something that fluctuates depending on sociological

changes. Understandings of the world are interpreted as forms of intelligibility as an array

of stories, arguments, experiences, propositions and the like (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Through subcultural involvement, members experience a range of activities which give

them certain perspectives of the world. The subcultural world provides a base for a person

to learn the language that he/she sees as meaningful in their own lives (Denzin & Lincoln,

2000).

Social constructivism resides within the interpretive research paradigm which

Sparkes (2001) identifies as one of the three dominant paradigms used in the discipline of

physical education. "The idea of interpretive practice turns us to the *hows* and *whats* of

social reality" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 342). The aim of an interpretive paradigm is to

understand the meanings that people attach to their lives. It examines the ways in which

people construct their lifeworlds, while appreciating the restrictions that are placed upon

individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Paradigms provide a world view, guiding researchers towards what is important,

reasonable, and legitimate (Sparkes, 2001). Researchers subconsciously adopt basic belief

systems which aid in guiding them towards their paradigmatic frameworks (Guba &

Lincoln, 1989). Researchers cannot, and do not enter the research process as empty

vessels (Sparkes, 1992). Research paradigms must be utilised as frameworks to base the

research process.

Historically the interpretive paradigm has been linked to sociology, anthropology,

and linguistics (Kirk, MacDonald & O'Sullivan, 2006). The interpretive paradigm allows

for analysis of data at a subjective level. It acknowledges that reality is only mind

dependant, and there are multiple realities, where "...truth is seen as a social construction

and is inextricably linked to the meanings of the study's participants" (MacDonald, 2002,

p. 140). The information gained from this research will be constructed and reconstructed

to define a social reality. It is accepted that if this study was repeated, a different result

may occur. Reality is not the same for all, and the results will acknowledge Sparkes's (1992) comment that "relativism brings about no truth, as no study is credible or incredible" (p. 35).

An ideographic approach has been selected for this research project. This approach is based on the view that to understand the social world, we need to first gain an insight into the subject under investigation. The ideographic approach of getting inside the subculture and accessing information that could otherwise remain inaccessible corresponds well with the use of interviews as a data collection method. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Henderson (1999) suggests that utilising interviews as a data collection method allows for questions to emerge as the research progresses. In addition, the use of natural settings for the interviewing increases the trustworthiness of the data as the participants feel comfortable and are more likely to express truthful and honest information.

With the use of interviews as a research method, "...inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two" (Guba, 1990, p. 27). Reality exists subjectively and is developed through socialisation and interactive processes. Knowledge is therefore an outcome of human activity (Sparkes, 1992).

This research will utilise a qualitative methodology that allows for flexibility in the research methods. With a qualitative approach, the discovery of data is an ongoing process. "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). Qualitative inquiry provides researchers the chance to capture the nature of their subject area through interviews and narration that is based within a constructivist theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Interview Process

Informed consent.

The project was granted ethical approval by the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago, New Zealand. A list of possible participants was then produced, and the interviewer contacted possible participants through telephone calls. Five elite participants showed an interest in the research and meetings were organised for the interviewer and each racer. An information sheet was given to each participant stating the relevant material prior to the interview taking place (see Appendix B). Once the participant was satisfied with the conditions stated within the information sheet, the interviewee was asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix C). "The form acknowledges that participants' rights have been protected during data collection" (Creswell, 2003, p. 64). Participants were given the right to withdraw from the research or refuse to answer the interview questions at any time. The researcher was available to answer all questions and concerns that each interviewee asked throughout the duration of this process. Each interviewee was made aware that the raw data from this research will be securely stored by the researcher for five years and may be utilised for future research by the same researcher with permission from the participants.

The interviewer.

Early in the research process I decided that interviews would provide the best method for gathering data from the participants for this study. As disclosed earlier, I consider myself a subcultural insider, and each participant in this research is in my network of friends. As the primary researcher in this project, my knowledge of the subculture was useful in ensuring that legitimate and reliable data collection was gathered (Gratton & Jones, 2004). In addition, I have had experience conducting interviews from past post-graduate research, and therefore decided that I would be best suited to carry out

the interviews. Interviews provided me with a method to utilise my subcultural position within the downhill mountain bike interpretive community. I was aware that the quality of the research material gathered was dependent on the ability of the researcher as an interviewer. As suggested by Makut and Morehouse (1994), my goal was to essentially have a conversation with the participants that had a purpose. As the interviewer, I followed the stages suggested by Henderson (1999) which were: 1) to build a rapport with the interviewee; 2) to be a good listener; 3) to make the interviewee feel comfortable; 4) to try to keep the interviewee interested and motivated to continue the flow of information; 5) to try and elicit from the interviewee rich and detailed accounts; and 6) to be creative in the approach.

As the primary researcher, I was sensitive to the contaminant nature of my position in this research project. Reflexive research allows for the researcher to involve themselves in the research process, and accepts that some bias may emerge. By considering myself a cultural insider, I accepted that my position within this research may have influenced many of the findings. Insider status has come about through long term involvement in the downhill mountain bike subculture. This status has given me insights into the subculture that outsiders may not be aware of, or have access to. Thus as the researcher, I cannot be separated from the research, and therefore have used my insider status to gain insights into the subculture that are trustworthy, honest, and reflective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Interview schedule.

The design of the interview schedule was important for ensuring that the correct material was gathered. As recommended by Patton (2002), the interview questions were initially designed to follow a timeline system where the question order was past, present, and then future (see Appendix A). Because of this structure, the interviews became more formal and structured as each interview evolved (Mertens, 2005). The sequencing of

questions was vital in ensuring the interviewee felt comfortable and was able to answer the questions as naturally as possible. Questions which were clear, not offensive, open-ended and precise were used as often as possible.

Initial questions were based on demographics and focused on the identifiable characteristics of the interviewee such as age, education, occupation, nationality, ethnicity, residence and perceived downhill mountain bike ability. These necessary preliminary questions ensured that each participant felt comfortable so that they could provide natural answers (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

The second part of the interview schedule began by asking the participants if they believed that downhill mountain biking was an identifiable subculture. Each interviewee confirmed that there was a subculture, and thus the researcher was able to proceed with further investigation of the subculture. Following confirmation of the subculture from the participants', the interviewer was able to ask each interviewee questions regarding experiences within the downhill mountain bike subculture. This section aimed to provide the researcher with information about how the subculture operates. This included the power dynamics, social structures, hierarchies, authenticity, identity and material factors. A sample of questions in this section included:

1. Is everyone accepted into the downhill mountain bike subculture?

2. What are the social structures present within the subculture?

3. Do some people hold more power than others?

4. How do the power structures play out within the subculture?

The third section for inquiry was structured so that the participants could reflect upon how involvement in the subculture influenced their lives. The aim for this section was to find evidence detailing how involvement in the subculture affects quality of life. Areas for inquiry included topics such as family, career, leisure, happiness and well-being.

This was followed by questions concerning how subcultural factors have changed over the duration of their subcultural involvement. Key questions included:

1. How does being part of the subculture influence your life?

2. Does being part of the subculture increase your well-being and life satisfaction?

3. What does being part of the subculture mean to you?

4. Has the meaning of being part of the subculture changed over time for you?

The interview schedule ended by providing the participants a chance to talk about any area of interest that they believed was relevant for this study. This gave the participants a chance to provide information that may have been left out of the interview schedule.

Based on the quality of the interviews conducted, it was necessary to complete follow up interviews with some of the participants. Two participants were contacted some time after the interviews took place in order to clarify some of their responses. Both of these participants were contacted via email, and their responses were added to their interview transcripts.

Interview technique.

In this research, interviews were the main data collection method. As suggested by Gratton and Jones (2004), the *semi-structured interview format* is appropriate for research such as this, where variation in research questions is allowable depending on how the interview progresses. Interviews provided the researcher with a method for obtaining data that the researcher was genuinely interested in (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher was in direct communication with each interviewee and was able to interpret the information as it naturally occurred. "This perspective leads the researcher to adopt particular views of the other who is studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 18). For these interviews, the historical time period in which the downhill mountain bike subculture was

studied was taken into account, in appreciation of political and ethical movements at the time of data collection. "The interview is also a very convenient way of overcoming distances both in space and time; past events or far away experiences can be studied by interviewing people who took part in them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 529). In keeping with Maykut and Morehouse (1994), each interview was no longer than one hour in duration.

The semi-structured interview technique was useful for allowing innovative and novel responses. When new responses and themes arose in the interview, the interviewer was able to ask additional questions within the boundaries and confines of the research topic. The researcher adopted a flexible approach for data collection, and had the capacity to probe for further information as required. This semi-structured technique meant the researcher was able to adapt the sequence of the questions so that the interview progressed naturally (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Through semi-structuring the questions, responses could be compared between participants (Deploy & Gitlin, 1998).

Before the interviews commenced with each participant, the researcher piloted the interview schedule with a range of mountain bike riders throughout the Otago region in New Zealand. The pilot interviews helped to evaluate the effectiveness and thoroughness of the interview questions. A discussion following each interview was used as a tool to find gaps and areas to develop within the initial interview schedule. Any problematic areas were identified and changed as required.

Participant selection.

Downhill mountain bike racers often travel to Otago to use the facilities provided by High Performance Sport New Zealand and the mountain bike tracks in the region. Throughout the early part of 2012, the researcher coordinated interviews with the participants as each travelled to the region. In order to avoid gender bias, the researcher

selected a relatively equal number of male and female participants. Five participants were used as research participants for this study. The low number of participants is firstly because elite downhill mountain bike racers are rare, and secondly because the information obtained in interviews had clearly reached its threshold by the final interview.

The principles of purposive sampling were used to identify participants who were the most likely to provide knowledgeable and useful information. The downhill mountain bike racers were selected because of their level of ability, experience, and continual involvement in the New Zealand downhill mountain bike scene. Those who had competed in the Union Cyclist International world championships and who had spent an extensive amount of time living as a downhill mountain biker were sought. Purposive selection such as this is consistent with Patton (2002) who stated that participants with the most experience in a specific activity provide the most information rich data. The researcher knew the riders well and had a friendly and professional relationship with them. This level of friendship aided the ease and flow of information in the interviews which appeared more like conversations. (Wheaton, 2003).

Data Analysis

Following each interview the data were transcribed verbatim. Each sentence was assigned a number, and the appropriate symbol for each interviewee was written down. According to Henderson (1999), word for word transcription is required for accurate interpretation and analysis. The data that was collected in this research was analysed in accordance with the strategies proposed by Gratton and Jones (2004) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000). These are:

1. *Simultaneous collection and analysis of data*: Almost straight after the first interview took place, the researcher analysed the information. In this qualitative research, the data collection occurred simultaneously with the data analysis. This data reduction process

helped the researcher to adapt the interview schedule for additional interviews as required. Data analysis was a continual process throughout this research.

2. *A reductive data coding process:* This involved organising the data by writing notes and summarising the information into conceptual categories. From this, themes were clustered together so that the researcher began to see data trends emerging. This memo writing process helped in the construction of themes so that the researcher could begin to make sense of the data. This method of displaying the data helped ensure that the required information was being sought from the participants.

3. *Comparative methods:* The data collected and themed was then compared with the literature review to check that it appeared to be valid. This verification of the research data was checked with colleagues, participants, and existing field notes to critically analyse what had been found. Themes and key points became clear and these were cross-referenced with theories established in the literature review and new knowledge was clearly delineated. This theoretical integration helped strengthen the research process and refined the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas. Constant comparison was a systematic method that was employed for analysing the data over the period of time. Throughout the research process, themes emerged from the interview transcripts and literature review which were used to organise the data and compare the gathered information (Henderson, 2006).

Trustworthiness.

For a work to be truthful, it needs to align with similar data and results from other studies at a similar time (Sparkes, 2001). As suggested by (Henderson, 1999), rigorous and careful analysis of the data helped pull the information together to provide persuasive material for the reader. By following the recommendations proposed by Sparkes (2001) insights were gained into the subculture of downhill mountain biking through descriptive

and accurate interview techniques. An inductive interview process meant that the interview schedule could be altered following each interview so that questions could be added if themes were seen to emerge. Thus, themes continued to develop throughout the research process, which meant that the research project was continually evolving.

Work by (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 181) provided five guidelines necessary for assessing the validity and reliability of qualitative research. I utilised these guidelines to ensure that the research met the standards required for trustworthiness. These were:

1. Does the work make full reference to the context within which the group exists? In this research, the findings were located within the downhill mountain bike subculture and reflected the participants' experiences in the group.

2. *Verisimilitude:* Does it provide the reader with a sense of almost being there, and give them some understanding of the culture? Specific questions within the interview schedule were designed to locate each participant within the subculture. This was done by allowing the participants to explore and discuss their place within the subculture and to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of how each participant fitted within the subculture.

3. *Triangulation:* Has the researcher used data from a range of methods to strengthen the validly of the claim? Here data were gained from three methods including interviews, observations and the researcher's personal experience in the subculture.

4. *Plausibility:* Does the report ring true? Does it provide a plausible account and explanation of the group or culture? Data from the participants was analysed for clarity and themes emerged from the information. This was compared with recent extreme sport subcultural research to check that the results were consistent.

5. Additionally, the thesis was sent to participants prior to its completion to ensure that participants felt that the information was correct. This member checking process ensured that the researcher had sufficiently researched and interpreted the interview data.

Additionally, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that researchers use a member check system to ensure that the interviewer is reviewing the material in an appropriate way. Where possible, the data analyses section of this thesis was sent to each participant in order to check that the interview transcripts were recorded and interpreted appropriately. With this process, any illogical or inconsistent statements were addressed through the member checking process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The methods above were used to organise and refine the data that was collected. These procedures ensured that the data was dealt with in an appropriate and effective manner. The purpose of this methodology was to gain further insight from the participants regarding their involvement in downhill mountain biking. Interpretations from the collected data are discussed in the following data analysis section.

Data Analysis: Discussion and Results

Introduction

Having the opportunity to interview the participants and listening to them talk about their involvement in the downhill mountain bike subculture was a privilege. Each provided insightful information about personal experiences living as a downhill mountain bike subcultural member. The participants voiced their opinions regarding both the subculture and their experiences in it, providing this research with meaningful and information rich data. Through a constant comparative process this section both supports previous research, and adds insight into new areas of knowledge and inquiry. In the course of synthesising the literature review and the participants' data, both consistencies and inconsistencies became apparent. In addition, I have included my own ideas and opinions relating to the themes. Because of the long duration of time I spent actively involved in the downhill mountain bike subculture, I bring many supporting ideas and personal examples to this section.

Following an initial context chapter that introduces the participants, the data is analysed through the use of three themes that became apparent in the interview transcripts. These themes draw together a wide range of applications and components relevant to the social theorising of downhill mountain biking. My aim in the first theme is to map the key factors that are important for the downhill mountain bike subculture. The second theme demonstrates the reasons that members devote themselves to the sport and the subculture. The final theme describes the lifestyle that is pursued by the elite downhill mountain bikers. Each of the key themes are divided into relevant sub-themes to increase clarity and depth of discussion.

Introducing the Participants

The five participants in this research each confirmed that they preferred their names to be used in this research. Therefore pseudonyms were not necessary for this research project.

Amy Laird.

Amy lives a busy lifestyle as both a lawyer and a semi-professional downhill mountain bike racer in Christchurch, New Zealand. Amy joined the downhill mountain bike crowd whilst studying for her Bachelor of Laws in Dunedin in 2004. She took to the sport quickly and has since represented New Zealand at numerous world cup and world championship events over the past seven years. Her best result was achieved at the world championships in Rotorua 2006, where she placed 14th in the elite women's field. Amy is 30 years old and shows her dedication to the sport by taking three months off work each year to follow the international race circuit. Amy has fractured her spine over six times and has a long list of broken bones that includes most limbs. Partly because of injury, she has recently revised her race schedule to include super-D and enduro races which are newer and less brutal disciplines of mountain bike racing. Super-D and enduro events share many characteristics similar to that of downhill mountain biking and demonstrate new progression and development for mountain biking.

Cameron Cole.

Cameron is a 24 year old professional downhill mountain bike racer. He travels overseas for five months following the world cup circuit to more than eight countries each year. Cameron began racing BMX at a young age and transferred to downhill in 2005. He found the transfer easy and became good friends with the downhillers as soon as he decided to part from BMX. His top results came in 2006 where he became Junior World

Champion. Since then Cameron has represented the Maxxis professional race team that is based out of America. In his spare time Cameron likes to be involved with other wheeled activities such as working on vehicles and riding motocross bikes in Christchurch, New Zealand. Cameron is trained by World Champion motocross racer Kathy Prumm. Together they are helping design new technology that tests power output when riding on mountain bike tracks. Their latest project involves testing gravity force metres that measure the force of gravity around each corner on downhill tracks.

Gabby Molloy.

Gabby is a 33 year old semi-professional downhill mountain bike racer. Gabby took to the sport late and began racing at age 22. During her 11 years in the subculture she has progressed consistently and currently considers herself to be peaking in her ability. Gabby is based in Rotorua, New Zealand, a town renowned for its cross-country trails. She has raced internationally, achieving top 20 results in many world cup races. Gabby owns the most established mountain bike coaching school in New Zealand: MTB Skills Clinics. She advises a team of more than ten coaches who operate in different towns throughout New Zealand. Gabby brings her experience as both a semi-professional racer, and a recreational trainer to this research.

Lauren Campbell.

Lauren considers herself to have grown up in the downhill mountain bike subculture in Queenstown, New Zealand. Queenstown is renowned for a diverse range of quality mountain biking trails, and attracts a wide scope of riders annually. She now lives in Dunedin where she owns a cookery business: The Inspired Pantry. Lauren joined the downhill mountain biking subculture when she was 11 years old. She has been involved in the mountain biking community for the past 15 years, however feels that she is in the

process of leaving the culture at the moment. Lauren's ability level was high as she represented New Zealand at both world cup and world championship events. Her highest result was 20th place at the world championship race held in Rotorua, New Zealand.

Wyn Masters.

Wyn began racing in the New Zealand national series races in 2000 when he was 12 years old. He considers himself an all rounder and rides many disciplines of mountain biking, however focuses his racing efforts on downhill. At 24 years of age he has his sights set high and aims to gain professional sponsorship this year. He has already represented New Zealand at multiple world cup and world championship events, with his highest place being 25th. Wyn is an authentic insider in both the national and international downhill mountain bike scene, and has his own television show: WynTV. This show has a huge internet following and provides people with an insight into the life of downhill mountain bikers.

Part A: Mapping the Downhill Mountain Bike Subculture

    The subculture.

In this section, the participants' responses are synthesised to describe the distinct behaviours, norms, and values that help strengthen and unite the downhill mountain bike subculture in New Zealand. The subculture includes a segment of the population who can be distinguished from wider society. These subcultural members feel an attachment to the collective and united group within New Zealand and each considers themselves an authentic insider. Each participant believes that there is a subculture that they actively contribute to and help represent. This idea is in keeping with Williams' (2011) definition of a subculture, "...the boundary between subcultures and mainstream culture exists whenever and wherever people collectively agree it exists" (p. 9).

> *Yeah there is a bit of a culture eh. Like everyone is pretty much a close unit*
>
> *and everyone knows everyone and they all ride together and have fun and I*
>
> *think that is why the sport is where it is at at the moment (Wyn).*

Many postmodern subcultural theories postulate that it is acceptable for members to be part of more than one subculture, however participants in this research show a commitment to just one. This finding is more in keeping with traditional subcultural theory (see Coates et al., 2010; Fincham, 2008; Hodkinson, 2002; and Williams, 2011), and demonstrates a level of dedication that is less prevalent in postmodern extreme sport subcultures. Traditional subcultural theories found that authentic members were dedicated to a single group alone, and were loyal in their attachment to the chosen subculture. Postmodern subcultural theories suggest that members are transient and display less commitment to single subcultures. Nonetheless, Gabby's comment postulates that downhill riders do commit themselves to the subculture, and most are dedicated adherents.

Contradictory to postmodern ideals, the downhill racers in New Zealand have encompassed a subculture that involves much of their lives.

> *Within mountain biking itself, there is a downhill culture for sure. And even in New Zealand, it's a little bit unique from the rest of the world. It's pretty friendly, it's pretty cool, and pretty fun (Gabby).*

> *There is a full on culture! (Cameron)*

The participants in this research discuss how involvement in the downhill mountain bike subculture is central to their whole way of life, greatly influencing their lifestyle balance and quality of life. The sport is the main driving force in their lives and has become the main organising factor in having relationships, planning holidays, choosing employment, and deciding where to live. The participants do not see this as a sacrifice, as it is where they want to be, and what they want to be doing. Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003) suggest that it is these shared understandings, attitudes, values, norms and activities that characterise a culture.

> *...that is where your friends are and that is why it is a subculture because that's what your culture is, so you don't need to make sacrifices to be doing what you're doing because you want to be doing it (Lauren).*

> *It's your family, it's part of your extended family that you can be a part of and it's really fun. It's not work, it's not boring, it's just really fun and it extends you at the same time, it is what's scary and hard, and when you achieve something you feel really good about it (Gabby).*

For most, this subculture plays the role of a second family. All of my participants stated that mountain bikers make up the majority of their friendships. Additionally, all riders interviewed would be more likely to date another rider rather than someone who does not ride bikes. The riders often live, train, party, travel and compete together at the same events. Fincham (2008) had similar findings in his research on cycle couriers in England where shared understandings naturally formed as part of the ideologies that developed within the subculture.

Style and aesthetics.

