

# **Lifestyle sports and national sport policy: an agenda for research**

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Report to Sport England

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## Executive Summary

- There has been a proliferation of new sporting forms over the two decades that have challenged traditional ways of conceptualising and practicing sport. These new forms, variously labelled ‘action’, ‘new’, ‘wizz’, ‘extreme’ and ‘lifestyle’ sports, have commercial and competitive dimensions, but are essentially understood by participants as bodily experiences – about ‘doing it’ (1.1).
- While challenging mainstream sport in terms of cultural significance, participation figures are hard to establish, as are recognised forms of regulation and governance (1.2).
- Beyond some limited market research, there has been very little substantive research into participation rates and patterns, nor on the socio-demographic characteristics of participants (1.3).
- Yet these new sporting forms have the potential to contribute significantly to the achievement of Government’s *Game Plan* activity targets (1.4).
- Lifestyle is understood as a self-interpreted pattern of actions that differentiates one person from another (or allies people through shared practice). Lifestyle sports contribute to this, through interpretations of how people look and behave, what subcultural choices and affiliations they make, what forms of control they take over their lives – for example against formal bureaucracies or sports associations. Lifestyle – and associated sporting forms – are thus associated with wider patterns of consumption, taste and identity (2.1).
- There are three central concepts related to lifestyle sports: ‘alternative’ (practices differentiated from conventional sporting forms); ‘lifestyle’ (meanings related to personal factors beyond – although not to the exclusion of - success in competition); ‘extreme’ (a label given to aspects of practice associated with risk-taking, including extreme locations, extreme emotions, transgression and extreme skills; also associated with branding and commodifying some aspects of practice). The relationships between these concepts are modelled in Figure 1 (3.1, 3.5).
- In contrast to the regulation of conventional sports, alternative or lifestyle sports are characterised by a relative lack of regulation and a customary refusal by participants to follow regulatory codes. Paradoxically, however, commercialisation and competition have led to a need to establish some codes and boundaries, although these subsequently act as markers for the extreme practice of the elite participants. Examples of the emergent codes and governance structures are given in Appendix B (3.2).
- A classification of lifestyle sports is developed in Figure 3, recognising that such sporting forms can arise in a number of ways: the reinterpretation of conventional sporting practices (eg climbing); new types of practice with no practical antecedence

(skateboarding); and the extreme practice of conventional and lifestyle sporting forms (eg barefoot snowskiing and volcano boarding) (3.3).

- Events are also an increasingly significant aspect of lifestyle sporting cultures, allowing participants to associate with others who share their sporting lifestyles. The most well-known of these events are the Summer and Winter X Games, which feature competition and exhibition, while in the UK events such as the Urban Games (London), Gold Coast Oceanfest (Devon), National Adventure Sports (Somerset) and World Skateboard Championships (London) are gaining popularity (3.4).
- The main sources of information on participation are market research surveys conducted by Mintel and Key Note. These are limited in terms of scope and data reliability, with little trend consistency. They indicate that around 10% of the adult population is interested in participating in lifestyle sports, but that the majority of this 10% is drawn from a narrow age and socio-demographic grouping (15-24 year olds, mainly men, from the higher socio-economic classifications). Participation is split between a relatively small core of regular participants (typically less than 1% of the adult population) and a larger group of occasional participants, some of whom learn and participate predominantly as a holiday activity (4.1, 4.2);
- The key determinants of participation appear to be: terminal age of education (19+ students have high participation rates); marital and parental status (single people without children have high participation rates); and economic status of local community (ACORN areas B and C – affluent urban and suburbanites - have high participation rates) (4.3).
- The new lifestyle sporting forms have led to the development of new cultural and consumption practices, including activity holidays and urban multi-sport activity centres. While the overall market for activity holidays is still small, it is comparatively large for outbound holidays from the UK. In these cases, sporting practice is an element in the larger subcultural world of activity holidays. This subcultural world is now also being addressed through the development of multi-sport centres catering for a range of lifestyle sports as well as acting as a liminal space for lifestyle identity formation and affirmation (4.4).
- While the data concerning, and the broader understanding of, lifestyle sports remains rudimentary, it is apparent that the principal participants are the very group of young people who have conventionally dropped out of sport and physical activity upon leaving school. Thus, the narrow age band attracted to lifestyle sports is probably rather less significant in policy terms than the potential that the sports have to contribute to the *Game Plan* activity targets. The extent to which this is the case has yet to be determined, while questions also need to be asked about the activity profiles of the participants – especially what the participation rates for individual sports mean in terms of overall participation (5.1).