Clothing.

Downhill mountain biking, like many individual extreme sport cultures, has emerged to include specific clothing styles. Riders are seen to wear uniform clothing which represents sponsorship, sport devotion, or attempts to buy their way into the subculture. The clothing acts to unite the racers, and brings the group together as a symbolic subculture. The practical clothing worn by the riders helps to distinguish downhillers from mainstream society. This powerful tool gives outsiders a way to locate downhillers, and acknowledge their subcultural attachment. Results from my study found that downhill mountain bikers wear similar clothing to firstly, help distinguish authentic membership, and secondly, to fit in with the group. This relatively superficial display of status creates a sense of coherence and togetherness for subcultural members. Nonetheless, the clothing and products must be seen as appropriate by the subcultural monopoly in order to strengthen a participant's subcultural identity (Donnelly, 2006). The five participants in my study commented on the unique clothing that is commonly worn both at races, and during their everyday lives. Wheaton's (2003) study had similar results where windsurfer's "...identity was marked by numerous visual signs, ranging from clothes, fashion and vehicles driven to the equipment used, which are distinctive and

identifiable from the mainstream" (p. 77). It is important for the subculture to differentiate itself from the dominant culture by maintaining its cultural identity (Stranger, 2007).

> *If they were walking around the street without riding clothes they would be wearing Dickies shorts, 510's, a tee-shirt that has a brand so it would be Smith, or Oakley or 510's or a bike branded tee-shirt, and a cap, and the cap would be branded as well. And socks pulled up to their calf, black with branding. Tanned legs with white sock marks, and always grazes on their elbows (Gabby).*

When describing common subcultural style, Williams (2011) states how clothing is symbolic for the members of the culture. The style creates a sense of community that can be recognised by members and outsiders. This overt display of style may act to preserve the status of the top members, by excluding those who do not recognise the subtleties for wearing the clothing, or those who are not sponsored by the most popular brands. Thorpe (2004) describes how power is produced and reproduced in subcultures through fashion, clothing and cultural tastes.

The members of this subculture provide reasons for this specific dress code by stating that it is the most practical clothing for their main activity in life. Lyng (2005) found that the practical rather than cosmetic value of clothing is appreciated in an expert edgeworker's life, and the outdoors offers a judgement free environment where obscure clothing is accepted. In downhill mountain biking the racers often wear colourful kit that would resemble pyjamas when viewed by mainstream society. These kits would be seen as obscure if worn in town or public places, yet are entirely appropriate in downhill mountain bike settings.

You just wear clothes that you wear on your bike all the time, and they are

quite hard wearing clothes. Shorts probably, I guess it's quite practical stuff

because we always like working on bikes and getting dirty doing that, or

going and riding bikes so you always need to be ready to work on a bike or

go for a ride, so you are always in that kind of stuff (Cameron).

This finding was also true for Corrigan (2003) who suggested that the use of hard wearing clothes that will get dirty is predominantly because of the activity that the participants are doing. However, the dress code unintentionally becomes the distinctive style for the subculture. Williams (2011) found that while there were undoubtedly affectations adopted purely for fashion reasons, the clothing choices tended to be dictated by the work. All participants in my research stated that authentic subcultural members would be wearing a flat peak hat. For outsiders, this may appear to be for fashion reasons, however Lauren discussed how riders wear hats to cover their sweaty helmet hair. Similarly, Gabby stated how the black or dark coloured clothing is to prevent dirt stains from the often muddy riding conditions. Regardless of these practical explanations, I would suggest that many of the younger riders would not know these reasons for the clothing choice, and are more inclined to copy the clothing portrayed by the top riders in the sport. Wheaton (2003) suggests that those new to the sport often believe that owning all the gear is the best way to become an authentic member. However, research has shown that commitment to a subculture is the best means for gaining recognition as an included member (Wheaton, 2000). Nonetheless, as a participant spends increased time in the subculture, they accumulate more of the correct brands and unintentionally increase the amount of equipment that they own (Donnelly, 2006).

In the separate interviews, the close-knit group of participants discussed how there are people who try to adopt this clothing style, however do not pull it off correctly. People

who do not fit the criteria for subcultural inclusion are called *muppets, squids,* or *posers.* The posers discussed by my participants are those who are just *doing* the lifestyle, as opposed to *being* authentic members (Quester et al., 2010). Wyn discusses how authentic members can quickly tell who does not fit the criteria for subcultural inclusion. Purchasing the correct brands and clothing adds to subcultural capital. When a rider displays professionalism in their clothing it is likely that those of outsider status will recognise the riders as members of the subculture. However, those of insider status will be able to identify their apparel failings and they will be seen as outsiders, or not included as authentic subcultural members (Williams, 2011). The equipment most desired is custom made bikes and gear made by sponsors. An important factor when choosing equipment or kit, is to buy the correct gear that is suited to your level of ability. Riders who purchase equipment that is deemed beyond their proficiency are labelled a squid. Conversely, someone who has lower grade equipment, yet can still ride with style and good ability is seen as heroic. Wheaton (2003) discusses this in her work as *cultures of taste hierarchies.* In this sense, true participants can tell someone's commitment to the subculture through their insider knowledge, value systems, and ability in the activity.

> *Yeah some people try too hard to get it, to look like they are in the scene or doing the right things. You can pretty much pick them out like a fish out of water (Wyn).*

 Wyn's comment is topical as it provides evidence of the process where authentic members can critique those who have not purchased the correct brands, or those who are trying too hard to buy their way into the subculture. Sherlock and Weller (2005) discuss how knowledge is passed between the authentic members regarding what brands are valued. Those who are authentic downhill members have a means to identify those who

are sponsored, devoted members, or try-hard riders. The clothing provides a method for identifying what Wheaton (2000) terms "insiders and outsiders" (p. 257).

Postmodern theories imply that subcultures are becomingly increasingly image based (Williams, 2011). In this research, it is apparent that clothing and style are important and valued tools for subcultural acceptance. However, the downhillers suggest they do not judge those who do not have the correct clothes, but still ride fast. A rider's skill and race speed appears to be an overriding factor that is more important that clothing and style. Nonetheless, through the use of style and clothing, a complex value system has emerged. Becoming an authentic downhill mountain biker is linked with having the most up to date race clothing, and representing the most valued brands.

Purchasing the correct clothing is often specific to localised settings, where styles are exclusive to that specific subculture. For example, members of the Queenstown mountain bike subculture wear clothes that represent the ideals of free-riders. This style is exemplified through cutting the sleeves off tee-shirts, and wearing baggy casual shorts when riding. The subculture devalues competition between downhill members and focuses on group projects such as track building, jump park development, and making downhill films. In the Queenstown subculture, downhill mountain biking is viewed as an art form, where body position and precision of movement have aesthetic appeal. Whereas, the Christchurch subculture chooses fashions and styles that are more race orientated. The Christchurch subculture is dedicated to racing, and have adopted a very competitive ethos, where if you don't race, you aren't considered a downhiller. Wheaton (2000) discusses geographical variance and suggests that communities within the same country often reflect different values systems such as anti-competition or anti-consumption ethos. Regardless of the geographical variance, the riders all have a common passion for the sport. They can all distinguish between authentic and non-authentic members; even the

anti-competitive group of Queenstown riders can pick out posers and try-hard non-members.

If you don't have the results to back it up then you are seen as a poser (Lauren).

Lauren's point here is interesting as it suggests that the greater someone's results, the more acceptable it is to choose their own clothing style. This point is evident as the riders discuss how the trends often originate from the people who have recently won the most races. Wyn stated how the clothing fashions would not start with junior riders unless they were really fast and won races.

Riders would be copying the pro's, by watching the videos with them on, and looking at websites (Lauren)

In this sense it appears that some people in the subculture have more power than others in choosing the styles and trends. The power that certain members of the subculture hold appears to be predominantly performance related. Wheaton (2003) had similar results in her study of windsurfers, where regardless of the equipment that someone owned, the underlying factor was their level of ability.

Usually from the guys at the top of the sport the fashion starts from, and if you are in the sport for a long time then people will probably respect you (Wyn).

Williams (2011) discussed how "there is a hegemonic implicitness at work in trickle-down theories, whereby it is assumed firstly that high fashion is internally structured, and secondly that people in lower social strata will follow the tastes of those in higher social strata" (p. 71). This trickle-down affect reflects fast changing postmodern subcultures. This stands in opposition to traditional subcultural theory, where trends were slow moving, and change was slow to occur.

Technology.

The technology used in extreme sport subcultures is fast changing (Torkelson, 2010), and equipment is continually being developed in all areas of the downhill subculture. In postmodern society, these trends are quickly penetrating mainstream markets because of the increase in media such as online websites covering downhill mountain biking. An abundance of youth styles reflects the increasingly individualistic lifestyles that the participants are living, where participants are more readily able to construct their own sociocultural identities (Bennett, 2011). People who are interested in the subculture have increased access to the latest equipment and stay up to date with the latest information in the sport.

The mainstreaming of extreme sport fashion occurs through a process of incorporation and commodification, where trends become mainstreamed predominantly by the media (Donnelly, 2006). The extreme sports trends are volatile, and are seen to occur on a timeline, where each has an entry point and an expiry date. The corporations are prompt to engage with the latest trends on the continuum and market these to mainstream society. Postmodern subcultures are absorbed through mainstream society's insatiable appetite for consumerism (Stranger, 2007). Consumption of downhill gear gives those who are new to the sport an opportunity to demonstrate their subcultural identity, while buying into the associated subculture and lifestyle. The buyers are aware of what is

seen as *in* and favour the products that are seen as fashionable within the temporary timeframe. Cameron's quote below hints at the temporary nature of these fashions.

Maybe next year everyone will be doing it, it might catch on! (Cameron)

As bike related technology continually improves, it is necessary for participants to keep adapting to the latest trends and fashions. The racers in this research discussed how they like to stay up to date with the latest equipment, however it does not fundamentally influence the motive for them to ride. I found that as a professional rider and being given so much free gear from sponsors, it was difficult not to take it for granted. A prominent example of this is where a tyre sponsor provided each member of a professional race team 1500 tyres for the season. To fulfil this entitlement, each rider would have had to change tyres four times each day. This is extremely excessive, and provides some insight into how elite racers can easily take for granted the equipment they are sponsored. Ford and Brown (2006) found that the meaning of objects afford different levels of importance depending on each subcultural members perceptions of identity and belonging. In a similar study to this, the top surfers accumulated the right brands and the right equipment over the duration of time spent in the subculture (Ford & Brown, 2006). The rider-gear relationship is important because it enables people to judge the riders status within the downhill mountain bike subculture. Those who are elite, treat their equipment as disposable and feel little attachment to their bike and safety gear. Because the elite are typically sponsored, the bikes are replaced often, and they are continually testing new gear. For elite, the subcultural image is taken for granted, and there is little significance placed on consuming the correct equipment. In comparison, new downhill riders express their subcultural attachment through buying the equipment that they see as necessary for

their chosen identity. In this sense, new riders view bikes, gear, and equipment as fundamental for downhill membership.

The latest trends appear to be initiated by the racers who hold the most power in the sport. The downhill mountain bike subculture represents a hierarchy in structure, where individuals are stratified into different levels of prestige. Internal contestations are continually recreated as a means to gain subcultural capital (Ford & Brown, 2006). Those who are successful in their race results appear to be the most valued and respected riders in the subculture. However, Cameron reminds us that status is only temporary, as the younger generation riders are continuing to come through and push out the older racers.

> *Yeah just whoever is cool for that short moment you know, like a couple of*
> *years ago it was **** but now it's not (Cameron).*

A current trend which was started by a top New Zealand racer is for downhillers to wear no gloves when riding. The top racer was in a position of power when he initiated this trend, as he was placed in the top ten in the world, and placed second at the world championships. This simple trend which originated in New Zealand, was very quickly adopted worldwide. This trend is especially topical because when someone crashes in downhill it is likely that they will fall onto their hands, and thus graze the skin off their palms. Therefore, this trend represents something that may not be the best option for amateur riders to adopt. Cameron reflects on the top racers position of power and his ability to start this trend.

> *Yeah, it was a new thing, someone like that is riding so well, so people think*
> *that that might be why because he is their idol, and so you copy them*
> *(Cameron).*

Other trends such as handle bar width, height, and angle appear to change as often as the seasons. The elite racers are continually testing new products for the manufacturers in the hope of decreasing their race times on the track. The slightest change in bike positioning through new trends such as handlebars, tyres or gloves provides reason enough for subcultural members to buy the latest equipment. Changes in bike equipment are common in downhill mountain biking. Each season the leading component manufacturers bring out a new range of slightly moderated equipment. The manufacturers are reliant on the elite riders testing the equipment and continually refining the technology to help produce the most up to date equipment. Stranger (2007) discusses how the participants rely on mainstream production companies to build these specialist goods. The more that participants help the companies develop the equipment, the more that the riders open themselves "up to manipulation, exploitation, and incorporation" (Stranger, 2007, p. 297). Thus, the mainstream companies gain more profit through selling subcultural products that are tested and refined by the elite riders. Similarly to surfing (Ford & Brown, 2006), the sponsors are reliant on the diffusion of trends from the elite members of the subculture, to mainstream society. "Indeed, the creation and diffusion of new style is inextricably bound up with the process of production, publicity and packaging which must inevitably lead to the diffusion of the subcultures subversive power" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 95).

The technological trends do not need to be complex, and can be as simple as choosing not to wear race gloves. In a sport where winning often comes down to a fraction of a second, bike technology remains of uppermost importance to the elite racers. Whilst accepting that technology can be a style fad, it's important to acknowledge that the riders all have a desire to race faster, and therefore are willing to invest in the latest equipment to aid their riding ability. Therefore, while many writers (Edensor & Richards, 2005; Fincham, 2008; Wheaton, 2000) suggest that the gear is purchased for aesthetic

value, it is often purchased primarily to help a rider improve their performance. Additionally, being seen to own and use the most up to date equipment is important. In the interviews Cameron reiterated this by suggesting that it increases your overall confidence in the subculture and racing.

Cut down spikes, no gloves, wide handle bars...it's sometimes not even the best decision but people still run them, it mentally gives you confidence I guess, like everyone's doing it so they think that they should, to be fast (Cameron).

A trend that has remained stable over the 15 years that I have been involved in downhilling is each rider's motor vehicle choice. Williams (2011) highlights that transportation and vehicle choice say something about individuals as members of social categories. Getting to and from races, and being seen to have the most practical of vehicles is an important part of the downhill subculture. Specific motor vehicles are valued and common in the downhill mountain bike subculture. Practical vehicles such as vans and utes are the most common vehicles for downhillers in New Zealand. However, it does not have to be the flashest of vehicles to be admired by other members of the subculture. Practicality is valued, and might come from a factor such as being able to hold the most passengers to complete downhill runs.

It might be like a bit of a piece, not the mintest car, probably scratches all over it and stickers and it might be like a van or a ute, or a car with a big bike rack with tie downs holding it down (Cameron).

Sponsorship.

Sponsorship is valued within the downhill subculture, none more so than energy drink sponsorship. The interviewee's discussed how racers who are sponsored by either Red Bull or Monster Energy are seen as high up and privileged by lower level subcultural members. Red Bull supports their athletes by funding projects such as athlete driven world record attempts. It is not only the energy drinks that the riders require, but the financial support that comes from large companies such as these. Those who are sponsored by these companies such as Red Bull are seen to bear more status in the downhill mountain bike subculture. This exemplifies the depthless and image based presumptions embodied within postmodern subcultural theory (Wheaton, 2000). Cameron suggested that athletes who are sponsored by energy drink brands are seen as higher up in the subculture and are more respected.

> *Energy drinks are quite big at the moment, like Red Bull, so because people*
>
> *are sponsored, they buy lots of drinks, buy the hats, buy the clothes, and try*
>
> *to dress like the Red Bull athletes (Cameron).*

In addition to energy drink sponsorship, certain bike manufacturers are key sponsors. Certain bike companies receive more attention than others with bikes hand-built in America and Canada being the most desired. More so, riders who are sponsored custom made bikes are envied the most by subcultural members.

Sponsorship is a form of support that helps give a rider a boost in confidence at races. Being sponsored implies increased support and free gear which can trigger tension within the subculture. The acquisition of sponsorship is important as this represents the potential value of a racer. The value of sponsorship assigned to each racer represents the quality and power of the athlete as a brand representative. While the elite racers are

rewarded with the highest financial rewards, there is more pressure on them from others in the subculture. Members of the subculture are able to judge whether the sponsor is an accurate representation of the rider's ability. Tension in sponsorship is manifested by the perception of unfair sponsorship distributions. In my opinion there are many riders who fulfil all of the requirements for sponsorship, yet do not receive the sponsorship that subcultural members would expect. In opposition, there are also athletes who receive levels of sponsorship that is perceived as too generous for their ability level. These riders are frowned upon by the dominant members of the subculture, and are often shunned by the dominant subcultural members. Athlete marketability plays a large role in determining which racers rise to the top of the sponsorship range, however many talented athletes still appear to be overlooked.

Because sponsorship is limited and not easily acquired, it plays the role of motivating many riders, yet can also be a site for resentment and jealousy. The gifting of sponsorship is not equal, and there is no universal standard for who receives sponsorship and who does not. Sponsors value riders who represent their brands in a holistic and well round manner. Because of this, sponsorship does not always go to the racers who have won the most prestigious races. In my opinion, sponsors prefer racers who can sell themselves to the public easily. Those who put effort into providing the media with press releases and continually promote their assigned brands often receive the largest sponsorship contracts. As opposed to more traditional subcultures such as New York rappers (Williams, 2011), the downhill mountain bikers are happy to *sell out* for large corporates to use their image for marketing. Selling out is common in extreme sport practices, and is a consequence of extreme sports becoming mainstreamed. Palmer (2007) suggests that selling out extreme sport has exploited and tainted ideals such as freedom and purity. Nonetheless, if possible, most riders are happy to sell themselves to sponsors, and are not precious in what brands they represent.

Riders involved and interested in the downhill mountain bike subculture have access to websites such as www.pinkbike.com and www.dirtmag.co.uk which cover the latest advancements in the subculture. These websites are updated daily with video clips from the fastest and most admired riders in the world. The professional racers are contractually required to blog and post comments on their Facebook, Twitter, and personal websites on a daily basis. Through facebook and twitter, racers are required to gather as many *friends* and *followers* as possible. The more friends and followers a racer has, the more market potential for the sponsors. Through this process of personal marketing, the elite racers are able to best represent their sponsors, and market the latest apparel. Interestingly, the riders are often contractually required to post these comments each day and have little choice in this marketing approach. Stranger (2007) suggests, "even those participants caught up in the commercialisation and sportisation of their activities often express ambivalence about what they are involved in" (p. 297). If the rider chooses not to post updates frequently, then it is likely that they will be dropped from the team. Being dropped from a professional team would be shameful for a racer, and may make it difficult for the person to find another team.

Riders in downhill mountain biking are judged for being loyal to their sponsors and the brands they represent. It is not acceptable to be sponsored by contradictory brands such as Red Bull and Monster Energy at the same time. There are numerous examples of racers who remain attached to loyal sponsors for more than a decade. Because of this loyalty, the rider begins to be embedded in the brand that they are representing in ways such as having their name logoed on all production model bikes. This *hero making* is discussed by Palmer (2007), where large companies capitalise on key athletes. The top team riders eventually get to the stage where they are both professional racers, and employed to test the equipment that the manufacturer is selling. The bikes are designed around the test rider's preferences and are refined to the angles that the top racer prefers.

In this process, the rider becomes the face of the brand as the main rider and representative. Other riders may join the same team, however these riders will be seen as secondary to the team's main rider. The top rider gets the most benefits from their network of supporters, such as a better mechanic, lighter race parts, and more comfortable hotel rooms. Because of this pecking order, the lower level team members are often required to use equipment that is not as good as the top team rider. It is common for the lower strata members of teams to use certain equipment that is heavier, slower, or less advanced than their high strata team mates. Through this process, a pecking order develops that spans both the race team and the subculture more generally.

There is always going to be a pecking order when you are...obviously the people with higher results, and more sponsors, flasher gear (Lauren).

Being sponsored is a powerful tool to increase someone's status within the subculture. Being a branded rider means that the person has the results to back it up. Racers who get sponsorship are often good communicators and spend time with fans and interested people. Sponsors are seen to pick those who market their brand the best, and therefore, those who are chosen can quickly move towards the top of the subcultural hierarchy. A cardinal sin commonly portrayed by new subcultural members is to buy all of the equipment from the same retailer and suggest to others that they are sponsored. This act of fake sponsorship is frowned upon by subcultural members, and the person would be immediately seen as a poser. This finding is similar to Wheaton's (2000) research covering identity in the windsurfing subculture. In her research people purposely brought the top level windsurf boards, yet had no knowledge regarding how to properly use them. Palmer (2007) discusses how posers are common in extreme sport subcultures. "There is an inexhaustible amount of commodities, products, and ephemera for proponents of these

sports" (Palmer, 2007, p. 75). Gear from downhill mountain biking is being continually mainstreamed to incorporate non-subcultural members who adopt the wider street culture in their everyday lives. By promoting the equipment through the use of top riders, downhill apparel continues to be mainstreamed and has appeal far wider than just on a downhill track.

Video, music and electronic media.

On the internet, downhill mountain biking has a large following. Interested people from all around the world are able to watch the races and events live. A wide audience of viewers are able to watch downhill mountain biking free online on a weekly basis. As discussed in the sponsorship section, specialist websites are common and help promote the sport to wider audiences. Ford and Brown (2006) analysed the role that films such as these play in providing wider audiences with information on the surfing subculture. They problematised how films often depict connotations from the subculture that are incorrect and portray sides to the activities that do not accurately represent the ideals. Downhill mountain bike films are presented daily on websites and are often funded by the sponsors. In this research, all participants have featured in these types of films and each have experienced contractual requirements implying their availability to star in such edits. In some instances, the films connote values that may not best represent the downhillers who race, and are overly used as a means to promote and market the rider's sponsors.

Specialist videographers in the subculture of downhill mountain biking produce videos and electronic media that covers the race calendar each year. The specialist video-clips help spread the latest ideas and portray the latest constructs globally, thus providing a means for the highly ranked riders to share topical information. The racers use video-clips as a way to display their talents to a wide audience. Television shows such as WynTV provide monthly updates that give viewers an insight into the life of elite racers.

As well as providing an audience with entertainment, they give the rider an opportunity to display their mountain bike talents. Additionally, this keeps the sponsors happy as the riders display branded equipment.

> *The riders watch the latest downhill videos or the last racing videos provided by a website or you know like WynTV or supplied by a person in the sport like Clay Porter (Lauren).*

The riders discuss how they have all watched these forms of media, and like to keep up to date with the latest happenings in the subculture. When the riders are not riding, they are viewing the online video clips that get published daily and are keeping up to date with the latest progressions in the sport. Because of the amount of time they have spent within the subculture, they instinctively know which videos are popular, and which are not. The participants in my research all recommended the same videographers, websites, music, and videos as being the best and most stylish for subcultural members. Most of the videographers discussed by the participants are based outside of New Zealand, however the racers had similar recommendations. The participants had strong views and scoffed at the idea of watching cross-country and cliff-drop videos.

> *Everybody watches all the videos and keeps up to date with what's happening, yeah definitely all Clay's movies and the Earth movies...(Gabby).*

Research by (Donnelly, 2006; Park et al., 2008; and Rinehart, 2003) suggest that styles, music, videos and audio are practical fashions that can be adopted by non-participants who want to imitate the top athletes in a subculture. There are forums set up

which provide arm-chair downhillers and non-participants a chance to voice their opinions and debate largely insignificant bike related information. The downhillers in my research joked that often these online non-members know information about themselves before they do. The elite riders have little care for the forums and despise the non-members who critique the subculture through online methods.

In this research, all of the participants are at the elite level, therefore it is likely that they are unaware of the extent to which younger or less able riders are copying their fashions. It appears that the type of music, videos and audio are more important for new subcultural members. Symbolic factors such as this help to visually identify those who consider themselves to be subcultural members (Fincham, 2008). These findings represent insider knowledge, where those who have been involved in the subculture for a long time can quickly identify aspects necessary for identity formation. Gabby demonstrates insider knowledge by discussing behaviours that are frowned upon by authentic subcultural members. She suggests that the people who watch these videos are trying too hard to fit in which is detrimental for subcultural inclusion.

Definitely those Drop-In movies and those Canadian huck movies are not cool. If you were a budding downhiller and were rating them then you would possibly not be accepted very much (Gabby).

Videos and internet sites specifically covering downhill mountain biking provide a means for the athletes to increase their profile in the sport. Additionally, those who are new to downhill are able to learn the latest techniques from the professionals. Websites and forums provide a means for sharing and debating the latest mountain bike related information in areas such as rider profiles, sponsorship deals, new bike parts and technology, and locations for racing. Wheaton (2003) found that these promotional tools

help strengthen the network surrounding the subculture, and serve to link people as an international subcultural entity, therefore giving people the perception of a common bond.

Music is less important for the racers, however they suggest there is certain music that bodes well with their sporting activity. Those who are not authentic members appear to enjoy more aggressive and fast paced music compared to those who are elite racers. Stereotypical views of music taste are present across a range of electronic media, where those who are not fully accepted into the subculture watch videos that are more hard-core and are likely to include crashes or more out of control riders. Nonetheless, it is likely that different groups within the subculture have different pre-race music tastes. The more hard-core amateur riders crash often, and listen to more upbeat and aggressive music, whereas the elite racers listen to more light pace and less aggressive type music. Nonetheless, music taste does appear to be subjective and is representative of postmodern constructs where racers are able to choose their own music styles. In downhill, all genres are celebrated and the subculture is accepting of all music tastes. In my experience, the music that riders choose is appropriate for their perceived level of arousal leading into the race. Therefore, those who are over-aroused listen to more relaxed music, whereas those who are under-aroused listen to more aggressive music.

> *Yeah especially for the younger people coming through, like they all listen to 'Rise Against' type music and I guess it goes with the lifestyle, the hardcore thing. Like they might listen to hardcore rap or hardcore rock or metal. So it's that hardcore and rough kind of look or feel that they have (Cameron).*

Cameron's comment implies that the new and younger subcultural members often get the music taste wrong, and act in ways that are typically more hardcore than the elite

racers. The new and younger riders appear to go through a stage where they perceive that hard-core music and videos are the most valued in the subculture. Their perception is mistaken and over time they learn that those at the top of the sport take a more relaxed approach to these aspects. As the new and young riders learn the distinct tastes of the subculture, they seem to settle into their place in the subculture. Ford and Brown (2006) discuss how cultural tastes such as this accumulate through naturalistic education provided by subcultural inclusion. Cultural capital can be gained through knowledge accumulated where systems of distinction such as subcultures confer social status (Bourdieu, 1984).

Cameron's comment provides insight into the numerous meanings that can be reinforced through the nexus that surrounds subcultures and music styles. The music is often representative of the activity that the participants are doing. In this case, downhill mountain biking is seen to be an extreme, dangerous and exciting sport. This fits with the frenetic music styles suggested by Lauren such as rock and punk. This finding is supported by (Gelder, 2007; and Gelder & Thornton, 2005) where the members had deep connections with the music as it acted to express and reinforce both the culture and the activity.

Linguistics and jargon.

The downhill mountain bike subculture is littered with jargonistic terms and symbols. The jargonistic terms were used effortlessly by the elite subcultural members I interviewed. This is demonstrative of their level of authenticity, belonging, and the length of time they have all spent immersed in the downhill culture. The downhill jargon has developed to represent an in-depth language system that represents characteristics of the sport. Labels for technical parts of tracks, race results, and riding ability all demonstrate how the words have developed to encompass what actually goes on in the sport. As

discussed in Ford and Brown's (2006) study of surfing, "early surfers needed to invent a way of talking, because there was no precedent to describe wave riding" (p. 66). These terms are distinguishable from mainstream society and help engage all subcultural members in a language that is exclusive to the subculture.

As I transcribed the transcripts, the jargonistic nature of the vocabulary became increasingly apparent. However, during the interviews, when I questioned the participants about the jargon used within the subculture, they were largely unaware of it. I presume that this is because all of the participants I interviewed are so deeply entwined within the subculture. The participants' word choice came naturally and they did not appear to realise the extent of their specialist vocabulary. Nonetheless, Gabby appeared to be the most aware of the jargonistic words commonly used by downhillers.

For sure they have their own jargon and language...milking something, scrubbing, hipping, you know the terms. You would not have a clue what they meant unless you were a downhiller (Gabby).

The cultural code used in downhill mountain biking is well developed, complicated, meaning laden and progressively evolving. The language used helps give the downhill subculture a means for being distinctive and unique (Mean & Halone, 2010). Wyn's comment suggests that mainstream society would have trouble understanding the downhillers language, however downhillers can easily speak to one another and be understood (Williams, 2011).

Most downhillers would come across as rough, even though they are not, like people in the street would look at them and think that they are idiots, and if they talked to them they couldn't understand them, but they aren't

idiots, if the people knew all of the stuff that they did they would be pretty

amazed (Wyn).

Wyn's statement suggests that the language choice is often difficult for mainstream society to understand. For people to be able to understand downhillers, they need some understanding of the social expressions and mannerisms that are commonly used. Examples of these are the emotional and self-expressive calls used such as hoots and hollers. When a rider does well on a section of track, the riders might celebrate their own or others skill by using loud supportive calls such as *yeowl*. In surfing subcultures, self-expression such as this is seen as important because it helps confirm each member's identity (Ford & Brown, 2006). Use of emotions and non-verbal signs demonstrate the depth of this linguistical code and helps distinguish the downhill subculture from mainstream society. Lauren's statement reiterates this finding by suggesting that the language used is basic and comes across as if the riders lack intelligence. The term *code* is significant because it implies that there is a hidden meanings in the language used. These jargonistic codes must be deciphered by those who are not members of the subculture (Williams, 2011).

It is as if downhill jargon comes from words that are just made up by young

boys really (Lauren).

I agree with these findings as the jargon used by the subcultural members often comes across as dim-witted and the persona demonstrated appears unintelligent and foolish. Nonetheless, the jargon used by the downhillers has a purpose that runs much deeper than it initially appears. The words are meaning laden and often represent processes in the subculture that are difficult to describe. For example, downhill mountain

biking is a dangerous and exciting extreme sport, yet one of the tactics used by the downhillers is to talk as if the sport is lacklustre and safe. At odds to the extremeness of the sport, the riders use jargon and language that suggests the reverse of what is actually going on in the sport. For example, when riders stand alongside the track and watch someone have a gnarly crash down a steep part of the track, those watching would not make a big deal of it. When the rider who crashed finally reaches the event pits, they may tell friends they just *slid out a bit* or *lost their line*. Therefore, through use of language and mannerisms, the extent of the crash is minimised, and the subcultural members resist making a big deal of crashes, or injuries such as broken bones. Being calm and understating all aspects of downhill is valued in the subculture, for example if someone was about to race a national or world cup race, they might tell friends they are *just going for a pedal*, or a *roll down the hill*. Because the hazardousness of the sport is exaggerated in most public perceptions, the riders choose to play down the level of danger and reject that it is dangerous or gnarly.

Cultural codes and mannerisms such as these are "ideological, structured, pragmatic representations of the everyday life of the people who create them" (Williams, 2011, p. 53). The cultural codes act as a language barrier, thus providing a method for the subculture to gain power within society (Liponski, 2009). Research by (Laviolette, 2011; Lyng, 2005; and Wheaton, 2004) inform my findings by stating that jargonistic terms are used in subcultures such as skateboarding, rafting and surfing.

In mountain biking, word choice that appears simple is often cleverly designed to represent and describe in-depth processes. Below are some examples of jargonistic terms and related meanings used within the downhill mountain biking subculture.

Characteristics of people.

Squid: Someone who is wobbly on a bike and lacks control and precision. You can never be sure which line down the track they will take.

Muppet: A person who resembles a puppet and does not demonstrate skill in movement.

       Characteristics of the terrain.

Hip Jump: A jump that curves to one side, resembling the shape of a human skeletal hip.

Pre-jumping: The take off that is located prior to the main take off for a jump.

Booter: A jump that kicks the riders high up in the air when they ride over it.

       Characteristics resembling riding ability.

On the pipe: A rider who is seen to be riding crazily fast as if they are on drugs.

Milk the track: To push your bike into the terrain and gain speed from the g-forces that are created.

Dead Sailor: A rider who freezes when in mid-air over a jump.

Scorpion: A bending of the spine motion that results in the rider's feet touching the back of the head when crashing.

Downhill as the baby brother of motocross.

A reoccurring theme in the interview transcripts is the participants' common referral to the subculture that surrounds motocross. There is no debating that downhill mountain bikers draw their inspiration from the international sport of motocross racing. The downhill subculture represents a subculture that is distinctive from motocross, yet in many ways has evolved to mimic motocross. This *big-brother* relationship has developed in a similar manner to other extreme sports, for example windsurfing's evolution from surfing (Wheaton, 2003).

During the interviews the participants often referred to mountain bikers as try-hard moto dudes. This refers to the manner in which members of the downhill mountain bike subculture have adopted many of the traits displayed by professional motocross racers. All five of the participants stated that downhillers draw their inspiration from motocross racers.

Downhill seems to be the younger brother of motocross because they are the next level in terms of professionalism and teams and things, so it's always good to see how a similar sport functions (Amy).

It appears that downhill is a sport which values the professionalism of motocross. In motocross the speeds are fast, there is more sponsorship, more prize money, and a larger audience compared to downhill racing. Therefore, the elite downhill riders envy those who are professional motocross racers because they can relate to their lifestyles and share similar values.

Well motor biking has been a pro sport for a lot longer and has kind of led the way for mountain biking, and it has way more money behind it (Lauren).

In Wheaton's (2003) work she describes how windsurfing evolved from the surfing subculture. This same relationship appears to have taken place between motocross and downhill mountain biking, where the ideologies and values have been appropriated and transformed to fit the different specifications and sociohistorical moment of an evolving and new subculture (Wheaton, 2003). The motocross subculture is operationalised in a very similar way to the downhill mountain bike subculture. Through media, consumption and marketing, people are able to immerse themselves in the motocross world. In a similar way to downhill, it is both entertainment and a hobby for many enthusiasts. It is an influential sport for downhill, and represents many attributes that the riders in this research value. In downhill, aspects of the motocross subculture such as mechanical technology, suspension and hydraulic brakes are continually copied by manufactures. There is an alliance between downhill mountain biking and motocross, where each sport tests equipment for the other. For example, there have been teams such

as Honda who use downhill mountain bike racers to test the metal compounds for motocross bikes. Conversely, downhill mountain bike manufacturers design brakes for motocross bikes and then copy the designs for push bikes. Nonetheless, this alliance is unequal in its distribution as downhillers idolise motocross riders and the sport, whereas motocross riders do not appear to idolise the downhill subculture. Additionally the clothing styles, hairstyles, and lifestyles of motocross riders are mimicked immensely by downhill mountain bikers.

I think it's a style on the bike thing, everyone seems to think that it's pretty cool, I guess they sound good, and there is dirt flying, and the lifestyles that those guys live compared to us, just from doing a sport that they love is way more you know, they can afford to buy these massive properties with their own tracks and big sheds, whereas we can't because we don't get paid that much (Cameron).

Regardless of the differences between downhill and motocross subcultures, postmodern subcultures such as these provide individuals with opportunities to be involved with a specific group of likeminded people. William's (2011) suggested that compared with traditional subcultural theory, people are less restricted in terms of ethnicity and class in postmodern societies. Nonetheless, Amy commented that there are predominantly white male motocross racers and little range in ethnicities. These findings are consistent with Edensor and Richard's (2005) paper which found that those in the snowboarding subculture were overwhelmingly white and middle class. Regardless of possible class divides, it is apparent that downhill mountain bikers' identity is constructed rather than given (Bennett, 1999). Postmodern theories postulate that subcultures such as these are more encompassing of a wide range of adherents.

Part B: Downhill Devotion

      Subcultural inclusion.

      The subculture is in constant flux as people shift between different levels of engagement and interaction with the subculture. Transitions continue to occur as new members are introduced to the sport, while simultaneously others are leaving the subculture. The downhill mountain bike subculture has a certain transiency and there are no formal membership protocols, which means members are free to move into and out of the group at will. The riders were asked whether they believed new riders were easily accepted into the downhill mountain bike subculture. Each rider provided their own opinion regarding the necessary aspects for inclusion. It appears that participants are judged from the moment they begin to engage with the subculture. Lauren suggests that being accepted correlates with who you hang out with, and who helps bring you into the sport.

      Depending on what group you get accepted into, I think it is definitely who

      you associate with (Lauren).

      In addition, Lauren suggested that there is a grading system that naturally occurs within the subculture. She suggested there are those who have been in the subculture a long time, then those who get results, then those who used to get results, and then the younger racers who will perform in the future. She stated that the level of acceptance into the subculture is determined by your status at the time. Therefore the riders' position within the subculture is always temporary and in flux, thus riders' must maintain their position or lose their place in the hierarchy. Weiss (2001) discussed how these stages of subcultural membership act to reinforce members' sense of identity. Membership into the subculture can occur on a range of levels that includes spectator, participant, mechanic, or

support crew (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Weiss, 2001). It is likely that each person adopts a role and deliberately changes their mannerisms, styles, and activities to suit their specific role. This process of role adoption means that the subculture is fragmented into smaller sub-groups of differing stratifications.

I think everyone is accepted to an extent, they may not be accepted into the different groups within it, but they are definitely accepted (Lauren).

Lauren's comment highlights how no one is ever denied access to the subculture, however there is a process for subcultural inclusion that differs depending on several factors. Amy believes that the extent to which an individual is accepted into the subculture depends on who introduces you to the sport. If someone is a highly ranked member of the subculture, then the process of initiating and introducing new members to the subculture is easier than if someone was not an authentic member.

I started riding with people who were already accepted...so that helped (Amy).

Nonetheless, it appears that over time everyone is eventually accepted in the downhill subculture. Lauren discusses how even those who are considered *muppets* are accepted.

They are always accepted, I think downhillers are always happy to have new people in the sport, but they are not necessarily accepted into those different groups, like they may not be accepted into the cool group (Lauren).

It appears that there are sub-groups within the subculture. Thorpe (2004) had similar findings where different characteristics helped distinguish sub-groups from one another. Lauren's quote implies that when initiated in to the subculture, people are selected to become a part of a specific sub-group. Thorpe's (2004) work was predominantly concerned with the sub-group practices that members participated in. Her research ties in with this research (as discussed in the video, music and electronic media section) as there are different roles for the groups within the subculture. More so, the riders are friends with those who are of a similar speed on the track. However, this does not necessarily mean that the racers in the same category ride together. In downhill there are distinctions between the race categories such as elite verses amateur. Gabby provides her views on the divisions between different friendship groups.

> *It's quite simple, there is usually little sub-groups, so it will be in your own town, or on the race circuit, that there will be a fast guy and he is going to have three or four guys that aren't as fast to hang out with, and then the next fast guy will have his three or four guys to hang out with, so that they are not threatening each other all the time and so they can relax (Gabby).*

The friendship networks in New Zealand appear unique in that all of the elite riders are friends. This practice differs from other international subcultures such as the British and French where the racers view each other as competition and do not associate with one another. The New Zealand elite riders are competitive on the race track, yet still prefer to hang out with one another and practice together at events. In my experience the elite racers are a cohesive group that is easily distinguishable from the other racers. The elite racers demonstrate professionalism in their approach and are predominantly friends with only the fastest of the non-elite racers.

However in New Zealand, the fast guys and girls do hang out with one another. In New Zealand the fast guys do tend to hang out quite a bit, they enjoy training together and doing runs together which is something that you don't see as much overseas, it's quite unusual that they are all friends (Gabby).

Because of the social and leisure emphasis in the downhill subculture, the competition between members is minimised. There is an alliance between solidarity and competition, where the riders are competitive when completing their individual race runs, but enjoy the social part of racing following the final timed race. By being friends with one another, the elite field in New Zealand appears to lessen the competition between each other. This is shown by the way the elite riders train together and support the winners. Nonetheless, this anti-competition ethos does not mean that the riders don't judge one another. At events, people discuss in the lift lines or shuttle trucks who is riding the best, who is doing the jumps, and who has the most style.

You are always watching other riders and seeing their techniques, and seeing who is riding good (Cameron).

Being overly competitive is not valued in downhill mountain biking, and effortless winning is the most desired. Nonetheless, winning is valued, but only if someone has style in their riding ability. In my opinion, there have been many World Champions with no style who were quickly forgotten or overlooked in the subculture. The predominantly male participants who are seen to have *mad style* by other racers are seen as the top of the value system in New Zealand. This group of no more than ten men appear to be the most powerful in the subcultural hierarchy. Embracing pack mannerisms they encourage each

other along so that the group improves at a faster rate than any other racers at the events. Wheaton (2003) found this in her study of windsurfers, where the most skilled were described as having the highest status.

> *They see that by working together they help each other and can actually get further. I think the kiwis are so confident in themselves that they don't have to be better than someone else to be confident. Whereas in America, you turn up to the lift queue and you hear them talking themselves up, and you are like oh my god what have I signed up for, these guys must be so fast, like talking it up, and then you see them crawling down the hill in all the flashest gear! Whereas in New Zealand if you were that person you would be ridiculed (Gabby).*

Gabby's quote highlights the modest nature of the downhill community in New Zealand. To be an authentic member, racers cannot be seen to be arrogant or portray a persona suggesting they have a higher status than other subcultural members. Even the fastest of racers still have time to help the up and coming riders and support those who are still progressing through the amateur categories.

Individualism in a postmodern world.

While visual identifiers such as clothing are important in the subculture of downhill mountain biking, there appears to be a certain personality type that is valued. The riding persona extends far beyond the weekends of riding and racing, as they demonstrate subcultural attachment in other areas of life. The participants told me that they consider themselves to be downhillers in everything that they do. Their personal identity is so tightly embedded in the subculture that they cannot separate themselves

from the sport. The sport commonly comes up in conversation outside of the downhill subculture, and they are always thinking about the sport.

> *Yeah there is definitely a personality type, and that is why when you race you probably get on with most of the people because they are all similar personality types, and also that is why there is sometimes conflict because everyone is so similar (Amy).*

Findings in this project mirror the findings from Wheaton's (2003) paper where new age sports displayed individuality, freedom, hedonism and anti-competitive attitudes. These aesthetically orientated sports where care-free attitudes, self-confidence and self-expression are valued stand in opposition to traditional team sports. Gabby's quote highlights that personality traits such as these are important in downhill mountain biking. Additionally she suggests that the riders have a distinct walking style. This idea helps confirm the process where trends as obscure as walking style develop to become common within the subculture.