- There is also a broader need to recognise that lifestyle sports span a number of policy and bureaucratic arenas – particularly sports, tourism and consumption. This has a number of implications, relating to the ways in which different policy agendas can be influenced through these sporting forms. For example, the relationship between sport, lifestyle and tourism is in need of analysis, in terms of the type of people who go on such holidays and how their holiday activity relates to their lifestyle practices at home. Similarly, the developers of multi-sport centres hope to capitalise on the links between lifestyle sports, fashion and consumption, to draw people away from internet shopping and back to social practices such as shopping and hanging out at the mall (and sports centre) (5.1).
- In terms of the research agenda for Sport England, the central finding is that rather than the traditional emphasis on individual sports, data collection with respect to lifestyle sports needs to focus on the participants; the sports are very much an expression of their identities and lifestyles rather than existing as institutional forms in their own rights. Thus, rather than conventional sports organised around governing bodies and formally constituted clubs, the new sports have no such structure nor continuity. Instead they comprise the collective activity of the participants, expressed in a myriad of forms and practices. As such, the types of research tools required include diaries, biographies, photographic and oral records, as well as the observation of events, gatherings and competitions (5.3).
- In shifting from a sport to a participant focus, Stebbins' work on serious leisure is a useful construct. Rather than the simple dualism of regular/occasional participant used in conventional data collection, Stebbins has proposed a number of categories that describe actions and understandings in a more comprehensive way. One example of this, developed from a study of the Welsh adventure tourism market, divides participants into four categories: samplers (first-timers who may then take up the sport); learners (those using the holidays to develop their skills); enthusiasts (the experienced regulars); and dabblers (those who have learnt the sport but only participate occasionally). New forms of this categorisation may be appropriate for describing lifestyle sports participation (5.4).
- The proposed research agenda for Sport England (section 6) comprises:
  - Data collection on participation in lifestyle sports: working from the Mintel findings, a large-scale exercise to collect lifestyle data from an age and demographically stratified sample of people (ie working with people rather than sports, to examine multiple participation and the ways in which sports participation helps interpret particular lifestyles);
  - Detailed categorisation of the participants, following Stebbins' work on serious leisure;
  - Small scale follow up work on specific sports (individual or group interviews), to tease out deeper levels of meaning and connections between sporting and other social practices;
  - Detailed work on the emerging cultural and governance structures relating to the principal lifestyle sports – how are practices regulated? How do people develop

skills? Is there organised competition – and if so how are the rules developed and enforced? What is the relationship between commercial and cultural interventions?

- Work on how to bring lifestyle sports into the policy arena, including examining the potential for new and different forms of engagement, consultation and deliberative participation in policy agendas. This would also include examining new ways in which governance structures – and governing bodies – could work with Sport England and other agencies.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Delineating lifestyle sports

Over the past 20 years there has been a proliferation of new sporting forms that have presented ‘alternatives’, and potential challenges to traditional ways of conceptualising and practising sport (Midol & Broyer, 1995; Rinehart, 1998; Wheaton, 2000). Examples of such activities are those sports that have been variously termed ‘action’, ‘new’, ‘whiz’, ‘extreme’ and ‘lifestyle’ sports. These labels take account of a wide range of mostly individualised activities, from established practices like climbing, surfing and skateboarding, to new activities like wake boarding, B.A.S.E. jumping and kite surfing.