> *They have quite a distinctive walking style. The style is a physique and a walking style...they have a kink in their lower back, so the posture is quite distinctive, and just the confidence. They are generally quite confident people (Gabby).*

The confident persona embodied by the downhill riders was talked about by all of the participants in this research. It appears to be a confidence that gives the participants feelings of invincibility. Authors (Bennett & Henson, 2003; Donnelly, 2006; and Larkin

& Griffiths, 2004) found that the self-development that occurs through extreme sports increases the participants' confidence.

> *It just gives you confidence and gives your life a lot more meaning, to not*
> *just be a boring person who just watches television, and goes to work and*
> *goes shopping (Gabby).*

This confidence and self-belief discussed by my participants' links with the consequences of Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) model of flow. Flow theory represents the balancing point between competence, confidence, and risk. "*Flow* can be said to occur when people are able to meet the challenges of their environment with appropriate skills, and accordingly feel a sense of well-being, a sense of mastery, and a heightened sense of self-esteem" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p. 1). Following experiences of flow, the participants' stated feeling confident, arrogant and a feeling of self-reward. I believe this feeling comes about through being able to push your body to the limit and being *in the zone*, therefore knowing that you are riding to your potential and challenging yourself. Lyng (2005) states that despite edgeworkers desire to pursue dangerous challenges, they feel satisfaction in the way they controlled themselves within the environment.

> *For me biking has made me a more confident person, because if you're*
> *doing well then your confidence goes up and you carry this into your day to*
> *day life, like wherever, buying stuff, or getting your car sorted, so you feel*
> *like you can rule at life a little bit more (Cameron).*

Because downhill mountain biking is such a dangerous and high pressure sport, it makes riders feel like they can more readily cope with life's pressures. In my opinion, the

riders try not to worry too much about anything and come across as easy going individuals. The riders stated how the sport attracts fun loving people who are out for a good time.

> *Well everyone is on the same wave length, and all wanting to do the same thing so they all get along pretty well and have fun together and all try to race as fast as they can (Wyn).*

This care-free attitude is valued in the subculture, and those who get top race results and still maintain this care-free attitude are the most respected and admired. This care-free attitude demonstrates the subculture's ability to accept people from all avenues of society. These findings support the ideas proposed by Gelder (2007) and William's (2011) who suggested that in postmodern subcultures, identity is more important than race, class or ethnicity. In postmodern subcultures, there are more opportunities for social mobility, and class is less of a constraint or predictor compared with more traditional times.

> *There are people from here there and everywhere and they are all pretty much friends, so it works out pretty well (Wyn).*

Through the participants' choice of style, and activity, the riders have shown that this subculture is less class based when compared with traditional subcultures. Nonetheless, those without financial security may be less likely to begin racing downhill because of the large costs needed for equipment. It is difficult to speculate on the constraints that limit people's ability to race downhill, as those who were interviewed in this research were authentic members and may not have in-depth understandings of the

class based societal constraints. Those that I interviewed admitted that it is a very expensive sport to be a part of. The cost for one downhill bike is over $8,000 and then the bike needs constant maintenance and parts. Regardless of the cost of the bike, everyone that chooses to invest in being part of the downhill subculture is accepted.

> *I think everyone is accepted, there is a fair amount of ribbing that goes on, but it is all quite light hearted, and generally only people who aren't accepted are those who rate themselves too highly and take themselves too seriously...but if you are in for a good time, then everyone accepts you (Gabby).*

Despite the racers care-free and effortless attitude, they do put a lot of energy into pushing the limits both on the race track and outside of the racing communities. The participants in my study all stated how the racers are energetic people who like to do everything to the maximum. Patrick (1988) stated how daredevil personalities are common in extreme sports such as downhill. Findings from (Laberge, 2002; Quester et al., 2006; and Willig, 2008) suggest that individuals who take part in extreme sports such as downhill mountain biking are inclined to enjoy pushing the limits. My participants all enjoy pushing their own limits both physically and mentally. It is apparent that rising to the challenge and riding a track well brings about a sense of pleasure, achievement and personal satisfaction (Willig, 2008). Therefore, through the activity and subcultural involvement, the riders are able to learn more about themselves (Kay & Laberge, 2002). Dodson's (1996) paper supports this by stating that racers are constantly faced with both mental and physical challenges in mountain biking that they need to tackle and overcome.

There is obviously the larrikin side of it where downhillers are pretty loose,

on and off the track...downhillers have so much energy to burn that when

they go riding they just get rid of it and it calms them down, and then if they

go out drinking there is probably a little bit left over that they blow out

(Gabby).

This sense of calm described by Gabby has been documented in other extreme sport subcultures (see Celsi et al., 1993; Larkin & Griffiths, 2004; and Wheaton, 2004). Schneider et al. (2007) found that following dangerous adventure involvement, participants' felt a sense of relaxation and calmness. Quester et al. (2006) suggests that this sense of calm following extreme sport is brought about by feelings of escape, where participants are freed by an activity that is not governed by rules.

In addition to the deviant, alternative and non-conformist lifestyles, participants constantly refer to themselves as *downhillers*, and to the subculture as *downhill*. The labelling or establishment of a theme name is a common trait linked with groups of deviant youth. This acquired title helps differentiate the subculture from mainstream society, whist increasing the status and recognition of the group (Stranger, 2007).

In addition to practicing downhill mountain biking, the downhill racers are thrill seekers in almost all areas of life. Lyng (2005) describes activities such as this as a desire to escape, resist and transcend mundane modern civilisation. Cameron's statement aligns with the idea of actors resisting the imperatives of emotional control, rational calculation and routinisation within modern society (Lyng, 2005). "Resistance to these modernising processes represents an aesthetic sensibility in opposition to the rational imperative of modernity..." (Stranger, 2007, p. 296).

A little bit deviant, but not completely, everyone is pretty much doing well

for themselves but they are a little bit more crazy than the rest of society,

but then you look at the sport that we do and you have to be (Wyn).

The riders live life to the fullest and are fervently keen to push the boundaries in whatever they do. Gelder (2007) suggests that subcultures need to be deviant, alternative or non-conforming in their behaviours. Hodkinson's (2002) work confirms these views, where the participants in his research are committed to the subculture and are constantly finding new ways to ensure their sport is distinctive. "A subcultures existence remains contingent on resisting subsumption by the dominant culture and maintaining cultural integrity in the distinction between it and the dominant culture" (Stranger, 2007, p. 296). Edgeworker's engage in practices such as downhill mountain biking to escape the mechanical, bureaucratic, rigid, impersonal and alienating forces of modern life (Lyng, 2005).

Yeah, being extreme and care-free, yes they take everything to the outer

limits of what normal people would (Lauren).

Deviance among young people is not an uncommon occurrence. The deviant behaviour discussed by Cameron suggests that the riders are looking for a means to relieve boredom and maintain excitement in their lives. Miller (2005) discusses how powerful sensations are experienced in activities where there is both physical and mental risk for participants. In this research, downhill mountain biking brings about sensations mentioned by Lyng (2005), these are: 1) self determination; 2) fear of failure; 3) excitement; and 4) hyperreality. The downhillers do not believe they are gambling in their downhill racing and feel a sense of control over their movements in the sport. With a

sense of control over the four sensations suggested, there is a tendency to continue the edgework activity (Miller, 2005). Therefore, the young racers are continually motivated to pursue both racing downhill, and the thrill seeking behaviour following.

It's because they are just thrill seekers and any time of the day or night they are just trying to find something to entertain them, and if they aren't riding their bike and going out of their comfort zone then they need to do it. It might come from riding a bike fast, or driving a car fast and crashing it and getting into trouble, or something like that (Cameron).

Yeah, they live pretty full on, not everyone but the majority live life pretty on the edge with everything they do, within reason though, and not too badly (Wyn).

As discussed by Miller (2005) it is typically youth who are involved in deviant edgework behaviours. Downhill mountain biking has a lower than normal age demographic where young individuals often leave home for the first time to travel with friends around the race circuit. The riders are often free from parental control for the first time in their lives, and are with people of similar ages. Young people are more likely to enjoy the thrill of edgework because of their increased perception that they are in control (Lyng, 2005). The youth have the illusion of control and therefore are more likely to push the limits in their behaviour to experience the rushes associated with sensation seeking behaviour (Miller, 2005).

There is a lot of littering and a lot of silly business like donuts in the car-park, and it is just that they are young and they have been let out of home

with no mum and dad and a whole lot of boys together just going wild

(Lauren).

There are numerous examples of downhill mountain bikers in New Zealand being involved in deviant and criminal behaviour. Examples such as stealing cars for joy-rides, crashing rental cars, wrecking hotel rooms, hospital parties, and escaping from police is common each year on the race circuit. These "sneaky thrills" (Lyng, 2005, p. 155) demonstrate the riders desire to escape, transcend and resist a variety of modern societal constraints. Nonetheless, deviant behaviour appears to be declining in the downhill subculture. With increases in riders travelling overseas for competition, they are more aware of the implications of criminal convictions. Therefore, there are less crimes being committed, but still a lot of silly behaviour.

Reputation and recognition.

Weiss (2001) states that reputation and recognition is an important factor for participants' continuation in sporting subcultures. All participants in this study suggested that reputation is important in the downhill mountain bike subculture. Wheaton (2003) found that recognition was not important in an egotistical sense, more so as a means to gain subcultural status in order to gain sponsorship. Wyn's answer mirrors Wheaton's (2003) suggestions:

A fair bit eh, as long as you are in the scene and keep doing well, or being

seen then you can keep going but it's still pretty hard at the moment with

sponsorship (Wyn).

If you are at the real high level, like Sam Hill who has been injured for two

years, and it is not that anyone has forgotten who he is, but he is not the

same dominant force that he used to be, so with the world cup and the

public recognition then yes you have to maintain results and be there to not

be forgotten, because in just a few years you can get forgotten quickly

(Amy).

The other four participants in my research suggested that reputation is an important factor for their continuation and involvement in the sport. Weiss's (2001) work aligns with Lauren's comment discussing the need to be concerned with reputation in order to see yourself improving, and to continue progressing in the sport. Additionally, downhill mountain biking provides a public space for racers to be viewed as improving and performing. It provides a means for showing off different bike riding styles, and each rider can be viewed as unique. In addition, riders gain recognition for their achievements at event prize-giving's and others can see them improving. These factors meet the conditions that Weiss (2001) suggests are important for persistence in sporting subcultures.

You can't really be good at the sport if you don't think reputation is

important because it will always be there in some form (Lauren).

In this research each rider discussed how they saw themselves as a unique part of the subculture. In downhill mountain biking there are some prominent and famous characters who stand out by being as unique as possible. As discussed earlier, the high profile riders often gain the most sponsorship and are the most famous in the subculture. Thus, riders are continually trying to juggle the need to be distinct, while balancing

necessary inclusion in the subculture. Essentially, racers are trying to stand out, whilst fitting in.

Drugs and alcohol.

Fincham (2008) suggests that leisure lifestyles such as this often involve recreational drugs, however he has never come across performance enhancing drugs. I would assume that performance enhancing drugs that increase the rate of muscle hypertrophy would be beneficial for downhill mountain biking, and it is surprising that downhillers are not drug users. Downhill mountain bikers have not been known to use performance enhancing drugs and thus far, no drug tests have exposed banned drug use. The downhillers appear to disapprove of drug use, and the general consensus is that the sport provides enough of a thrill without having to use drugs. These results oppose Fincham's (2008) work where the bicycle messengers were both dealing and using class A recreational drugs. Gabby's quote below suggests the purity of the downhill racers.

I've noticed that hardly any downhillers drink coffee which I have always found quite fascinating (Gabby).

In spite of limited drug use, when the downhillers are together they heavily consume alcohol. Part of the care-free lifestyle means that the riders often drink alcohol whenever there is some form of racer gathering. The interviews established that downhill mountain bikers are binge drinkers, who do not consume alcohol often, but drink high quantities when they do. While this trend is prominent in downhill mountain biking, it is necessary to acknowledge that this trend may reflect the New Zealand drinking culture, rather than just the downhill subculture. At events and riding gatherings the downhillers drink alcohol following the main events. Nonetheless, Amy discusses how the drinking

culture has decreased over the past ten years. She suggests that racers are more competitive now as the sport is being increasingly codified. Additionally, Amy comments that the females do not party as much, or drink as much as the males. There are fewer females that race downhill, and therefore Amy suggests they are more competitive in their category.

There aren't many girls racing so any that do are quite serious, hence no drinking (Amy).

In this research alcohol consumption appears to be linked to gender, where females consume less alcohol than males, and do not party as hard as the men. However, in keeping with postmodern subculture theories, there are exceptions. Nonetheless, the downhillers live life on the edge and are always keen to push the boundaries after the races. Fincham (2008) suggests that alcohol use such as this goes hand in hand with the working environment of the cyclists. It appears to be a social manifestation of their identities (Fincham, 2008).

They just drink, they drink hard! (Gabby).

Some of them are still pretty wild when they want to be, even now. It's just, you have to have fun and it can't just all be serious because then you won't race good. Because you aren't going to race good if you are in that state of mind (Wyn).

Wyn sees the party lifestyle as necessary for the downhill mountain bikers to achieve top results. He implies that the carefree lifestyle helps the participants balance their lifestyle, and is an integral part of the life the riders have chosen.

A self-help system.

There is little doubt that the downhill mountain bike lifestyle is addictive for participants. There is some evidence that people are genetically disposed to seeking psychological thrills and are more inclined to find meaning in their lives through taking risks (Booth, 2011). Booth (2011) describes how surfing subcultures often take care of kids that are more inclined to take risks, and keep them away from lifestyles of crime. Wyn has been committed to downhill mountain biking since he began in 1999. He believes that bike riding is his main addiction, however the subculture is an important part of his life.

I'm more addicted to riding my bike, rather than just being part of the culture. Just to live a lifestyle where I can ride my bike pretty much (Wyn).

However, for others it appears that being part of the subculture is what is important for them. The subculture acts as a distraction from other activities such as drug abuse and criminal behaviour. Wyn describes how he has seen many people fall out of the sport because of big crashes, who have gone on to abuse drugs and alcohol. Riders who are forced from the sport because of injury often become depressed, unhappy and lose the drive to participate in healthy sporting activities. Therefore, often subconsciously, subcultural involvement takes the role of a self-help system for some participants. The subculture keeps the racers out of serious trouble, and gives them a focus in their lives.

Yeah, I think they are all addicted to some form of adrenalin and if they weren't getting that from some form like biking then they would be trying to find it somewhere else, whether it be another sport, or drugs or something else (Lauren).

I don't know if it is a conscious thing, but I would say that a huge proportion of downhillers would be depressed, or they would be in jail, or they would be a criminal if they didn't do downhill (Gabby).

This form of addiction is pleasurable for the riders in both a physical and mental sense. Shortly after being introduced to the sport, the participants discussed becoming hooked on the activity, and intensely intrigued by it. Whilst appreciating there is vast science covering the physiological aspects of extreme sports, it must be noted that participants in downhill mountain biking experience a state of physiological arousal pre-empted by the thrill of riding at speeds across unforgiving terrain. Part of the addiction process can be attributed to the release of hormones epinephrine and nor-epinephrine into the blood (Booth, 2011). There is little doubt that there are numerous physiological benefits associated with riding downhill, however I believe that the physiological reasons alone do not explain the downhillers persistence in the sport.

Yeah, I think there are a lot of people that would be a lot worse off if they weren't putting their energy into something constructive like downhill mountain biking. I think it is a good way to get rid of pent up energy and frustration and direct it somewhere good (Lauren).

The riders made it clear in the interviews that riding aids self improvement, adding to their levels of confidence and giving them a reason for living. Cameron attributes the sport of downhill to increased self-esteem, and stated that it's the best thing to keep him occupied. Wheaton's (2003) paper suggested that windsurfing provided participants with self-development, as they competed against environmental obstacles. When participants feel they are essentially beating the environmental obstacles, they get feelings of achievement and self-satisfaction. In my opinion this success brings peer respect, and therefore increases the likelihood of continued results and subcultural commitment.

Danger, risk and personal safety.

Downhill mountain biking has the potential to be a dangerous sport and each participant is aware of the possible dangers. At the elite level, riders need to push the boundaries in races and ride at their upmost limit. When asked if they were concerned for their safety, the riders stated that they are not often afraid, but it depends on the difficulty of the track. The occupational pattern of elite subcultural members is one that is littered with physical danger. Kabush and Orlick (2001) and Puchan (2004) remind us that there is the potential for serious injury and death when mountain biking. Risk is often glorified in the media and participants are seen to be ignorant of the risk. However, my research opposes this idea, where all participants state that they do consider the risks and use calculated methods for ensuring their safety. "...no evidence indicates that disciplines of extreme sports have completely abandoned concerns for safety" (Booth, 2011, p. xiv). Lyng (2005) refers to risk taking as a fine balancing point in which the person's competence and confidence are matched to the level of risk. Edgeworkers such as downhill mountain bikers enjoy conquering obstacles as this gives them a sense of control (Lyng, 2005). As Lois (2001) discussed, a huge benefit of being an expert extreme sport participant is being able to maintain control over one's feelings and emotions in a

mentally or physically demanding environment. This emotional control evokes feelings of satisfaction and positive personal feedback. Through engaging in these positive feelings of control, the downhillers feel comfortable expanding their edge and pursing even riskier or harder experiences in their future expeditions.

Risk reduction equipment such as body armour, full-face helmets, and protective shoes are all worn by downhill mountain bikers to help minimise the dangers. Because of the increased codification of extreme sports, Booth (2011) discusses how safety equipment such as this is becoming regulated in the rules at many events. A Union Cyclist International regulation in downhill mountain bike racing is for riders to wear spine, elbow, and knee protection, along with a certified full-face helmet. Amy discusses how she became increasingly risk adverse over the duration of her racing career.

When I first started I was like no, what's the worst that could happen! Nothing! But I think once you have broken your bones a few times, you get quite risk adverse, like I definitely don't think I am as fast as I used to be because I am a lot more careful about things because I don't want to be broken anymore, because it is quite dangerous and you can have big crashes (Amy).

Amy's perception of being invincible is common for new subcultural members. In my experience, it is difficult for new riders to read the terrain and judge the correct speeds, so they don't know where the limit is regarding how fast they can go before crashing. It takes a few big crashes before the racers begin to learn that they are not invincible. Then, in keeping with Amy's quote, the racers begin to tire of having to recover from injuries such as broken bones. There appears to be a broken bone limit, where after half a dozen or so, the racers start to consider the negative affect that the sport

is having on their well-being. When this happens, you can notice riders slow down their ride speed to just less than maximum. This slight reduction in speed generally represents the downward process where racers begin to leave the downhill subculture.

> *Yeah, it's definitely dangerous and I think you always have to have a little bit of concern for your safety somewhere in there, I think you definitely have more of it once you get older and once you get those injuries. You realise that you are not invincible anymore (Lauren).*

Both Amy and Lauren's quotes may elicit insight much deeper than it appears. Both stated that they have become more aware of the risks over time, and both are more scared in the sport compared to when they first began racing. There are numerous reasons for this such as being more aware of the risks, and becoming wiser with age. However, part of this could be because of the growth that extreme sport disciplines are experiencing (Lyng, 2005). An increase in participation numbers has lead to the codification of sporting unions, where regulations for safety equipment have been imposed (Booth, 2011). Therefore, regulatory safety equipment is increasing and the participants in downhill mountain biking are continually being told that they need the latest safety equipment to prevent serious injury. A prominent example of this is when manufacturers told participants that they could not wear the 2010 version helmet and needed to get the latest (Troy Lee D3) 2012 helmet to reduce the chances of concussion. The manufacturers implied that wearing a (Troy Lee D2) 2010 helmet would mean almost certain head injury such as concussion. Therefore, through increased codification brought about by increased participation, people are being socialised into thinking that the activities consequences are becoming more dangerous. Consequently they are becoming more safety conscious. Hence, both Amy and Lauren suggest that they are riding slower now than what they used

to. However, it is too early to confirm this developing idea and this may be of some interest for future researchers.

Nonetheless, the downhill mountain bike environment does mean that the consequences of crashing can be severe, and it would be expected that the participants have always displayed some level of concern for their personal safety. Tracks are often built close to highly populated areas in New Zealand and are built to be both accessible, and aesthetically pleasing to riders (Taylor, 2010). The addictiveness of such pursuits where a person can test their own limits within a semi-controlled environment provides a means for escaping the constraints of mainstream society (Lyng, 2005). Danger and risk taking is no doubt part of the attraction for downhill racers (Bennett & Henson, 2003) and the hazardousness of this activity is a likely reason for subcultural continuation.

Relationship with the environment.

A commonly overlooked area of subcultural research is extreme sport participants' relationship with the environment. All participants in this research suggested that they do not care for the environment and tracks as much as they should. Cameron's example demonstrates that it is only when the land is taken from them that they begin to value it. Findings suggest that the subculture has a value system that quantifies the significance and importance of certain tracks in New Zealand. Tracks in Queenstown, Christchurch and Dunedin were those predominantly discussed by the participants. As each rider revealed to me their favoured track within New Zealand, they were able to fluently describe the trademark parts of each track in vivid detail. This finding correlates with Fincham's (2008) paper which found that subcultural members are often interlinked by feelings of commonality when they share a base. In traditional subcultural research the base has referred to manmade shelters such as churches, houses, or street corners (Williams, 2011). This research proposes that the participants are able to build

relationships with certain tracks and obstacles within tracks. The riders value specific tracks and throughout their careers develop a tendency to prefer different types of dirt and terrain over others. In my time racing, I began to prefer the tracks in America far more than the tracks in Europe. Each location has different soil composition and after a while you begin to be picky about the sorts of terrain you prefer. For me, I enjoy dry, dusty and rocky trails, and feel no attraction to damp and loamy tracks. Racers in this research agree, yet each demonstrated personal preference for different tracks and ride locations throughout New Zealand. This postmodern view on environmental bases appears to confirm Edensor and Richards (2005) notions that the participants are each experiencing and performing in certain spaces and therefore building relationships with these areas. Despite this, it is obvious that the riders do not appreciate the tracks as much as they should.