While often characterised as alternative or even counter-cultural, lifestyle sports also have commercial and competitive dimensions. They are, for example, part of the landscape of ‘traditional’ achievement sports (sports like snowboarding, windsurfing and kayaking are included in the Olympic Games) and are subject to the same processes of sport commercialization. Events such as the X-Games, which include a range of sports such as skating, BMX, and sport climbing, are used as a strategy to attract youth audiences/consumers.

Nevertheless underpinning all forms of lifestyle sport are lived cultures that are fundamentally about ‘doing it’: about taking part. Participation takes place in spaces that often lack regulation and control. The sports tend to have a participatory ideology that promotes fun, hedonism, involvement, self actualisation, ‘flow’ (Csikzentmalyi, 1990), living for the moment, adrenalin and other intrinsic rewards. They often denounce, and in some cases even resist, institutionalisation, regulation and commercialisation, and tend to have an ambiguous – if not paradoxical<sup>1</sup> – relationship with forms of traditional competition. Most lifestyle sports emphasise the creative and performative expressions of their activities (Booth, 2003; Howe, 2003; Humphreys, 2003; Wheaton, 1997), establishing an aesthetic context in which one blends with one’s environment.

## 1.2 The significance of lifestyle sports

In May 2002, in a poll conducted by a ‘teen’ marketing firm in the USA, skate boarding star Tony Hawk was voted the ‘coolest big time athlete’ ahead of ‘mainstream’ mega-sport celebrities such as Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods (Layden, 2002). If Jordan’s status comes even close to Nike’s 1999 claim that he is ‘the most recognized person in the world’ (McDonald & Andrews, 2001: 21) then lifestyle sport’s profile and ‘cool

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<sup>1</sup> Windsurfing, for example, is an Olympic sport, yet only a very small minority of participants use the type of craft sailed in the Olympic competitions. The Olympics is not considered the pinnacle of the sport by most participants. The types of ‘funboard’ competition presided over by the Professional Windsurfing Association, including slalom, freestyle and waves is more popular with spectators, although still has a low take up among participants.

factor' marks it as a major player in the youth sports market, in the USA at least. In the twenty-first century there are claims that lifestyle sports are attracting an ever-increasing number of participants, representing a wide range of experiences and levels of involvement. Yet participation figures are hard to establish, precisely because of the informal and counter-cultural context of the sports. Claims about the popularity of lifestyle sports are thus supported by equipment sales figures which suggest, certainly for the USA, that lifestyle sports purchases are outpacing the growth of a number of 'big league' traditional sports including baseball (Beal & Wilson, 2004).

Moreover, it is not just the U.S. market that is seeing such a growth, nor is it just among teenage and young men. In the UK, it has been claimed in newspaper articles that surfing has become one of the fastest growth sports at the turn of the twenty-first century, particularly among women, and men in their 30s and 40s (Asthana, 2003; Tyler, 2003; Walters, 2002). Similarly, kayaking and canoeing are fast closing on angling as the most popular forms of inland watersport in the UK (University of Brighton Consortium, 2001; Mintel, 2000).

Sports such as snowboarding and surfing may not seem to have significance or widespread potential for the public, particularly when represented as discrete activities, their significance measured only in terms of rates of participation. Yet collectively, their position in relation to other sport practices on the broader sport spectrum is, socio-culturally, highly significant. While each lifestyle sport has its own specificity, its own history, identity and development pattern, they all share a common ethos *distinct* from that of traditional sport. In these sporting cultures, the main emphasis is on 'grass roots' participation; individuals invest a high degree of commitment in time and money. They identify themselves through recognisable styles, expressions and attitudes that develop in and around the activity. In practical terms, these activities represent avenues for sporting participation and social engagement for men and women, young and old, who have been alienated by traditional school-based and institutional sport practices (Wheaton, 1997; 2000; 2004).