> *Possibly not as much as what we should. I think at heart downhillers really like the forests and being out in nature and they are outdoorsy people but they are definitely not tree huggers I would say (Gabby).*

Brymer et al. (2010) suggests that involvement in wilderness spaces is vital to lifestyle balance, and therefore a reason for continued participation in an activity. In this sense, the racers may not be aware of their attraction and reliance on the wilderness tracks and terrain. Lyng (2005) discusses how extreme sport participants are drawn to natural environments as a means to escape the norms of mainstream society. Lyng's (2005) notion of edgework suggests that people undertake activities such as mountain biking to temporarily escape industrialism and the pressures of late modernity. As computers and artificial intelligence becomes increasingly valued, edgeworkers seek out adventure in wild places. Natural settings, such as downhill tracks provide a judgement free area where

edgeworkers are free to make their own decisions and choose their own lines. Nonetheless, my participants appear to take for granted the value of the tracks and do not discuss the well-being and happiness that comes from being in wilderness environments.

> *We are definitely becoming more aware of the value of our tracks, since we have had tracks closed on us a few times, and that effects you so you wake up a bit and realise that you have to look after it or keep the park ranger happy or whatever in your local area so that you can go back and ride that area otherwise you have nowhere to ride (Cameron).*

The downhill subculture is drawn to certain tracks, and throughout New Zealand the nationals are held on similar tracks each year. There are eight national races throughout the country and racers can choose to attend six of them to qualify for points in the series. Riders are able to choose the races that they attend, and do not have to attend all of them. Racers prefer some tracks over others, and individuals are known to perform better on specific tracks than others. Those who live close to the race tracks are likely to be the ones that help with the working bees by building sections of track, and designing the lines. It appears that the racers develop an attraction for their local tracks and the terrain they are used to. Therefore, they are more likely to value the tracks which they have worked on, or the tracks they have spent most of their time practicing on. Cameron's point is interesting, because it is only when the tracks are taken away from the racers that they begin to realise the value of it. Therefore, it's often difficult to comprehend the love for certain tracks until they are taken away.

A holistic discussion of gender differences.

Findings from this research confirmed that downhill mountain biking is a male dominated domain. This finding is well supported in other extreme sport literature where participants are younger generation and predominantly male (see Cho et al., 2010; Lyng, 2005; Wheaton, 2004; and Willig, 2008). Participants suggested that the ratio of female riders is no more than 20%, with males making up 80% of the subculture. In spite of the gender divide, participants feel that more women are taking part in the sport than ever before. The participants suggest that the average riding ability for women has increased significantly over the past few years, and that female participation continues to increase. These results mirror that of Puchan (2004) and Willig (2008) who suggests that there are more women in extreme sport than ever before. In the interviews some gender differences became apparent. When I asked Wyn whether he thought there were gender inequalities in the sport, he replied:

What do you mean like girls aren't as good or {laughter}...Na not as fast,

but it comes down to male strength and mentality really, and the

testosterone (Wyn).

This seemingly harmless comment is representative of common views regarding women who race downhill mountain biking. It appears that the males do not take the females seriously in this sport. Nonetheless, the interview transcripts suggest that the females do not take themselves seriously in the sport either. Gabby, Lauren, and Amy's interview transcripts were littered with statements that oppressed female participation.

I don't think I'm a very good downhiller, but I'm much better at trail riding.

Trail riding I'm pretty good, and then downhilling not very good, and shit

compared to the boys (Gabby).

Regardless of the gender divide, Wyn's comment holds true, as at the highest level women's results are weaker compared to the men's (Union Cyclist International, 2012). Huybers-Withers and Livingston (2010) suggest that ideologies such as this confirm dominant masculine stereotypes in society and amplify the gender divide. Beal and Weidman (2003) had similar findings in skateboarding, where females were marginalised and not considered "real skaters" (p. 345). The authors found that the girls had to become like the guys in order to be accepted as legitimate participants; this meant being better than the males. In my experiences, the men in the downhill subculture are generally supportive and accept female racers. There is no doubt that the men hate being beaten by females, however they are supportive as long as the female is riding at a pace that's considered fast enough. Despite the fact that participation in this sport is not equally gendered, both Amy and Gabby's comments offer insight into Wheaton's (2007) suggestions that postmodernism is less constricting for female participants. In a more transient and multi-segmented society, there may be more opportunity for females to become part of extreme sport subcultures.

> *There is a small amount of girls who race, so the guys are always pretty*
>
> *stoked to have more girls racing, but whereas with the guys there are more*
>
> *of them, so you have your friends already and don't need any more (Amy).*

> *Because I was a girl, you probably don't have to work your way in there as*
>
> *much as a guy would (Gabby).*

This finding runs in direct opposition to Donnelly's (2006) work in the snowboarding subculture where the females felt left out of the subculture. In this study, it appears that it is more difficult for males to become cultural insiders, and perhaps easier

for females to be a part of this sport. This finding is most likely due to the large number of men that compete in downhill mountain biking. There are less females who race, and thus it is easier for both the male and female participants to notice new female racers. However, Gabby and Amy highlight an intriguing insight that the females are less accepting of other females, whereas the men are happy to have more females in the sport.

> *Yeah, guys are more accepting of other guys but I think girls can be harder to make friends with. So they won't be friends with each other until they have gotten over their threatening, who is threatened by who, and if they are younger then parents have to accept the younger child as well (Gabby).*

> *Yep it seems like it is, even at world cups and stuff, girls are a little bit more bitchy, and the guys they are just all good like they get along, like the girls in NZ are all good but you see it overseas more, I guess the higher up the competition gets, there is more at stake so people are always going to be a little bit more funny, but definitely you always notice it more with the girls because they are more catty (Amy).*

The participants in my research discuss how the boys keep the competition to the track and how the females are more likely to be obviously competitive with one another at the races. One possible reason for this is that in each localised subculture there are usually only a few girls who race downhill. In each localised group, the female is a valued member of the group, and the special one amongst a male dominated group. At races however, there are many female racers and none of them, except the fastest few, are treated as special. Therefore, the females are continually vying for the contested position of top female racer.

Yeah I guess yep, because for the boys it's like well, your race goes how it goes. It's not that the guys don't have that kind of thing as well, but it's more for the girls. And I think the guys are more likely just to say something to one another, whereas the girls will just have a bitch behind each other's back. But in New Zealand it's quite good, like everyone gets along (Amy).

Nonetheless, high paying sponsorship opportunities for female athletes are limited and there is no doubt that there is still a wide gap in the salaries that females receive compared with males. It is difficult to speculate whether gender inequalities such as these are fair as there are so many immeasurable factors that need to be considered for each race and each situation.

Only the top girls are looked after, like maybe for the top three and then the rest aren't. But then it's getting less for guys...like only the top ten are getting looked after because there isn't enough money in the sport at the moment (Wyn).

There is no doubt that the boys get more sponsors, but it is fair enough because they go a hell of a lot faster, and are more marketable because they look much cooler and do bigger jumps. I would much rather have a picture of a guy doing a big jump than a girl doing a big jump (Gabby).

Yep, obviously guys, there are more guys getting paid and they get paid more but I guess there are arguments either way and I haven't thought about it too much, but the girls are riding the same track as the guys but the

guys are always quite a lot faster than the girls and there is inequality for

sponsorship and prize money, but who knows if that is fair or not. People

say well there is more guys in a class, but it's like well the girls are paying

the exact same entry fee, but then it is easier because there is not so many

racing. Yeah I think there is inequality, but I don't know if it would be fair

for it to be exactly the same necessarily (Amy).

Sponsorship and prize money debates are nothing new in the world of downhill mountain biking. It is apparent that neither gender believes that the prize money allocation is fair. Lauren confirms that females can more easily get sponsorship, however the females get paid less that the males. It is easier for females to get equipment and clothing sponsors, however there are very limited financial sponsorship opportunities on offer.

Because the females are such a minority they get the sponsorship possibly

easier because they are more well known and have higher profiles

naturally, because there are less of them (Lauren).

Sponsorship opportunities may shed some light on the overarching fact that all of New Zealand's female downhill mountain bike racers are employed in high profile work in fields such as law, medicine, and education. When compared with the males, there is a definite split between the types of work that each gender is employed in. Lauren believes that it takes a certain personality to become a downhiller.

I mean, I guess it does take a high achieving female to compete in that

sport...I mean there is lawyers and accountants yeah, definitely not a lot of

bike shop workers or trade workers for the women (Lauren).

I don't think we are the classic female stereotype that all of the girlfriends

are, but I don't think that we are feminists (Amy).

Wyn suggests that all the riders really want is a job that pays enough so that you can travel each year, and can have enough time off for riding. Therefore, because males are paid more in professional sponsorship, they can afford to have part time bike shop type jobs. In my experience, even at the highest level of professionalism, a woman still would not make enough money to support herself in the off-season, and therefore needs to be in secure employment. A clear difference between male and female employment is that all of the females in this research were educated with higher level degrees and diplomas. In direct comparison, none of the elite males in this research were educated higher than secondary school level. Speculating reasons for these differences, it may be likely that the females feel a greater need to develop their education because there is only a slight chance that they could become fully professional in downhill racing. Whereas for the men, there are more paid sponsorship opportunities, and it may be easier for them to take up paid trade work following their racing careers. In relation to Lyng's (2005) work on edgeworkers, the females in my research appear to be the only gender that pushes the limits in their careers outside of downhill racing. For the females, edgework has developed to include intellectual aspects rather than just the physical challenge of downhill mountain biking. This finding relating to gender differences and vocation does not cohere with other extreme sport subcultural research and may provide a new direction for future research.

Ruining the fun: Olympic inclusion.

Downhill mountain biking has thus far resisted inclusion into the Olympic Games. Data from this research demonstrates that participants have varied views in regard to

institutionalising the sport and allowing it to become mainstreamed. Clearly, Olympic Game inclusion would increase the profile of the sport, yet this may come at the detriment of the fun loving ethos that participants hold as important. Conversely, a higher profile would undoubtedly bring more money into the sport, and increase the reward for professional racers.

> *Yeah for sure, because then it would bring money into the sport (Wyn).*

Wyn believes that Olympic Games inclusion may take some of the fun out of the sport. This presumption is supported by (Laviolette, 2011; Lyng, 2005; and Wheaton, 2003). The authors suggest that the Olympic Games may force extreme sport subcultures to become over commercialised which would be to the detriment of the doctrine of the subculture. Commercial facilitation has become more common, as companies capitalise upon the cultural ideals portrayed in extreme sports and justify product use in a variety of contexts (Lyng, 2005).

> *The fun in the racing is how you choose to race, so it's up to you to put the fun into the racing rather than any event, it's kind of how you look at it (Wyn).*

> *Yeah, probably there would be more pressure from sponsors, especially coming into this year with Olympics, and you would probably feel like you have to train more, especially if you aren't motivated then it would be real hard (Cameron).*

Interestingly most participants decided that the sport would be better off in the Olympic Games. Riders would be willing to sell themselves to the sponsors in a desire to be paid more as professional athletes. This finding clashes with ideologies indicative of downhill mountain biking being a free spirited, individualistic and anti-competitive sport. One participant indicated the possible debates that would occur with the local and governing bodies of cycling in New Zealand. No doubt, inclusion into the Olympic Games would professionalise the sport and therefore increase the importance of relationships between the riders and governing bodies. This reluctance to be associated with the governing bodies and clubs would need to be overcome in order for these professionals to become Olympians. Thus, it is possible that the sport may lose its free-spirited ethos and become increasingly codified. The following quote sums up the organisational situation in New Zealand currently.

The reason that we think New Zealand has done so well at downhill over the years is because of a lack of support, and so everyone thinks well there is no support so I'll just do it myself and they have actually pushed harder and been more motivated to do it for that lack of support. So if the governance screws it up, it's probably quite a good thing that they keep screwing it up, because it builds that community and team work. Because, if there was money and a fricken golden egg at the end of the rainbow (like Olympics) then things could change. Whereas at the moment the big goal is to get overseas and to get on a team, and that is not competition against each other, it is helping each other so much (Anonymous).

This tension exemplifies relationship difficulties that the participants in downhill mountain biking have with the governing bodies. In my opinion this hatred for affiliations, associations and the like represents the riders' jealousy that is present between different

cycling codes. For example, both BMX racing and cross-country racing are Olympic sports, and therefore the most elite racers in each discipline are provided with financial support and services. The downhillers feel that they are misrepresented and undervalued by the associated governance and are therefore spiteful towards the organisations. This tension that downhillers hold comes as no surprise, as within the professional downhill mountain bike racers, there have been over five World Championship medals, and only one for cross-country racing. The quote above demonstrates how this communal jealousy has transpired into the participants actively helping each other and therefore a stronger network of professional riders has been established. This idea of forced community is common within subcultures and represents the lack of power that single agents have, and thus the groups desire to unite (Torkelson, 2010). Traditionally, subcultures have formed in order to tackle the problems that they have within society (Williams, 2011). However, in this case, the quote represents the group uniting to help one another overcome the problems arising from the governing bodies.

Part C: A Lifestyle Sport

   The subcultural lifestyle.

   The nature and characteristics of the downhill mountain bike subculture (as discussed in Part A and Part B) run parallel with the lifestyle that is lived by participants in this research. "Theories of subculture and lifestyle revolve around matters of personal consumption and associated meanings (Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 60). The distinctive lifestyle of the participants is imbued with certain styles and characteristics that are portrayed by the subculture. "Central to the notion of sensibility underlying lifestyle is that it has a certain coherence, which is imbued with aesthetic or ethical significance, and, in turn, contributes to a sense of self-identity" (Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 62). These accumulative characteristics help distinguish authentic members from non-members and

help differentiate the subculture from mainstream society. Wheaton (2003) stated how for the core windsurfing participants, "...windsurfing dictates their leisure time, their work time, their choice of career, and where they live" (p. 76). As Gabby stated, the competitive side of racing is often of secondary importance to the lifestyle components imbued in the subculture. Downhill racing is not the major preoccupation of most downhillers, who feel that racing is secondary to riding well, and being a part of the subculture.

Yeah it is the lifestyle, that is the only reason I race anymore (Gabby).

In extreme sport, the participants' subculture becomes their whole life (Ford & Brown, 2006) therefore determining the members' worldviews. Booth (2003) stated in his work on surfers lifestyles that "they are complex in both their internal dynamics, roles, rules, and symbolic meanings, and in the social and cultural interactions they initiate across society" (cited in Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003, p. 316). Their lifestyles are in constant stages of flux, as they continually manage a range of cultural and temporal subcultural facets. Members choose the style of life, and their involvement can be seen to exist on a continuum. For some, the subculture is just a small part of their lives, for others the subculture consumes everything they do. The racers in this research demonstrated levels of commitment in almost all areas of their lives, demonstrating devotion that matches hard-core windsurfers (Wheaton, 2003) who can be seen as obsessive. For the dedicated subcultural members, their involvement is demonstrative of a "culture of commitment" (Wheaton, 2003, p. 76).

It's a lifestyle choice, even if I am not getting paid lots of money, I'm pretty much still going to do it, it's pretty much just what I do (Wyn).

Style of life is so important to Wyn's involvement in racing and his whole life is planned around this leisure activity. This aligns with Lyng's (2005) research on edgeworkers where, "... risk taking is an integral part of the very fabric of contemporary social life, pursued not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself" (p. 5). The riders see the subculture as part of their identity, where downhilling provides the most powerful source of meaning and enjoyment in their lives. Downhill mountain biking provides possibilities for escape, transcendence and resistance, providing an outlet that is simultaneously different, yet a part of mainstream society.

Participants in this research stated that through buying a downhill bike and riding downhill, they had access to living the downhill lifestyle. Therefore, by purchasing a downhill bike and the necessary equipment, consumption "offers the possibilities of constructing a self, as well as reflecting a current self-identity" (Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 68). The downhill mountain bike subculture, as does the surfing subculture (Ford & Brown, 2006) appeals as a cohesive and exciting subculture for new members. It represents a fun loving lifestyle where subcultural members follow the summer seasons in specific locations throughout the world.

It's just fun loving! (Lauren).

Fun is clearly the main reason why the racers continue to be involved in downhill mountain biking. Burton (2003) described this in his narrative on snowboarding where he described the personality of snowboarders as "...firmly rooted in a passionate blend of fun and poker-faced seriousness" (p. 402). The snowboarders, as are the downhillers, are very serious about making sure that the sport and activities surrounding the subculture are always fun. Part of this ethos is because the riders race individually on the track and there is no body contact in downhill. The riders are effectively competing against the terrain

and the track. Therefore, each rider is able to put effort into self-improvement and happiness, rather than hatred for fellow competitors. This fun loving attitude is portrayed through a huge number of avenues, but can be seen in the lifestyle values embodied by each individual.

> *Like it is always fun, and you always have really good friends. With mountain biking you have friends all over New Zealand and all over the world because it is such a strong network (Amy).*

Imbued with subcultural membership is the opportunity to develop strong friendships. All five participants discussed how their work and leisure is also their social life. Each participant's majority of friends were downhillers or people associated with the bike industry.

> *Well I think, no matter if you are in the middle of the subculture or not, you still have friends that you have developed through it and they are a really wide net of friends the whole way around NZ, and I think that it is a comfort knowing that you have a whole set of friends in something else other than your daily life (Lauren).*

In Fincham's (2008) research on the bicycle courier subculture, the participants stated feeling a sense of security in knowing that they had a network of friends all around the world. Networks of friends and associates such as this may contribute to the participants' sense of place within the subculture as they can rely on others to stay updated with the latest information in the subculture. This sense of security may benefit the participants' sense of well-being and increase their status within the subculture.

Additionally, it may help the racers to find sponsors, or to find employment in the industry that surrounds the subculture.

> *Well I think it's like anything, your subculture is like minded people which is a nice environment to be in, and sometimes a nice easy environment to be in because you are never going to find that many like minded people, especially when you have grown up in that environment as well (Lauren).*

In keeping with Quester et al. (2006) the participants acknowledge the friendships that they have developed whilst engaged in natural settings. As stated in prior sections, the participants have developed connections with one another by working as a team to tackle the obstacles and challenges that the tracks present. With a common goal, the subculture developed both a strong sense of connection with both the environments, and those who were associated with the subculture (Ford & Brown, 2006; Lois, 2001). Findings from Celsi et al. (1993) had similar results where the participants felt increased camaraderie when helping each other to develop technical skills. In downhill, the racers who reside on the same race teams help one another to find the fastest race lines down the track. Many riders build an alliance with one another where they follow each other down the track in an attempt to figure out the fastest race lines. These alliances are normally between people who do not compete in the same categories, or who the faster person sees as non-threatening. It is uncommon for the top racers to support one another in choosing race lines. There are many top racers who keep the race lines secret and only expose them in their final race run down the hill. There is an aura of secrecy surrounding the race lines and interested fans enjoy watching the top racers to see which lines they will pick. Therefore, while the racers are friendly to one another and happy to help each other, there are still many competitive tactics that remain secret and hidden.

Lifestyle balance: Work, life and leisure.

For those who are professional racers, their work is also their leisure. Cameron suggested that many people find it difficult to manage both work and leisure because the work side of it becomes too serious. Rapoport and Rapoport's (1974) model provides a means for understanding the important components that make up a person's life in terms of career, family and leisure. With the elite athletes in this research, it is often difficult to distinguish their career from their leisure. Because time is not infinite, there is only a certain amount of time that someone can dedicate to each domain in life.

I get so much enjoyment out of it and then now it's my job so it's kind of weird, to enjoy something so much and have it as your job as well (Cameron).

Cameron discusses how there is often no dislocation between his work and his leisure as both are fundamentally the same thing. Fincham (2008) found this in his study of cycle messengers, where their employment also constituted their leisure time. The athletes discuss finding it difficult to distinguish between their work and their leisure. Wyn suggests the best way to manage this lack of distinction is to view both aspects as leisure.

I never really looked at it as a job, so it won't be a job because it would be what I was doing anyway. So if you look at it as a job it becomes too serious and it wouldn't be much fun (Wyn).

When Amy was first employed as a lawyer she found that her lifestyle was out of balance and she was not getting enough free-time to train and practice on her bike. Matuska and Christiansen (2008) highlighted how this is a common occurrence, where inadequate role and time management has a detrimental effect on the individuals lifestyle. In Amy's case, she was lucky to have the job flexibility necessary to ensure that she was able to manage her quality of life adequately. Amy chose to leave her job as a lawyer in a large firm, and chose a new employment opportunity that allowed her the time off to ride her bike.

> *My first job as a lawyer I left because they were a little bit funny about me going away, so my next job offered me the three months total annual leave (Amy).*

Being a professional racer typically gives riders opportunities to manage their own lifestyles and schedules. Hill et al. (2001) suggests that job flexibility such as this can be beneficial for an individual's sense of well-being. Cameron is a professional cyclist who has a flexible work schedule, nonetheless, he still has difficulty managing his lifestyle as a downhiller.