### **1.3 Sport policy research and the exclusion of 'alternative sports'**

To date, research on lifestyle sport has tended to focus on how individuals construct identities in these sporting cultures, the impact of commercialisation, and the experiences of minority groups such as women. These studies have been predominantly qualitative in nature, and thus have explored local subcultural spaces and settings. Research has been most prevalent in North America (see Rinehart & Sydor, 2003; Kay & Laberge, forthcoming; Thornton, 1998). In Australia, there is an increasing amount of research on surfing and climbing (Booth, 2001; Kiewa, 2002; Lanagan, 2003), with the latter also the subject of research in Brazil (Marinho and Bruhns, 2005, forthcoming). In the UK, research in this field is limited, but some work has been conducted on windsurfing, surfing, climbing and skateboarding (Borden, 2001; Abell, 2001; Wheaton, 1997, 2000, 2004), mountain biking (Ravenscroft, 2004) and watersports (particularly kayaking)



(University of Surrey Consortium, 1999; University of Brighton Consortium, 2001; University of Brighton, 2004).

Some comparative research does exist, but serves to highlight the paucity of accurate data on most lifestyle sports. To date, however, no research – by academics or policy analysts – has focussed on lifestyle sport and its implications for national sport policy. Sport policy in England has set ambitious targets for physical activity and sport participation (As outlined in *Game Plan* and the *National Framework for Community Sport in England*) with a strong focus on youth. The achievability of these targets is largely dependent on the ability to understand and demonstrate change within the sport sector, and to connect to external public policy priorities. However there is little evidence that solely encouraging traditional forms of sport will lead to the growth in participation required to hit the targets. In this context, recognising the diversity of sport cultures and practices that exist outside of traditional sport provision has become increasingly relevant to policy analysts.

Yet, at present, there is little indication of how many people participate in lifestyle sports, nor who they are, nor the extent to which they are different from those already known to participate in other sports and physical activities. For example, it has been estimated (Mintel, 2000) that up to 2 million people participate in canoeing and kayaking each year, although less than one-fifth of these belongs to the British Canoe Union. Little is currently known about who the bulk of these participants are, nor what other activities they participate in.

#### **1.4 The emerging lifestyle agenda for sport policy**

While recognising that sport alone will not address the Game Plan targets, the Government clearly views it as a central element of the policy, particularly in fostering a positive attitude towards physical activity. This has resulted in a reorientation of public financial support for sport, with national governing bodies (NGBs) being tasked with promoting and increasing participation in their sports. However, there is little evidence to suggest that NGBs and their affiliate clubs are suited to, or equipped for, this role. Their principal interests (legitimated by public funding) have conventionally been in governance, training and competition for skilled and elite performers, with encouragement to new entrants largely being in the form of junior memberships and access to training schemes and the like. Thus, NGB activity and membership is predominantly unrelated and - crucially - unsuited to the more spontaneous and informal activities characterised by lifestyle sports. Engaging young people in these less regulated new sport activities could have an important impact. Likewise, lifestyle sports have the potential to attract sections of the community that have turned their back on traditional organised forms of sport. Accordingly, there is a need to broaden the definition – or at least conceptualization – of ‘sport’.

Issues of relevance to policy makers thus include:

1. Why do young people choose sports that exist outside of the 'mainstream' policy provision? Why are attempts to promote or institutionalise lifestyle sports likely to be met with resistance?
2. Who takes part in these activities and what are the barriers to access and inclusion? How do traditional barriers operate in these non-regulated cultures?
3. What are the issues around the use and regulation of open space?
4. How do current national sport policies impact participation in lifestyle sports?
5. Does citizen participation in lifestyle sport contribute to the goals of UK sport participation strategies?
6. How might Sport England seek to engage with, or make policy interventions in, lifestyle sports?

## **1.5 Research objectives**

The broad aims of this report are to explore the significance of lifestyle sport culture to national sport policies. Specifically it will:

- 1) Develop a lexicon of lifestyle sports;
- 2) Explore the governance of lifestyle sport;
- 3) Analyse the current and potential implications of lifestyle sport to government policy objectives and processes;

## **1.6 Research methods**

The report is based on a desk study of available evidence about lifestyle sports in the UK. It consists of conventional published material, recent research undertaken for Government, market analyses and trend data, internet searches, trade and lifestyle magazines and personal contacts with youth workers, probation officers, physical education professionals and others.

## 2 The Construction and Meaning of Lifestyle

### 2.1 Lifestyle: the significance of the concept

There is a long-established recognition that the concept of lifestyle challenges any over-determining notion of class, by suggesting that social hierarchies and divisions could be based upon status as much as economic categories of class. This was of course (one element in) the challenge that Weber was laying down to Marx. In more contemporary sociological thought and cultural studies, lifestyle has come to be a conceptual signpost to forms of social and cultural life in which consumption (rather than production) has come to the fore as the primary source of social identity. So a person's chosen consumption activities express a selected lifestyle, regardless of their identity or socio-economic status.

In *Consumption, identity and style*, Tomlinson (1990) showed how, in the simplest of ways, the aura of the commodity has become more important than the functional purpose of the object or the activity: "... those who live in modern societies will use a notion of lifestyle to describe their own and others' actions. Lifestyles are patterns of action that differentiate people." (p. 4) Lifestyle or action sports are surely about this – about how you look, what your subcultural choices and affiliations are, what forms of control you can take over your own life (and against formal bureaucracies or sports organisations). In their informal ways action/lifestyle sports can be as excluding and self-serving as the most elite sport or leisure clubs (see Tomlinson, 1979).

In his work on lifestyles, Chaney (1996) overviews debates on consumer culture and lifestyle uses, and prioritizes the symbolic dimensions of lifestyle: symbolic exchange, symbolic capital and symbolic process. He claims that lifestyles "undermine the initial three characteristics of modernity" (p. 159), which are:

- i) secular ideologies articulating social conflict based on class consciousness, and a search for social explanation that is itself a (Lyotardian) form of grand narrative;
- ii) nation-state and community-imagined forms of nationalism; and
- iii) the centrality of the public sphere (based on 'impersonal rational discourse', in Habermas' language).

In their place are new forms of social identity which consist of:

- i) *Choices* – people themselves identified the attitudes values and tastes that were/are significant to them (p.10);
- ii) *A Cultural, consumption or leisure* base to these choices; and
- iii) *Patterns, affiliations or sensibilities* that characterise these personal choices.

For Chaney, consumption refers to all that people do that they don't do 'for a living' (p. 14). It "necessarily includes the social patterns of leisure which I shall characterise as new expectations for the control and use of time in personally meaningful ways." (p.15) So consumer culture and a leisure economy have 'constitutive significance' for "modernity and the social affiliations of lifestyles" (p. 15), with youth being extended and opened up across genders (p. 27):

"The significance is captured by an appreciation of how new symbolic forms of status (that is lifestyles) exemplify interdependent aspects of identity. That is, how social actors understand themselves as identities that are both parts of new types of networks of 'we' and 'us', necessarily differentiated from 'they' and 'them', and as individual entities that simultaneously have a separate and unique existence. Lifestyles therefore provide a set of props for the person we would like to be that are comprehensible in the spaces and places we inhabit." (p. 119)