> *Yeah I'm quite selfish I guess because to get that feeling and to get what I want out of it, I need to spend quite a lot of time doing it and that takes its toll on a few other things. And like family, I would like to see them more and talk to them more on the phone, but if I'm always training and always travelling and always trying to do everything really well each day then it takes up a lot of time and I don't have enough time for other stuff, and when I do, it's managing a relationship as well, and then me being able to go out*

and play tennis or golf or spend time away from the sport as well, because I

need that, so there isn't enough time in a day really, and not enough days in

the year (Cameron).

Cameron's perception that he is selfish in order to do his sport is not uncommon for dedicated extreme sport participants. To be elite level, it is expected that racers dedicate the majority of their time to forms of cycling. Wheaton (2003) found that windsurfers put their sport before their families and partners. "Men expect their partners to understand and accept their commitment to windsurfing" (p. 89). The downhill mountain bike racers obsession with the sport demonstrates the strong links that connect each rider to the subculture, the lifestyle, and their personal identity.

Subcultural involvement and quality of life.

Christiansen and Matuska (2006) describe quality of life as "...a consistent pattern of occupations that results in reduced stress and improved health and well-being" (p. 50). The views from my participants suggest that each rider uses downhill as a method for maintaining lifestyle balance. The participants confirm that they are choosing to be a part of this subculture to increase their life satisfaction. The subculture provides a means for goal attainment, relationships with others, and identity reinforcement. Additionally it has proven to be a site that participants are interested, engaged, challenged and competent, and where their efforts are rewarded. These factors, proposed by (Hornquist, 1990; and Matuska & Christiansen, 2006) suggest that the riders can obtain maximal quality of life through their choice in subcultural attachment.

The extreme sport literature has been known to discuss extreme sport participation as an unhealthy endeavour suited to those who represent a problem to be solved (Willig, 2008). While not demonstrating bad health, research portraying windsurfers found that

they were not interested in health, longevity or self preservation and were more concerned with immediate fixes of sensation seeking (Wheaton, 2004). In direct contrast to this, the participants in my research are well aware of both the health benefits and detriments involved in their chosen lifestyle sport. It is clear that the participants in this study are aware of their personal health and believe that being a mountain biker encourages healthy lifestyle patterns. This is a consistent trend shown in the literature, as the maintenance of good health is an important goal of modern society (Brackett, Davison & Mullen, 1994). Nonetheless, in a more transient, heterogeneous and unstable society, the participants discuss having to juggle the constraints inflicted by the range of roles in their lives. The participants in this research discussed that the sport has provided a means for learning about healthy eating patterns and a way to keep fit. Cameron stated how the sport has taught him more about healthy eating as he has progressed over time.

> *I have learnt a lot about nutrition and health and fitness, I like to think that when I do stop racing I will continue a lifestyle of staying fit and eating well. And you notice that if you do all of that stuff you feel better, like just getting out for bike rides (Cameron).*

Cameron believes that living a healthy lifestyle is a crucial part of achieving success. Through being part of a larger race team, Cameron has gained nutritional knowledge by actively engaging and learning with others who see this as an important factor for success. Light and Nash (2006) argue that situated learning such as this is yet to be recognised in the fields of education and physical education. This participatory learning is the process of being involved with the subculture and being aware of the goings-on surrounding the group. Lauren discussed the learning that has occurred for her in the realm of food and nutrition. She considered herself a healthy eater prior to entering

the downhill subculture, however agrees that racing does provide a means for increasing health and well-being. The athletes specifically referred to learning about their diet requirements in relation to pre and post-race food, and pre and post-training food.

> *I think it could only be beneficial, it offers a much better lifestyle in terms of exercise and providing balance in your life, in terms of stress it's a good outlet to keep you balanced and healthy and ready for anything (Lauren).*

Postmodern societies are becoming increasingly aware of the opportunities for learning in applied settings such as subcultures (Wheaton, 2000). Buckley (2011) highlighted how subcultures become the place where many participants do the majority of their learning. The downhillers have opportunities to learn about the contextual factors relating to the sport and their well-being. There is a vast range of areas for the racers to become unofficial experts, such as nutrition, sports psychology, fitness, and travel. Subcultural members experience participational learning where they learn from being a part of the subcultural world (Wheaton, 2000).

> *You pretty much learn because you travel from a really young age so it makes you a well rounded person from going to all of these places and having to deal with it all yourself from a young age...it makes you a better person because you have to learn about yourself. Learning about life really (Wyn).*

In postmodern subcultural theory, participants are seen to be more transient in their subcultural attachment (Williams, 2011). They are often members of multiple subcultures and experience learning from a range of subcultural sources. Nonetheless,

racers in this research suggest that the majority of their learning has occurred in the downhill mountain bike subculture. Learning in the downhill subculture is both plentiful and comprehensive, with examples such as better self-management and improved stress management. Improved stress management is learnt because of the high pressure environment of racing. In such a high pressure and dangerous sport, the participants have both a lot to gain and a lot to lose at each race. It is apparent that at the elite level, downhill mountain biking can be a cause of both internal and external stress for some participants. Nonetheless, training and riding can also decrease stress levels and leave the participants feeling relaxed and content. Cameron stated how stress levels increase closer to the competition and briefly disappeared following the actual timed race. The athletes learn to live with this stress and have strategies in place that help them to manage their stress levels. Stress manifests itself in many forms, however participants discuss how internal stress outweighs the pressure imposed by others such as sponsors. In society, stress is generally associated with negative connotations, however the racers stated how both internal and external stressors help keep them motivated and challenged. The ability to deal with this stress increases lineally with the improvement in results, therefore the participants discuss how they have learnt to cope with the stress as they have improved.

When the dream ends? Subcultural sustainability.

Downhill mountain bikers only have a short window in their life where they are able to perform to the highest level in races. The *dream* for most is to perform at the highest level and to win races. However, after a while the dream becomes unrealistic, and the racers are forced to either leave the subculture, or take up other roles in the wider downhill subculture. The elite participants all confirm that they will not be racing at the highest level for ever. Most racers stay in the sport for as long as possible, justifying the risks to themselves right up until the point of exit from the subculture. For those who

struggle to leave the subculture, there are opportunities for employment in businesses that provide for the subculture.

> *Well if you want to push it may be up to 30, but then by 35 you have other*
>
> *stuff in your life going on so normally it can be a fair bit shorter (Wyn).*

Wyn's assumption that other factors such as family become more important in an individual's life is supported by numerous studies on subcultural patterns (see Gelder, 2007; Gelder & Thornton, 2005; Jenks, 2005; Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003; Williams, 2011). William's (2011) suggests that people grow out of subcultures, as other things in their life are seen as more important. Literature supports the idea that participants are most likely to be involved in subcultures during the first third of their life (Cho et al., 2010; Fincham, 2008; Lyng, 2005). When examining the sporting life cycle of the participants, it appears that the athletes are performing to the best of their abilities between the ages of 17-30.

> *If it was just a general thing, maybe 17 to 30 at the top (Cameron).*

Career stages reflect the rate that the participants are becoming increasingly committed to their sport. Research by (Berliner, 1988; Bloom, 1985; and Cote et al., 1995) suggests that elite development is characterised by significant changes in parts of each athletic career. It is likely that the participants in this research are in the third stage of Bloom's (1985) athletic stage model. Here the athletes demonstrate full commitment as they refine their skills and move towards the pinnacle of their performance. Nonetheless, participants in this research are likely to be going through transitional stages that occur throughout their athletic development. According to Wylleman and Reints (2010) model,

it is likely that Amy, Lauren and Gabby are approaching the transitional stage between mastery and discontinuation. For Cameron and Wyn, it is likely that they are in the midst of the mastery stage. These stages are important for this research because of the interlinking relationship present between life stages and subcultural involvement. As each participant experiences different life stages and transitions, the level of authentic membership, status and power, dedication and commitment changes and adapts. These results have highlighted the flux and fluid nature of subcultures and the adaption's that members must make to remain valued within the subculture. Booth and Thorpe (2007) cover this in their section on mountain biking, "innovate or die" (p. 209). This idea is significant because it suggests that racers need to continually modify their lifestyle to fit the current patterns common in the downhill subculture. For those who are approaching retirement from downhill, they may not have the desire to keep pushing the limits and living the style of life required. Lauren believes that the riders push themselves to the limit in both alcohol use, and racing as fast as they can, therefore this way of life cannot be sustainable.

> *It's hard on your body, it's hard on your finances and you won't be able to sustain that forever. For a small part of their life, I mean they are not going to be like that forever! (Lauren).*

 In spite of the racers being risk adverse, those interviewed in this research have undergone extensive surgery for breaks sustained when downhill mountain biking. Additionally, all five of my participants have metal plates and screws in their bodies as a result of large crashes. The potential for downhill mountain bike riding to harm the body is extreme. In 2011 Wyn was riding at a world cup in Scotland and because of the gravity forces acting on his arm, he bent the metal plate holding his radius in place. The

implications from this were visually disturbing and Wyn had a bent arm. This injury forced Wyn out of the 2011 world cup race season and he was not able to work in his casual employment. Injuries such as this have both an effect on the racers desire to race, and an impact on their ability to earn money. The riders are tolerant of such incidents, and each discussed their injuries as if they were insignificant. Nonetheless, if racers continue to get major injuries, they often choose to retire from the sport. Each racer appears to have a high threshold, where they try to stay in the sport for as long as possible, however are forced out after a while.

> *Injuries get you after a while, and it's too expensive, and the time off is full*
>
> *on if you get a real job (Gabby).*

Gabby's comment highlights how after a while, participants in this sport realise that they need to get more permanent or secure employment. The racers have a short amount of time where they are able to be professional racers, and following this they need to find more sustainable vocations. This transition between professional racing and mainstream employment demonstrates one of the major transitions in a rider's life. Wheaton (2003) found this in her research where commitment to the windsurfing subculture decreased from mid-thirties onwards. My research has found evidence of this as both Amy and Lauren consider themselves to be departing from the downhill mountain bike subculture as other areas of their lives take precedence. It would be expected that downhill mountain biking may no longer be compatible when parts of their lives such as family and career become more important. Research by (Gelder, 2007; Jenks 2005; Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003; and Williams, 2011) aligns, suggesting that subcultures attract younger generation participants. Nonetheless, more research is necessary to analyse the demographics for the entire downhill populace, even so I speculate that this subculture

has a younger than average demographic. As discussed previously, the downhill subculture provides an exciting and coherent lifestyle for the participants, however after experiencing the deviant behaviours and thrills, many participants tire of the lifestyle and begin to step away from the subculture.

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings that have emerged through exploring the participants' data and the material in the literature review. The aim of this research was to map the downhill mountain bike subculture. Additionally, my aim was to explore how subcultural involvement affects each participant's lifestyle. The participants lived experiences, and the meanings they attached to subcultural affiliation were of central concern. Of equal importance were the participants' perceptions of quality of life, and the reasons for continued subcultural involvement. It was hoped that this information would provide some insight into the stages, changes and transformations that occur in relation to participants lived experiences in the subculture.

Rather than address each of the key research questions directly and independently, I have chosen to construct this conclusion chapter in keeping with the three parts that emerged in the data analysis section of this thesis. The questions are answered in their entirety throughout this section, as the concepts and processes often interlink and overlap with one another. Through use of the three parts, conclusions are presented regarding the key aspects relating to the downhill mountain bike subculture. Firstly, the downhill mountain bike subculture is mapped to provide a holistic construal. This section aims to provide descriptions portraying how the subculture is operationalised, and the main processes that ensure it is maintained. The second explores the participants' devotion to the subculture, and their experiences in it. In this section, the effect of subcultural attachment and dedication is discussed from the perspectives of the participants. Finally, part three examines the ways in which downhill mountain biking is important for the participants' lifestyle and quality of life. This part summarises the way downhill influences their lifeworld, and the affect that subcultural membership has on quality of life.

A Summary of Part A: The Subculture

   The subculture.

   There continues to be debate regarding the extent that subcultural theories apply to extreme sport communities in postmodern times. The present research highlights the multilayered features of the downhill mountain bike subculture, including the subcultural entity, the devotion shown by the elite members, and the lifestyle that the subculture entails. There is no doubt that downhill mountain biking has evolved as a postmodern practice; nonetheless many characteristics are demonstrative of a traditional subculture. Because of the nature of postmodernism as flux, fluid and evolving, the separation between traditional and postmodern subcultural attributes has not been clear cut. The elite members studied in this project represent racers who have been dedicated to the subculture for a long period of time. The members' attachment to the subculture reflects ideals that are more traditional as they have all been members of the subculture for over 10 years. Nonetheless, there is a large demographic of racers who represent the amateur fields, and are likely to be part of more than one subculture. Findings show that the amateur racers are more transient in their subcultural attachment, and thus populace flow is more likely in the amateur categories. The level of attachment to the subculture differs between members of the group and reflects opportunities more prevalent in postmodern times. Additionally, the fluid nature of many subcultural components reflects the continual transitions between themes such as style, technology and language.

   The subculture manifests itself in a myriad of ways, and is an important part of many mountain bikers lives. While confirming that downhill subcultural membership is informal, the group does not deviate from the politics that preside over the subculture. Whilst the politics are not formal or governed, they are monitored by those involved in the sport. The nature of downhill mountain bike riding serves as a natural stage for demonstrations of cultural prestige and showmanship. Undeniably what is valued in the

subculture is power. William's (2011) reminds us that power always matters in some way or another within a subculture. As described in the discussion chapter, power inevitably flows throughout all components of the subculture. Right the way through this thesis, power has been a reoccurring premise, seemingly relating to all matters pertaining to the downhill mountain bike subculture. It has become apparent throughout the research process that Foucauldian discourses of power are the most relevant to this subculture. Foucault proposed that in modern societies, power is no longer held by a sovereign ruler, and that power is invested in technologies of control (Foucault, 2002). In this sense, power is invested in disciplinary techniques and discourses that manifest themselves through the subjects and normalising processes. Therefore, as the subjects within the subculture continue to maintain and update their uniqueness, normalising factors act upon the subculture and aspects such as style are adopted into mainstream society. Therefore, each individual in the subculture adds to the effective power of the group, and may not be aware of the power that they posses (Foucault, 1994). In addition, as shown in this thesis, power is productive, it produces discourses which offer opportunities for learning, knowledge, and truth (Foucault, 1995). Findings have shown that power is perhaps the most fundamental element guiding the continuation of the downhill mountain bike subculture in New Zealand. This finding has emerged as a strong component of the downhill subculture, and has only become clear in the final stages of this research project. In hindsight, the power discussed by the participants may be reflective of my sample of only elite downhill racers. Those who were interviewed hold prominent positions of power within the subculture, and each has been successful in their performances.

Style and aesthetics.

Clothing.

In light of the findings presented in this thesis, it is apparent that clothing in the subculture represents an in-depth value laden system. From the literature and the findings presented in the discussion, I believe it is clear that the clothing styles worn by both new and authentic subcultural members are continually scrutinised by the subcultural monopoly to decipher many meaning laden concepts. The clothing worn by the downhillers is uniform, where each member is likely to oblige by the common dress standard in the subculture. For example, four common clothing fashions are; 1) black socks pulled up to mid-calf height, 2) a cap with a flat-peak, 3) a dark coloured hoodie pulled up over the head, and 4) no gloves when riding or racing. Each of these clothing styles are symbolic and represent aspects such as; 1) subcultural authenticity, 2) practical usage, 3) identity and membership, and 4) level of ability determined by sponsorship. This visual form of clothing capital acts to unite the riders as a cohesive subculture that is both a part of, yet separate from mainstream society. The clothing style within the subculture helps to separate and define the subculture as different from mainstream society, which effectively increases the power of the group.

In addition to choosing the correct clothing as a subcultural member, the racers must also choose an image that is representative of the riding style that is present in each geographical location. Racers must consider whether there is a racing, or free-riding ethos for the specific tracks they choose to ride, or who they choose to ride with. This complex value system can be learnt through increased time living as a part of the subculture. Each specific riding location has a localised hierarchy, as well as conforming to the greater hierarchy governing the New Zealand downhill subculture. The clothing styles tend to have a trickledown effect, where the fashion begins with those of higher social strata. The racers who win the most events have the most power to introduce new styles into the

subculture for others to follow. The introduction of these styles occurs at both a localised level, and a national level at competitive events and gatherings.

Clothing choice is a powerful tool to distinguish members of the subculture from non-members. There are two main levels of authenticity; outsiders and insiders. Those new to the group undergo an intense learning process which sees them make the transition from outsider to insider. Despite outsiders and insiders providing two clear cut definitions, there are numerous levels within each of the two separate labels. Outsider and insider status can be judged by the authentic downhill racers easily. The riders judge a racer's level of authenticity through various visual characteristics such as their choice in clothing apparel. The clothing worn by those in the subculture helps the authentic members to read others level of commitment and subcultural understanding. For those who are outside of the subculture, they have less of an insight into the complexities of the downhill style, and believe that those who wear the right brands are subcultural members. For uncultured members of the subculture, there is a preoccupation with wearing the branded clothing and trying to fit in through choice of clothing. Whereas for the committed adherents, there is less emphasis on wearing the right brands as this occurs subconsciously as they have accumulated the *correct* gear overtime. The authentic downhillers choose clothing that is practical and clothes that make it easy to transfer from everyday life to riding downhill. Therefore, authentic members are always wearing clothes that are practical for riding their bike at any point throughout the day. For experienced downhillers, the styles are taken for granted, and the argot, demeanour and dress become normative and natural. In time, the orientation on clothing shifts as emphasis on performance and riding ability become of increasing importance. Following this shift in authenticity, the need to buy into the lifestyle becomes less important, as performance capital becomes of greater significance.

Technology.

Technological progressions continually occur in the downhill mountain biking scene. Technology is a continually evolving facet of the wider subculture and is important for all levels of downhill riders and racers. The elite racers interviewed discussed how technological trends are started by the most valued of racers. This includes driving to races in the most popular of vehicles, following the most up to date trends, or being sponsored by the most desired specialist equipment companies. In postmodern times racers have more access to construct their subcultural lifestyle through consummative processes than ever before. Through the use of websites and athlete promotion, people are able to gauge what bike parts are in fashion, and what the latest technology is. Bike related companies have capitalised on this by producing slightly modified bike components on an annual rotation. Official bike component launches are common and are always supported by high profile riders who help market the branded parts.

While the elite are often the people marketing the latest technology, findings have demonstrated that authentic members are less brand orientated compared with amateur racers. Uncultured subcultural members are often drawn to purchasing the latest model equipment, yet lack the riding ability to use the equipment to the full potential. This fundamental mistake for new members is common and only exacerbates the obviousness of their newcomer position in the subculture. In contrast to the amateur racers, the elite are more likely to pursue downhill mountain biking for its own sake. Nonetheless, while the elite are less concerned with having the latest technology, they are often the ones who are required to use it and test it regardless. The racers have no problem doing this and are happy to sell out to sponsors. Despite using the latest equipment, the elite racers treat their gear as more disposable, and are less dependent on their equipment for gaining social status. The elite racers are happy to test equipment because it keeps their sponsors happy, and helps them find the fastest equipment for their own riding gains. The changes in bike

technology are often not complex and are often only just enough for people to justify buying the latest parts. However, these small changes are enough to maintain the progressions in the sport and on the race track.

Sponsorship.

Sponsorship appears to come to those who are pushing the boundaries of the sport. Pushing the boundaries entails reaching the highest speeds, winning the biggest races, or contributing the most to progression in the sport. Being seen to perform well on the race track by riding dangerous or original lines, doing the most stylish whips, or completing a race run the fastest all contribute to subcultural capital. Sponsors add to this capital by providing an *outside backer*, namely a valued brand who invests in the rider to represent them. The value of the brand is determined by the financial assistance they provide, and also the other riders who are on the team or branded by the sponsor.

Often downhillers' preoccupations with wanting to be the fastest racers are motivated by the desire to be sponsored by the coolest of brands. The young riders aim to live *the* life, which encompasses the fame and heroism attached to brands such as Red Bull or Monster Energy. However, in time the prestige associated with the brand wears off, and in a similar process to clothing styles, the rider begins to occupy themselves with performance and a desire to be seen as the best rider. The appraisal of skill and speed becomes of increasing importance, as racers of the highest level judge through general consensus who is the best rider at the time.

Race sponsorship is driven by the supporting companies desire to capitalise on the consummative subculture of downhill mountain biking. Sponsorship represents a complicated network of systems which centre on choosing racers that are the most marketable. Tension for sponsorship is common in downhill, as the monopoly of riders are able to judge whether another racers sponsorship is seen as fair. Riders who are

sponsored help represent their assigned brands, and are required to promote their brands as required by their backers. Often the distribution of sponsorship appears unfair to onlookers, as some underperforming racers are given rewards, whereas many top racers are often overlooked and do not receive the support others expect. To achieve sponsorship, racers need to find the balance between self promotion and race performance, while not over exposing themselves or being too accessible.

Video, music and electronic media.

Videos and other electronic media surrounding the downhill mountain bike subculture play an important role in helping present the latest trends, fashions and news to the wider subcultural community. Postmodern societies have become adept at finding out information through internet websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Racers and sponsors have capitalised on online promotion and often produce clips of racers covering their daily lives, racing blogs, and bike related information. Videos have been a common method for producers to feature chosen racers and highlight their riding abilities. However, short online edits are becoming more common which provide brief insights into aspects of the featured racers life. These online edits are often paid for by the sponsors and simultaneously help market their brands, while at the same time increasing the profile of the sponsored rider.