Thus, lifestyle is used here as a broad umbrella term referring to various aspects of identity and identification with sport(s). Identity is associated with wider patterns of consumption, taste and distinction. For example, the emphasis on clothing and footwear, music, and particular (subcultural) codes of behaviour. Of particular importance is the concept of individually chosen lifestyles, which emerge from consuming the right products, e.g. trainers, logos, equipment, which remain heavily inter-linked with the sport(s). This is not a novel feature as 'conspicuous consumption' is strongly linked to the need of certain individuals and groups to distinguish themselves from others (see Veblen, 1899). Veblen wrote over a century ago of the need for members of the 'leisure class' to cultivate taste, to be able to discriminate between consumer goods, to look and feel the part – "the gentleman must consume freely and of the right kinds of goods, there is the requirement that he must know how to consume them in a seemly manner. His life of leisure must be conducted in due form" (Veblen, 1899, p.64). In contemporary terms, participation in lifestyle sports is "about living life through your sport. The sport and its associated lifestyle define who you are, introduce you to a set of like-minded people and give you exclusive membership of a fashionable youth sub-culture" (Mintel, 2003a).

A further acknowledged element of lifestyle sports is the notion of elite or style leadership and with it the notions of agency and innovation. Lifestyle sports have been noted for their rate of change and innovation, where new challenges are sought. Yet, a central feature is the linking of these innovations to individual elite participants. There is an element of entrepreneurialism at work here, certainly a playfulness, with individuals creating new moves, equipment, and sports in order to satisfy their own interests and the demand for new and extreme experiences. Some creative participants (e.g. the snowboarder Jake Burton, in-line skaters Anjie Walton and Arlo Eisenberg, and skateboarder Tony Hawk) have gone on to make it big in their respective sports (Rinehart, 2000, p.509), with the latter, Hawk, widely to be acknowledged as a style icon and in some surveys second only to David Beckham in terms of his cultural influence. It could be argued that figures like Hawk deploy their skills, ability and enthusiasm for the

sport and gain a cultural capital, which can translate into an economic capital and status at the top of their respective sports where they assume a leadership role.

According to Rinehart (2000), however, there is a distinction between cultural and economic capital, or what also could be described as the professional and amateur standings of the participants. Many do the activity for intrinsic reasons, for the excitement and thrills it gives them, for the internal goods to be gained through participating. This problematises, for some, the nature of these activities as 'sport' because of the high levels of commitment, dedication and immersion into the activity. For these individuals, a recoiling away from interpersonal competition is noted.

## **2.2 Understanding Lifestyle Sports**

There is now a body of academic literature that examines the phenomena of what have been variously termed 'extreme', 'alternative,' 'lifestyle' 'whiz' 'action-sports', 'panic sport', postmodern, post-industrial and 'new sports.' Such labels encompass a wide range of mostly individualised sporting activities, from established practices like surfing and skateboarding, to new emergent activities like B.A.S.E. jumping and kite surfing. While these labels are used synonymously by some commentators, there are differences which signal distinct emphases or expressions of the activities.

The academic literature and thus 'labelling' of these sporting activities emerged in the early to mid 1980s with Nancy Midol's analysis of 'new sports', based on what she terms the 'whiz' sports movement in France (Midol 1993). Midol and Broyer (1995) developing Midol's (1993) earlier work, argue that a sporting movement developed around the 'whiz sports' which constitute new sport forms, and new communities based on them:

This culture is extremely different from the official one promoted by sporting institutions. The whiz sport culture is championed by avant -garde groups that challenge the unconscious defences of the existing order through which French society has defined itself for the last two centuries. These groups have dared to practice transgressive behaviours and create new values (Midol and Broyer 1995: 210).

In North America the idea of 'alternative sport' was adopted (Rinehart 1996, 1998a; Humphreys 1997; Beal 1995), although the 'extreme' moniker quickly became prevalent, as an all-embracing label, particularly in popular media discourse, and most significantly in the emergence of ESPN's eXtreme Games, later renamed the X Games (see Kusz this volume).