Findings from this research have demonstrated that the music taste for the downhill mountain bike subculture is typically subjective. The music that members listen to helps the racers to connect with the activity of downhill mountain biking. The music taste of amateur racers is typically hard-core and helps motivate the racers to ride faster and more aggressively. For the elite racers, a more relaxing tone of music is common, as they choose the music appropriate to their level of perceived arousal before the race. This

said, the subculture is typically accepting of the wide range of musical tastes, however the music does connect racers with the extreme activity that they are pursuing.

Linguistics and jargon.

Technical jargon and language systems have emerged within the downhill mountain biking subculture. The jargon used by subcultural members represents multiple processes in the sport including characteristics of people, terrain, and personal riding attributes. Labels are used in the subculture that are often difficult for mainstream society to understand or comprehend. As members of the subculture spend increased time immersed in the culture, new jargon is produced as the language continues to progress. To remain fluent in downhill speak, members must remain engaged with authentic downhill members. For new members, an intense process must be undertaken where they learn the terms used by the downhillers. The language of the subculture is crucial for helping maintain its distinction from mainstream society. It helps strengthen the bonds between racers, and unites the group through the uniqueness of the cultural code.

Downhill as the baby brother of motocross.

Downhill mountain bikers envy the lifestyle that motocross racers live. The downhill racers are all well aware of the extent that the members mimic the clothing styles, riding styles, and lifestyles of professional motocross racers. Motocross presents itself as a subculture that is very similar to downhill mountain biking. The difference between the two subcultures is that motocross appears more professional, and the athletes are paid more money than downhill racers. For these reasons, the downhillers in this research mimic many characteristics of top motocross racers. The big-brother relationship that has developed is not uncommon in extreme sport subcultures. The evolution of

windsurfing from surfing is a prominent example of how sporting characteristics can be adopted by sports that have similar traits.

The downhill subculture idolises those who are professional in motocross. The ideals, jargon, sponsorship systems and tracks are all operationalised in a similar way to motocross racing. The design of mountain bike components and technology is largely driven by the progression in motocross equipment, and there is an alliance between the design of many motocross and downhill bike parts. Regardless of the commonalities between the two sports, downhill does represent a subculture in its own right. The sports do have some differences including the fact that motocross bikes are powered by a motor and downhillers are powered by gravity and pedal power. For now, the differences between the sports keep the two subcultures from combining, and the downhill and motocross crowd do not intermix.

A Summary of Part B: Downhill Devotion

Subcultural inclusion.

Postmodern ideals are correct in suggesting that people are more able to choose to be involved in subcultures in the 21st century. Nonetheless, whilst being a choice, inclusion into the downhill mountain bike subculture in New Zealand is not an easy process. New members who choose to engage with the subculture must learn the lore of the downhillers and spend time in the company of authentic members. The downhill subculture represents a fratriachy similar to that of a hierarchical brotherhood (sisterhood). Whilst there are no formal membership protocols, the downhillers agree that new members need to be interested in the sport, be committed to improving, and have suitable personalities. Riders who are seen to sufficiently achieve these unspoken standards will increase their level of power within the subculture as they move up the hierarchy. The downhill subculture consists of likeminded individuals who share common perspectives

and ideologies in downhill riding and racing. Those who are included into the subculture are often people who are mutually oriented and interested in the values and practices involved it the sport.

Young racers are often manipulated into pursing the sport to bring about increased levels of fame and prestige (Booth, 2011). This process works because the youth are the most susceptible and gullible in desiring the exciting lifestyle that downhill mountain biking provides. The youth are the most likely to partake in risk taking behaviours, in the desire for sponsorship, kudos, and recognition. Those who are new to the sport see that the ones achieving have the most power in the downhill mountain bike subculture. By choosing a lifestyle as a downhill mountain biker, the racers are naively adopted into a system that helps strengthen the subculture as an entity. The downhill mountain bike subculture acts as a natural structure for systems of social control such as these to operate. The participants in the subculture are manipulated into following the typical processes that stratify members of the subculture into different levels of prestige. All components included into this thesis represent parts of the system that ensures downhill as a subculture is maintained and continually reconstructed.

Individualism in a postmodern world.

Findings have shown that the majority of downhill racers in New Zealand choose to be part of the associated subculture. Postmodern subcultural theories propose that subcultures such as this are now more accessible for those who have the desire to take part. With less class based constraints, individuals are more readily able to take part in downhill riding and racing. Those interviewed in this research suggest that the sport of downhill attracts likeminded individuals. The racers attribute a certain personality to enjoying downhill, and say the sport is for energetic people who like to challenge themselves. While outsiders often view downhill racing as a craze driven pursuit pursued

by the young and reckless, those who race see themselves very differently. Downhill racers are meticulously measured and calculated when riding at high speeds on their bikes. The downhillers appear relaxed and composed in the race pits, and present a rational and controlled demeanour. Crashing is not common for the elite racers, and only occurs because of the unpredictability of aspects such as weather conditions, terrain, loose rocks, and incorrect body positioning. Nonetheless, the downhillers are attracted to the danger and excitement of the sport. Those who race are outcome orientated and are willing to take risks in the hope of glory.

Those who become authentic subcultural members often play out their subcultural attachment in all areas of life. The findings suggest that elite downhillers' personalities are so deeply embedded in the subculture that it affects almost every avenue of their being. Downhill provides a subculture where racers can be amongst like minded individuals, who all have similar goals and aspirations in the sport. The support and friendship networks gained from the sport give the riders' confidence. Feelings of confidence are exacerbated by the personal gains they achieve with their racing, and through chances to push their bodies to the limit both physically and mentally. Riders who achieve at the highest level in racing often develop deep connections with the sport and demonstrate an increased loyalty to the subculture. An obsession for the sport appears to flourish as racers spend more time associated with the subculture. At this level, participants often choose to make downhill their career and therefore plan their lifeworld around the sport.

Reputation and recognition.

For many downhillers, the subcultural lifestyle is what separates them from other people in mainstream society. Downhill is what makes the racers socially distinctive, and gives them opportunities to increase their confidence and push their own boundaries. The racers are part of a special subculture that shares similar aspirations, common goals and a

specific commitment to the group. Postmodern society values individuals who are unique, and people are encouraged to push themselves through liminal pursuits such as downhill (Ford & Brown, 2006). While pushing the limits on the race track is acceptable, the racers actions and behaviour in society is constantly assessed. The racers' lives are continually monitored by fans, therefore racers are required to conduct themselves in a manner that considers the approval of others. Due to the transparent nature of postmodern society, each racer's lifeworld is open to critique from interested fans, family, and friends. The transparency of modern society often dictates the participants' behaviours, values and personalities (Williams, 2011). The racers are role models for interested fans, and their everyday life is more available for others to scrutinise and view than ever before. Therefore, to maintain their reputation, sponsorship, and fans, they need to seek public recognition for factors such as their fashion sense, racing ability and public persona.

Often downhillers seek recognition for their involvement from both insiders, and those outside of the downhill subculture. Key attributes that attract many participants are the opportunities for prestige, power and status. Downhill offers participants opportunities to rise above others who are involved in the subculture, and provides an arena to develop a reputation. The sport provides a public space for racers to continually be assessed and asses one another. There is intense competition for subcultural prestige, as members of the subculture compete against one another for the top positions (Booth, 2011). The downhillers in this research all value the role that reputation and recognition plays in their lives. The participants willingly express that reputation is desired, and each rider values moments of recognition and appraisal.

Alcohol and drugs.

Postmodern extreme sport subcultural members are often depicted as consuming high levels of both alcohol and drug substances. The downhillers in this research have

confirmed that drinking alcohol is an important part of the culture that they belong to. However, the elite participants take a more reserved approach to alcohol consumption, whereas the amateur and new members of the subculture are the highest consumers. Alcohol use appears to aid the process of subcultural restoration at events, and helps new members to be included into the subculture. While the racers frequently consume alcohol, drug abuse in downhill mountain biking is not common. The participants in this study have never come across anyone who uses hard drugs in the subculture. Nor has anyone, to our knowledge, proved positive for performance enhancing drugs.

A self-help system.

In a postmodern society, there are many innovative new strategies to help people deal with problems that are detrimental to their well-being. This research has highlighted the influence that a subculture can have in helping people to leave lifestyles of crime, and use their addictions in a more positive and productive manner. Postmodernism gives people more choice in constructing their identities and choosing their cultural attachments, therefore those who enjoy exciting lifestyles may be more able to contribute to this progressive and popular subculture. Those who are inclined to seek thrills can become committed members of the downhill subculture in New Zealand. Subcultural attachment provides possibilities for members to contribute to both the subculture, and to their own psychological well-being.

Danger, risk and personal safety.

Downhill mountain biking is an activity where injuries are common and personal safety is compromised. Successful downhill mountain biking requires a careful balance of riding precision, whilst exerting intense physiological strain. In downhill racing, there is no prize for those who do not push themselves to their upmost limit for the entire duration

of the track. Those who risk the most on the downhill track are the most respected in the subculture. Prestige is gained by completing the track in the fastest time, and doing the biggest or most gnarly jumps well. Pleasure is experienced by the riders who have trained the hardest, have the most skill, and ride the line between precision and devastation.

The racers in this research discussed that when they were first introduced to the sport they were unaware of the dangers of riding. Each felt invincible and did not realise the likelihood of serious injury. As the participants spent more time immersed in the subculture, they learnt to take more calculated risks, as each learnt to read the terrain and gauge appropriate speeds. In more recent times the governing body for cycling has introduced safety equipment standards internationally. The introduction of safety equipment is a disputed topic among the racers, where those who have been in the subculture for a long period of time do not like to be told to wear body armour. The introduction of the new safety standards has occurred because of the codification of downhill, much to the dislike of many racers.

Relationship with the environment.

Downhillers are tied to the environment in ways that they are often unaware of. The tracks all cover natural terrain located on mountain sides and hill landscapes. In the summer race season, the racers travel to a range of outdoor settings, visiting the specific race tracks as the season progresses. Regardless of their reliance on these natural places, there is an overarching ignorance of the value of the land and terrain. Often, the downhill racers travel to a specified location, race for the weekend, and leave immediately after the race. In their time at the place, they put effort into tearing up the track, and being as aggressive as possible on their bikes over the terrain. Responses from the downhill participants in this research, and my knowledge of downhill racing suggests that downhillers are often anthropocentric in their approach to using the downhill tracks in

New Zealand. The riders view tracks as there to be used by them for their needs, and have little regard for the damage they are doing to the terrain. As each rider travels down the track, small changes are made with every turn of the wheels. The track will never be the same again, and is a constantly changing resource that the downhillers are able to use. While someone will win the downhill race, the tracks are never completely conquered. As the downhillers exit the venue, the track remains, ready to be utilised another year.

Nonetheless, over an extended duration of time in the subculture, the racers begin to increase their appreciation of the land. For those who are elite and more experienced racers, there appears to be a deeper understanding and reliance on the environment. Experienced downhillers are able to better read the contours of the tracks, and interpret the angles, progressions, and ride-ability of each section of track. The racers come to appreciate certain parts of tracks over others, and gain a deeper understanding of dirt conditions, and sections of tracks. Often riders develop a sense of territorial rights, where they are more likely to care for their local tracks and prevent out-of-towners from using their tracks.

The experienced downhillers are more aware of the numerous ways that the land is used to bring the downhillers together, to form connections, to ride on, and to be in nature. With increased duration of time in the subculture, the racers are more likely to attend working bees and other environmental meetings to help ensure the tracks are able to remain and be ridden. Within the subculture as an entity, there are differing levels of land appreciation. Long term membership offers the chance for further subcultural learning. New members are unaware of the lore of downhill, and are liable to skid on the lips of jumps, or ride on tracks after rainfall. These unspoken rules of the downhill fraternity require a learning process that begins on entry into the subculture and continues throughout.

A holistic consideration of gender differences.

The sport of downhill mountain biking is a male dominated domain. The racers in this research propose that females make up no more than 20% of the subcultural demographics in New Zealand. These findings are common in extreme sport, where female participation is low compared to that of men. In addition, the females are less adept at racing downhill and record slower times in the races compared to their male counterparts. The sponsorship for women reflects these gender differences, where females receive much lower financial support compared to the male racers.

Despite fewer sponsorship opportunities and less female participation, the females who race downhill appear to be catching the men in terms of speed on the track. Postmodern ideals propose that factors such as gender are less constricting for participants in postmodern sports (Wheaton, 2007). Participants in this research suggest that the male members of the subculture are supportive towards the female racers, and do not disrespect them for their lack of ability. Interestingly, the female participants appear to be harder on both themselves, and one another when compared to the men.

A distinct difference between the two genders is the difference in employment that women have compared with male participants. Findings in this study show that females are more likely to be involved in permanent work in high profile employment. In comparison, the downhill men are employed in part-time trade employment. Despite the gender divide, a common theme is the participants' desire for freedom in their lifestyle, where employment is chosen to fit around their training and riding needs.

Ruining the fun: Olympic inclusion.

At the present time, downhill mountain biking is not included as an Olympic Games sport. The racers in this research overwhelmingly believe that the sport would benefit by being part of the Olympic Games. Because of way that sport is governed in

New Zealand, sports that are within the Olympic framework are privileged with the most financial assistance. Therefore, downhill mountain biking athletes are exempt from the monetary gains that other athletes of a similar calibre are provided with. The racers in the downhill subculture are aware of the financial benefits given to their cross-country counterparts. Because of this, tension has arisen where the downhillers believe that the governing body does not have their best interests at heart. Regardless of this, there is no plan in the immediate future for the sport to be included into the Olympic Games. For this to happen, racers and governing bodies need to work together to better communicate the goals for both parties involved.

The downhill racers are aware of the negative connotations that may come with inclusion into the Olympic Games. Olympic inclusion may see a decrease in the fun loving ethos, and the development of a more codified and commercialised sport. Part of the downhill ethos is the fun loving aspects, where riders are free to ride whichever tracks they desire, and to travel to whichever races they choose to attend. However, athletes in this research believe that they are a strong enough subculture to ensure that the fun and excitement of the sport remains, even when included into the Olympic Games.

A Summary of Part C: A Lifestyle Sport

    The subcultural lifestyle.

Postmodern subcultural theories propose that extreme sports are an increasingly available product for consumers who choose to shop for a lifestyle (Ford & Brown, 2006). Extreme sports such as downhill mountain biking are becoming a product for those who want to buy the lifestyle. Buying into the subculture is of personal significance to most new downhillers, however over time devoted downhillers develop an attachment to the sport that far exceeds the desire to be considered authentic. Downhill mountain biking revolves around a lifestyle that comprises numerous levels of engagement and devotion.

Because of the lack of formal membership protocols, there is no gauge for evaluating the extent that an individual belongs in the subculture. Because of this, the lore of downhill is of even more importance, and the division between outsider and insider is maintained. The outsider and insider distinctions ensure the subcultural status hierarchies are maintained, and the process of subcultural inclusion is not easily granted. As opposed to many clubs and societies where buying membership is common practice, downhill mountain biking membership is obtained over time. For those who are granted authentic membership, the lifestyle represents their identity and is the main occupation in life.

The activity of downhill mountain biking evokes strong emotions that people are less likely to experience or show when occupied with day to day life. The downhill mountain bikers self impose sensations such as stress and fear upon themselves which in turn helps the racers bind together as a social entity. The downhill subculture acts as a context where meaningful and momentous social connections are fostered, and where emotions not normally experienced in everyday life are expressed. Experiences such as injuries, suffering, crashing and glory all help to unify the subculture, adding to the unique social conglomerate. Therefore, the downhill subculture acts as a catalyst, increasing the likelihood that members form alliances and social bonds. Downhill offers participants opportunities for self exploration, where members are encouraged to push their own limits in front of a deliberately fabricated community of friends and associates. The bonding function of the subculture retains dedicated adherents, therefore developing the collective identity of the group and strengthening the subculture. For committed devotes, downhill is not merely included into an individual's life, it becomes their life.

Synthesising the lifestyle: Work, life and leisure.

The lifestyles of the downhill mountain bikers are in constant stages of flux, as they continually manage their subcultural involvement, careers, life and leisure. The ideal

lifestyle for a downhiller involves being able to live and spend extensive time close to downhill tracks and ride areas. The participants continually seek opportunities to travel to new locations to race, and plan riding holidays. Because downhill mountain biking is a seasonal sport, the racers are required to travel overseas annually to achieve the amount of downhill riding they desire. In the racers spare time, they coalesce with other subcultural members to plan upcoming races, and future riding trips. The racers collectively pursue travel in small friendship groups which often reflect where they are based, their riding ability, life experiences or similar personality structures.

All elite participants in this research were obsessive in their dedication for the sport. The professional downhill racers in this research discussed how their leisure also constitutes their career. The athletes spoke of the difficultly they had managing their lifestyle balance, and the difficulties they had in finding the distinction between the two lifestyle facets. Those who choose to be employed outside of the downhill scene choose employment that offers them the freedom to partake in downhill when desired. For the racers in this research, their career, leisure, and lifestyle is dictated by a desire to ride downhill. For some, seasonal work is the employment option of choice, travelling between the main mountain bike destinations throughout the world in search of the feelings that they desire on the tracks they prefer. For others, more permanent work was a more favourable option, however with a contract that allowed months off for racing.

Subcultural involvement and quality of life.

The subcultural habitus provides a myriad of lifestyle benefits for individuals who are interested in downhill mountain biking. Overwhelmingly, the participants felt that downhill mountain biking improves their quality of life. Downhill offers participants a temporary escape from the confining and disciplining nature of mainstream society. Those interviewed discussed how downhill mountain biking provides an antidote to escape

monotonous everyday life. Through downhill, the racers have the chance to experience temporary liberation from civilised and conservative societies. While the sport of downhill remains largely codified, organised and rule bound, there are still many opportunities for self expression and freedom in riding style, speeds, and ability. The racers are provided with a track between the tape in which they can express aggression and hostility, in individual contests against oneself, the environment, and other competitors.

Findings from this research suggest that members of the downhill subculture experience feelings of security in knowing that they have a large network of likeminded friends and associates. The downhill subculture provides a highly contained network for individuals where participants can collectively develop in their quest for success. Downhill racing provides individuals with opportunities for building relationships, travelling to remote locations, sponsorship and career opportunities. The participants' felt that downhill mountain biking helped balance their lifestyles, proving opportunities for continual learning. Racing helped the participants develop healthy eating patterns, better cope with stress, and improve the overall happiness in their lives.

Nonetheless, participants were aware of the detriments involved in this lifestyle. Constant travel, unstable work patterns, injury and overtraining were all discussed as downsides to the downhill lifestyle. However, participants shrugged off the impact that these detriments had on their life, and agreed that the benefits far outweighed the negatives.

When the dream ends? Subcultural sustainability.

Eventually, most downhillers retire from elite level competition as other aspects of their lives begin to take priority. The demographic that has the best chance of racing well is those between the ages of 17-30 years old. This group of youth have perhaps the most access and opportunities for living the downhill mountain bike lifestyle that they desire.

The youth demonstrate the most enthusiasm for racing fast, the least fear, and are the most readily able to learn the skills required for riding downhill. Following 30 years of age, racers normally begin to lose touch with the downhill subculture as other factors take precedence. A downward process of retirement from the sport is almost inevitable as factors such as family, career, and various other occupational commitments become more important. For some, involvement in downhill mountain biking decreases as they reach their broken bone and injury limit. These reasons for leaving the subculture are common in other extreme sport subcultures as "the performances of older athletes decline because they taper their training, pay less attention to nutrition, and succumb to injury – usually under psychological, emotional and social pressures that lie outside their sporting milieu" (Booth, 2011, p. 112). Nonetheless, there are opportunities for older racers to be involved in the sport in areas such as sponsorship, marketing, management, coaching and mentoring. Those who cannot leave the sport often find themselves in roles that ensure they can still travel to the races and be part of the downhill scene. Due to a decrease in performance, often racers can no longer maintain their position in the downhill hierarchy. As young downhillers emerge in the sport, those in prominent positions are often relegated to lesser positions in the subculture.

Theoretical Implications

More than ten years into the 21st century, extreme sports have proven that they are a permanent in the world of sport. Extreme sports continue to fragment and evolve, as new disciplines become popular and others are retired. In a similar process, the people participating in extreme sports change. The transient, transparent, and less restricted postmodern societies have supported the development of new extreme sport activities. Many sports such as downhill mountain biking are at the cutting edge of the dangerous sport movement, and therefore continue to attract new members. Many other extreme

sports have become stilted as members have tired of the activity and moved into more innovative disciplines. The findings in this research help add to knowledge by examining the patterns, concepts and structures present in the downhill mountain bike subculture. This research examines how the culture maintains its distinctiveness, and why members are drawn to the downhill lifestyle.

It is hoped that this thesis contributes to theoretical knowledge in the areas of both postmodern subcultural studies, and mountain biking. This research provides an original contribution to knowledge by examining the downhill mountain bike subculture, and further suggesting the impact that subcultural attachment has on participants' lives. The findings and conclusions in this thesis reflect the experiences and perceptions of the five participants who contributed to this research project. This research helps reaffirm findings from other extreme sport fields and may offer additional knowledge for postmodern subcultural theories. This unique research includes a wide range of areas which are important in comprehending the downhill mountain biking phenomenon, while additionally helping researchers to understand aspects of devotion necessary for subcultural inclusion.

Through mapping the subculture, this thesis has provided insight into all of the main factors important for subcultural membership. This thesis documents the process of change in the subculture, and the practices that are involved in ensuring the subculture continues to develop. I believe this thesis has provided useful examples documenting the minute developments that occur within subcultures. Innovations are continually occurring within each facet of the subculture. Aspects such as style, aesthetics, clothing, technology, sponsorship, video, music, electronic media, linguistics and jargon have proven to be the main components comprising the downhill subculture. Each of these components has an important role in ensuring the continuation of the subculture. Postmodernism implies that these components do not respite, as innovation and modernisation continues to occur. In

addition, the subculture has a partial reliance on the development that occurs in the motocross subculture. The downhillers rely on the progression of motocross to help legitimise their own subculture.

This thesis contributes to knowledge by providing an overview of a postmodern subculture that contains devoted members. Assumptions that traditional subcultural theories no longer apply has been proven incorrect, as those interviewed are indefinitely committed authentic members of a single subculture. Nonetheless, many aspects of the subculture appear to represent postmodern standards, and very much represent the ideals proposed in postmodern subcultural theories. In such a transparent society, subcultural inclusion, individualism, reputation and recognition are important for those involved in downhill. In mainstream society, the racers are viewed by some as role models. Therefore, the presentation and actions of the top racers need to cohere with standards expected by the broader society. This research has illuminated the racers' place within the subculture and has reaffirmed their position as role models and heroes. It is hoped that activities such as littering, donuts in cars, and general silly behaviour can be reduced, as the downhillers begin to be more aware of the way they are seen by both younger racers, and mainstream society.

The subculture provides a modern means for escaping traditionally deviant behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse. While additionally, providing a means for helping people overcome psychological, physical, and social problems that are common in the 21st century. As a direct result of downhill, those who desire high levels of excitement in their lives have an outlet that helps them refrain from deviant and illegal involvement. This research has demonstrated how downhill provides a context for testing ones limits against the environment, other competitors, and most importantly oneself. Findings have shown that downhill helps members to connect with the environment through active outdoor pursuits, aiding personal learning experiences and personal development.

This research provided a means for current downhill participants to discuss downhill as their lifeworld. This research has synthesised the racers' lifestyles in regards to their work, life and leisure. Few researchers have examined how extreme sport involvement influences quality of life, therefore this research has provided new information in this context. Additionally, this research can confirm that subcultures are predominantly youth cultures. Subcultural attachment is temporary, and members do espouse differing levels of authenticity within the subcultural hierarchy.

Contribution for Practitioners

During each interview, the riders were able to think deeply and scrutinise their own involvement in the downhill mountain bike subculture. This reflective analysis was new to the riders and helped them to understand and realise the meanings embedded in their lived subcultural experiences. This process of evaluating one's life over a period of time helped to contextualise their present position as professional racers, and as individuals. It seemed that by analysing each racers life, they were able to gain a deeper understanding of their involvement, and most of all appreciate the value that the subculture brings to their lives. The interviews increased the participants' awareness of the subculture, and allowed for deep thought regarding how it operates and maintains distinction from mainstream society. Throughout the interview conversations, the racers became increasingly proud of the subculture. The increased levels of pride came about through new understandings of the complexities of the subculture, yet were the product of each racers own words.

This research provided a platform for the racers to further understand their involvement in the New Zealand downhill mountain bike subculture. The findings in this research may help participants understand their choice in lifestyle, and may aid their race performance. Professional downhill mountain bikers are continually looking for areas of

their lives that they can adapt to increase their sporting results. However, often one needs to look outside of themselves to reassess their life roles, goals and plans in ways that they haven't thought of before. Many of the professional racers who are racing currently have not looked ahead and planned for a future that does not involve racing bikes. If this research helps the racers to understand the likely duration of subcultural involvement at the elite level, then racers can better plan future directions when they move away from being professional racers. All five participants contacted me sometime after the interview took place to say thanks for inspiring them to think critically about their subcultural involvement. They were genuinely interested in the research process, and appeared interested to see the finished thesis. Subsequently they recommended other racers who they felt would benefit from taking part in this research journey.

In a broader sense, those who are more general and recreational cyclists may benefit from the findings proposed in this research. This research highlights the important components necessary for inclusion into the downhill subculture. Therefore, people who read this thesis are provided with an overview of what they are getting themselves in for, if deciding to take part in the sport. This thesis provides an overview for new members to gain some insight into the subcultural practices, and therefore will be able to make clearer decisions regarding what equipment to buy, and what is common in the subculture. In essence, as stated in the discussion, work such as this provides an opportunity for individuals to lifestyle shop. Through drawing on the wisdom provided by the five participants in this research, it may be possible for internet websites, or directors to use this research as a basis for a film surrounding the subculture. Racers stories from within the subculture would provide an intriguing group to portray digitally and could be used to help attract new members, or to portray what the sport can offer individuals.

In terms of the more general public, this thesis may help land owners, dog walkers, trampers, or invested parties to understand the phenomenon that is downhill mountain

biking. With a deeper understanding of the subculture, those who come into contact with the downhillers may better understand why riders are continually building new tracks, why they need access to hill sides, and why they travel at speeds often on walking tracks. In addition, it is hoped that the downhillers may begin to realise how privileged they are to have so many locations to use within New Zealand, and may be inspired to take more care of their wilderness surroundings. With an increased appreciation for their riding environments, it could be presumed that mainstream society will be more accepting of downhill racers, and may be more helpful in terms of permitting access to land, and tolerating high speed riding.

Reflecting on the Research

Logistically, the qualitative research method used in this research was effective. Qualitative inquiry provided a means to talk with the participants and appreciate the various ways that the downhill subculture was constructed for them. The benefits of using interviews as the main data collection method appeared to outweigh the limitations. I was able to openly converse with the participants in an environment that we both felt comfortable in. Throughout the interviews I was enlightened by the original and unforeseen answers to many of the research questions. Because of each participant's subjectivity, the racers opened my mind to new understandings and insights into the processes at play within the subculture. The exploratory nature of this research meant that managing and collating each of the data sets was a progressive process. Many links between the data were not noticeable until late in the thesis writing process. Therefore, many unforeseen findings have been included into the latter part of this thesis, namely relating to power, prestige and status. Foucauldian discourses of power became an overarching theme that appears to be present in almost all components of the subculture. This finding is ever more important because of the way that I did not seek to find how

power was operationalised within the subculture. As the researcher, I was unaware of the effect that power had within the subculture until the end of this research project. It is now clear that Foucauldian power is a central pillar around which the subculture is constructed, and is an area worthy of further research.

I have enjoyed this research journey immensely. As the researcher, this project represents tens of thousands of hours of taking part, in-depth thinking, and discussing all things concerning downhill mountain biking. This research brings together the debates, discussions, and gossip that the downhillers often converse in in the race pits, or when travelling between races. In essence, this thesis provided an opportunity to think deeply around many of the issues present in the subculture, and provides a structured account of all six of our perceptions. Specifically, the reflexivity of myself as the researcher has proven both as a benefit and a limitation. Being an ex-World Champion and elite downhill racer in the past meant that I too am among the more professional of downhill racers within New Zealand. Because of this, my ideas and perceptions of the subculture differ from those who are more recreational, or less hard-core members of the subculture. Therefore, throughout this research I needed to try and understand how others within the subculture would view the emerging findings. It is expected that elite participants provide the most data rich information on the subculture due to each participant's experience of moving up the categories. However, I now suspect that elite participants have made it into the elite category for reasons much deeper than just training and hard work. Therefore, the elite may not best represent the views of the entire subculture. The elite may view the subcultural world differently than those who remain in the amateur ranks. Therefore, this research appears to reflect an *elite* take on the downhill subculture within New Zealand.

The reflexive relationship between both myself and the five participants was effective and allowed for the socially constructed nature of the subculture to be interpreted. As a subculturalist, my personal experiences have undoubtedly influenced the

phenomena under investigation. With regard to the research data integration in particular, my priorities, values and experiences may have influenced my analysis of the interview material. Often insightful themes and propositions were raised by each of the participants, and because of the reflexivity of myself as the researcher, I was able to deeply scrutinise the data and attempt to define the findings. This self-reflexive process allowed for the material and themes to emerge that added new insight to this research project. In addition, it provided me with opportunities to explore the social relationships within the group, and to examine different perceptions regarding how the subculture is socially constructed. Many processes suggested in the discussion section involved my interpretations of the complex relations within the data. Nonetheless, as does all good qualitative research, this project appreciates that the researcher's subjectivity is undoubtedly included into the written thesis. Therefore, this thesis represents just one way in which the data could be interpreted.

Future Research

Numerous research opportunities have become apparent throughout this thesis writing process. Excluding extreme board sports, literature covering extreme sport subcultures is still relatively limited, and there are many possibilities for future research. In terms of mountain biking, it would be interesting to complete research that compares the localised downhill mountain bike subcultures within New Zealand. Comparisons between geographical locations such as Queenstown, Dunedin, and Auckland would make for insightful study. The Queenstown mountain biking scene in particular would provide intriguing research because of the multitude of cycling disciplines that actively use the same geographical areas, and are present within the same town. Recently downhill mountain biking in Queenstown has increased prolifically, with over 113,000 downhill runs completed down the Skyline Gondola tracks. The opportunities to study aspects of

this phenomenon are numerous, and would help those interested to understand this sudden influx of downhillers into Queenstown. This research has focused on the New Zealand subculture and has only provided a brief overview of the smaller subcultures. Further research could explore these smaller subcultures and try to understand the sociological processes of each.

A further potential research project could be to map the history of the downhill mountain bike subculture. In this research, I first needed to read broadly to determine my perception of the downhill mountain bike social history. Research that clarifies the disciplines of cycling, and then distinguishes the multitude of cycling subcultures would add to knowledge in this area. Given the breath of mountain biking disciplines there is scope for further research that explores the differences between the disciplines, and then the differences between the associated subcultures. One method for research such as this would be to map the transcendence of cycling disciplines and explore the ways that the disciplines have fragmented over time. Research could examine the ways that the different subcultures work together and the interactions between the different cycling disciplines.

Further mixed methods research could be useful to determine the effect that different tracks and terrain have on riders' levels of satisfaction. This could be completed by using bicycle cranks that determine power output and speed in accordance with heart rate, perceived exertion, and a scale that measures a range of environmental factors and psychological factors. Findings from research such as this may help determine the tracks that are most valued by mountain bikers, and therefore guide the development and design of tracks. Post-ride reflections, recall and memories may be useful to understand the attraction of specific tracks, and the reasons that riders return to certain mountain bike locations. With further information documenting the preferred disciplines of cycling, research could determine future trends to track the fragmentations of the disciplines.

This research has been conducted with participants who have obtained elite level status in their downhill racing. Future research could include a range of participants from the subculture who each fulfil different roles within the subculture. I would suggest that those who are more successful in downhill mountain biking come from privileged backgrounds, however further research is needed to examine this relationship. By researching the influence that class has on lifestyle balance, it may be possible to explore constraints to lifestyle balance and mountain bike involvement. An example of this would be to research the different lifestyle factors between successful mountain bikers, and those who have never become professional.

Conclusion

This thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the downhill mountain bike subculture in New Zealand. By exploring a specific extreme sport subculture, this work has demystified the downhill mountain biking scene in New Zealand. Discussion centres on descriptions of the subculture, devotion to the subculture, and the consequent lifestyle pursued by the elite downhill mountain bike subcultural members. It is clear from this study that downhill mountain biking majorly influences the way that participants lead their lives. The lore of downhill mountain biking has been examined and provides those interested with a greater understanding of this activity. The informal knowings, cultural understandings, patterns and practices have been investigated to provide readers with a deeper understanding of this wheeled sport and subculture. By use of a qualitative research approach, the five participants in this research were able to provide insight into this in-depth and well established subculture. The voices of the elite downhillers were useful in explaining the downhill subculture, as well gaining information suggesting how involvement affects each participant's life.

The central research question has been answered by use of both the literature review, and the interviews completed with the five participants. Constant comparisons between both of these data sources meant that the discussion section incorporated both results and findings. Answers to the four research sub-questions have been demonstrated and explored throughout the data analysis section of the research. Key points are then reiterated and explored in the final research summary section. The findings evident in this thesis support similar research published in the field of extreme sport. Therefore, this research may help progress research surrounding postmodern subcultures. Nonetheless, there are instances where data in this thesis is unsupported, and therefore appear as new additions to academic knowledge.

Despite this research providing a coherent and sufficient research project, there are still many possibilities for future research in the field of downhill mountain biking. The general sport of mountain biking is undergoing rapid transformations as the field continues to fracture into newer disciplines. The evolving nature of the sport provides a myriad of academic possibilities for further theoretical research in many areas such as physical education, cultural studies, anthropology and sociology.

In keeping with postmodern research, I presume that there is possibility for multiple truths in this project, and this study reflects my interpretations and analysis of the interview transcripts. The lifestyles of the elite participants have acted as intriguing interpretive resources where many meanings are possible. I accept that conceptualisations of reality differ between individuals, and sociology is a field that is accepting of contradictions and variances. Nonetheless, this research frames the lifestyle of five elite downhill mountain bikers who are members of the associated subculture in the 21st century. Downhill mountain biking is very much in vogue, and this research helps contribute new and intriguing insights into this dynamic and distinct subculture.

Definitions of Downhill Mountain Bike Jargon

A piece	Something that is rough and not worth much to anyone.
Berm	A banked corner on a mountain bike track.
Downhillers	An abbreviation for the downhill mountain bike subculture.
Drift	To slide around a corner without braking.
Drop-In movies	Movies with large cliff-drops.
Gnarly	Something extreme.
Hard-core	Extreme mountain bikers.
Hipping	To jump sideways on a mountain bike over a jump.
Hoots	A vocal sound of support or excitement.
Hollers	A vocal sound of support of excitement.
Huck	To complete a mountain bike drop and land awkwardly.
Kit	Specific race clothing worn when racing mountain biking.
Knuckle	To land a jump before the down side of the ramp or landing.
Lost their line	Mountain bikers who go off the track.
Mad style	Good style on a mountain bike.
Mintest	Something nice or great.
Milking	To generate speed by using gravity on a bike.
Moto	Motorbike.
Muppets	Someone who lacks skills and movement on a bike.
Posers	Someone who desperately tries to fit into the subculture.
Pre-jump	To jump before the take off of a jump.
Pros	Professional mountain bike riders.
Scrubbing	To stay low in the air over a bike jump.
Spikes	Tyres that have spiked edges for muddy conditions.
Squid	Someone who is wobbly on a bike.

Tape	The tape that marks the boundaries of each race track.
Utes	A utility vehicle.
Whips	To throw the bike out to one side in the air over a jump.
Yeowl	A vocal sound of support of excitement.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Demographic Information:

What age are you?

What is your date of birth?

Where do you live or consider home?

What is your highest level of achievement in downhill mountain biking?

How long have you considered yourself a member of the downhill mountain bike community in New Zealand?

What level ability do you believe you are?

What is your highest level of education?

What is your ethnicity?

What ethnicity are most people who race downhill mountain biking?

What is your income band on this scale: 10-20K, 20-30K, 40-50K, 50-60K, 60-70K, 80+?

Describing the Subculture:

What are the key factors that make someone a downhill mountain biker?

If you looked at a downhiller, how could you tell that they were a subcultural member?

Is everyone accepted into the downhill mountain bike subculture?

What are the social structures present within the subculture?

        Do some people hold more power than others?

How do the power structures play out within the subculture?

        How does this power help or constrain certain people in the subculture?

Discuss possible hierarchal structures within the subculture?

        Do you need to associate with certain people to be seen as high up?

How do you know if someone is an authentic member of the subculture?

        Are there people who are not accepted into the subculture?

Who decides this?

Who do you see as privileged or high-up in the subculture?

Has your subcultural identity increased over time?

Do you think subcultural identity is gained through increasing performance, or increasing duration of time spent in the subculture, or both?

Do you believe that subcultural members wear specific clothing or fashions that are specific to the sport of downhill mountain biking?

Do you believe that there is certain music or audio that needs to be listened to if you are a subcultural member?

What things are privileged in the downhill mountain bike subculture?

How is power distributed within the downhill mountain bike subculture?

Is this extreme sport subculture the only one that you belong to?

Do you believe downhill mountain bikers draw their inspiration from any other sports?

What are the different roles within the subculture?

How does belonging to the subculture upset belonging to mainstream society?

What adjustments need made between different subcultures?

How does the subculture relate to the environment?

Do downhill mountain bikers appreciate the environment?

Would you say that downhill mountain biking is more than just a sport and is perhaps a lifestyle choice?

Does this subculture use specific jargon and language?

Discuss any the gender inequalities within the subculture?

Who is responsible for the development of new direction and trends in the subculture?

How does peer pressure and social recognition play out in the subculture?

The subculture and your own life:

How does being part of the subculture influence your life?

Does being part of the subculture increase your well-being and life satisfaction?

What does being part of the subculture mean to you?

How do you think this subculture differs from mainstream society?

What effect does being part of the subculture have on your employment?

> Do you plan your holidays around racing?

> Do you choose your jobs around racing?

> Do you believe there is any difference between the jobs that men have, compared

to women in relation to racing and working?

> How do you meet the costs of racing?

> Is this way of life sustainable?

What effect does being part of the subculture have on your relationships?

Are you more inclined to date people who ride bikes?

Are you addicted to being a part of the downhill mountain bike subculture?

Does belonging to this subculture act as a self help system in any way?

What are the most important parts of the downhill mountain bike subculture for you?

Is your position of power in this subculture the same in any other areas of your life?

Does downhill mountain biking detriment or benefit the time that you are able to spend

with your family?

Do you need to make sacrifices to be a part of the downhill mountain bike subculture?

Do you still enjoy other forms of leisure or recreation?

Do women in the downhill mountain bike subculture resist feminine norms?

How does being in the downhill mountain bike community constrain you?

What is it about mountain biking that benefits or detriments lifestyle balance?

What does lifestyle balance mean for mountain bikers?

How does belonging to this subculture effect well-being and lifestyle balance?

What are the professions undertaken by mountain bike subcultural members?

What happens when leisure becomes your job?

Has the meaning of being part of the subculture changed over time for you?

Does the downhill mountain bike subculture represent different things for you now, compared to when you began racing?

What role does reputation play in you continuing to be a subcultural member?

Additional Questions:

Are you concerned for your safety in any aspect of being a professional downhill mountain bike racer?

What is your idea of a balanced life?

How does being a professional mountain bike racer influence your lifestyle balance?

Do you find it hard to balance family, career, and leisure in your life?

Now you are a professional athlete, do you still see mountain biking as your recreation?

Would you like to discuss any other avenues that relate to the subculture of downhill mountain biking?

Appendix B: Information Sheet for Participants
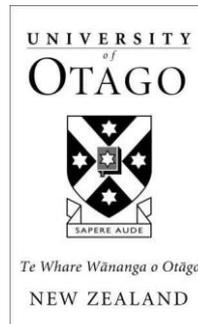
INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Downhill Mountain Bike Subculture in New Zealand

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the aim of the project?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a Masters Degree at the Physical Education School at the University of Otago.

The aim of this project is to examine the subculture of downhill mountain bike racers and riders in New Zealand. This will be followed by an examination of the effect that being part of the subculture has on the participants' life in facets such as well-being, and life satisfaction.

What type of participants is being sought?

Six participants who are/were professional downhill mountain bikers will be involved in this research.

Participants must consider or have considered themselves downhill mountain bike racers.

No payment or reward is offered.

Upon the completion of research you will be emailed regarding a statement of appreciation and the option of obtaining a copy of the final thesis.

What will participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to complete an interview with the researcher for no longer than two hours duration. The interview will be recorded with audio file systems.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

An audio file recording will be taken for the duration of the interview.

Each audio file will be transcribed by the researcher within two weeks from the date of the interview.

Personal information regarding the participant's descriptions and experiences as a downhill mountain bike subcultural member will be collected.

The purpose of the data collection is to examine the effect that belonging to the downhill mountain bike subculture has on their life in general. The researcher will examine relevant factors from the interviews both individually and through synthesising the results.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned will be able to gain access to it.

Dr. Michael Boyes

Scarlett Hagen (MPhEd Candidate)

The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity.

On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer.

You may wish to correct or withdraw data/information from the point of involvement to three months prior to submission of the completed project (dates to be advised). At any time you are welcome to view your individual data or information.

Upon the completion of research you will be emailed regarding a statement of appreciation and the option of obtaining a copy of results.

This project involves a semi-structured questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes descriptions of factors relating to subcultural belonging. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the interview at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the School of Physical Education, University of Otago.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What if participants have any questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Scarlett Hagen   and/or   Dr. Michael Boyes

School of Physical Education   School of Physical Education

University Telephone: 03 479 9122   University Telephone: 03 479 9056

Email: scarlett.hagen@otago.ac.nz   Email: mike.boyes@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the Department stated above. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee administrator (ph 03 479-8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix C: Consent Form for Participants

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTCIPANTS

The Downhill Mountain Bike Subculture in New Zealand

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;

2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;

3. Personal identifying information on audio files will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;

4. This project involves a semi-structured questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes that regarding your involvement in the downhill mountain bike subculture. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind;

5. The results of the project may be published and available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity, unless I confirm that my identity can be made public.

6. No payment or reward is to be given.

I agree to take part in this project.

....
       (Signature of participant)   (Date)