The meaning of alternative sport has been most systematically considered by Rinehart (Rinehart and Sydor 2003; Rinehart 2000, 1998a, b). It includes an extremely wide range of activities - in fact pretty much anything that doesn't fit under the Western

‘achievement sport’ (Eichberg 1998) rubric. Rinehart (2000: 505) lists activities ranging from indigenous folk games and ultimate fighting to jet skiing, SCUBA diving, beach volleyball, and ultra marathoning, also embracing various media spectacles such as the X Games. A number of commentators have also debated whether these activities are more appropriately (or usefully) conceptualised as forms of play rather than sports (see Stranger 1999; Howe 2003), and have highlighted the importance of their artistic sensibility (Rinehart 1998b; Wheaton 2003; Howe 2003; Humphreys 2003; Booth 2003).

However, to understand their *meaning* we need to move beyond simplistic and constraining dichotomies such as traditional versus new, mainstream versus emergent, or other related binaries such as sport versus art. Alternative sport, and so called ‘mainstream’ sport, can have elements of - to use Raymond Williams’s (1977) categorization - residual, emergent and ‘dominant’ sport culture (Rinehart 2000: 506). As Rinehart suggests, the difference between, and within, these sport forms is best highlighted by a range of debates, concerning their meanings, values, statuses, identities and forms. For Mintel (2001), meaning lies in the connections that people make between themselves, the activities and the environments in which they participate:

Ask any extreme sports participant and they will tell you that their sport is more than just a sport – it’s a state of mind and a way of life. Its about challenge, adventure and pushing the boundaries. Sometimes it involves competing against others, more often it involves challenging your own limitations and pushing them to the max. Its about meeting and sharing your enthusiasm for your sport with a like-minded group of people and its about fun, challenge and excitement.

Despite differences in nomenclature, many commentators are agreed in seeing such activities as having presented an ‘alternative’, and *potential* challenge to traditional ways of ‘seeing’ ‘doing’ and understanding sport (Rinehart 1998b; Wheaton 2000a; Midol and Broyer 1995). Historically as Bourdieu (1984) has observed, many ‘new sports’ originated in North America, particularly in the late 1960s, and were then imported to Europe by American entrepreneurs (what he calls the ‘new’ and ‘petite bourgeoisie’). With their roots in the counter-cultural social movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Midol and Broyer 1995) many have characteristics that are different from the traditional rule-bound, competitive and masculinised dominant sport cultures. Maguire (1999) for example, suggests that the emergence of these sports (he cites snowboarding, hang-gliding and windsurfing) and their challenge to the achievement sport ideology is evidence of the increase in the range and diversity of sport cultures, a ‘creolization of sport cultures’ (87, 211). Bale (1994), likewise submits that such activities present a challenge to the ‘western sport model.’

Lifestyle sport is less all-embracing than the terms alternative or new sport; and although many lifestyle sports are often called extreme sport, the latter tends to be the way the

mainstream media and marketers, rather than the participants themselves see them (Sky 2001). As Rinehart (2000: 508) notes,

Some practitioners - and writers - have disputed the very term 'extreme' as merely a blatant and cynical attempt to capitalize on a wave of oppositional sports forms, and, by doing so, for corporations such as ESPN to appropriate trendy oppositional forms.

This is not to suggest that the media are not central to understanding the experience or cultural significance of lifestyle sports. Rinehart makes a convincing case for the increasing influence of the electronic media in determining the shape of what he calls the 'alternative sportscape' (Rinehart 2000). Lifestyle sports take many shapes, including at the elite level being part of the landscape of 'traditional' sports (witness snowboarding in the Olympic Games), the X-Games (activities include a range of board sports including skating, snowboarding, and sport climbing- see Rinehart, 2000), and increasingly as a marketing tool for advertisers attracting youth audiences. Nevertheless underpinning these forms are lived cultures that are fundamentally about 'doing it', about taking part. Participation takes place in local subcultural spaces, spaces that are often quite 'liminal' (Shields 1992) lacking regulation and control, and the sports are performed in ways that often denounce -or even resist -institutionalisation, regulation and commercialisation.

### 3 Conceptualising Lifestyle Sports

#### 3.1 Modelling Lifestyle Sports

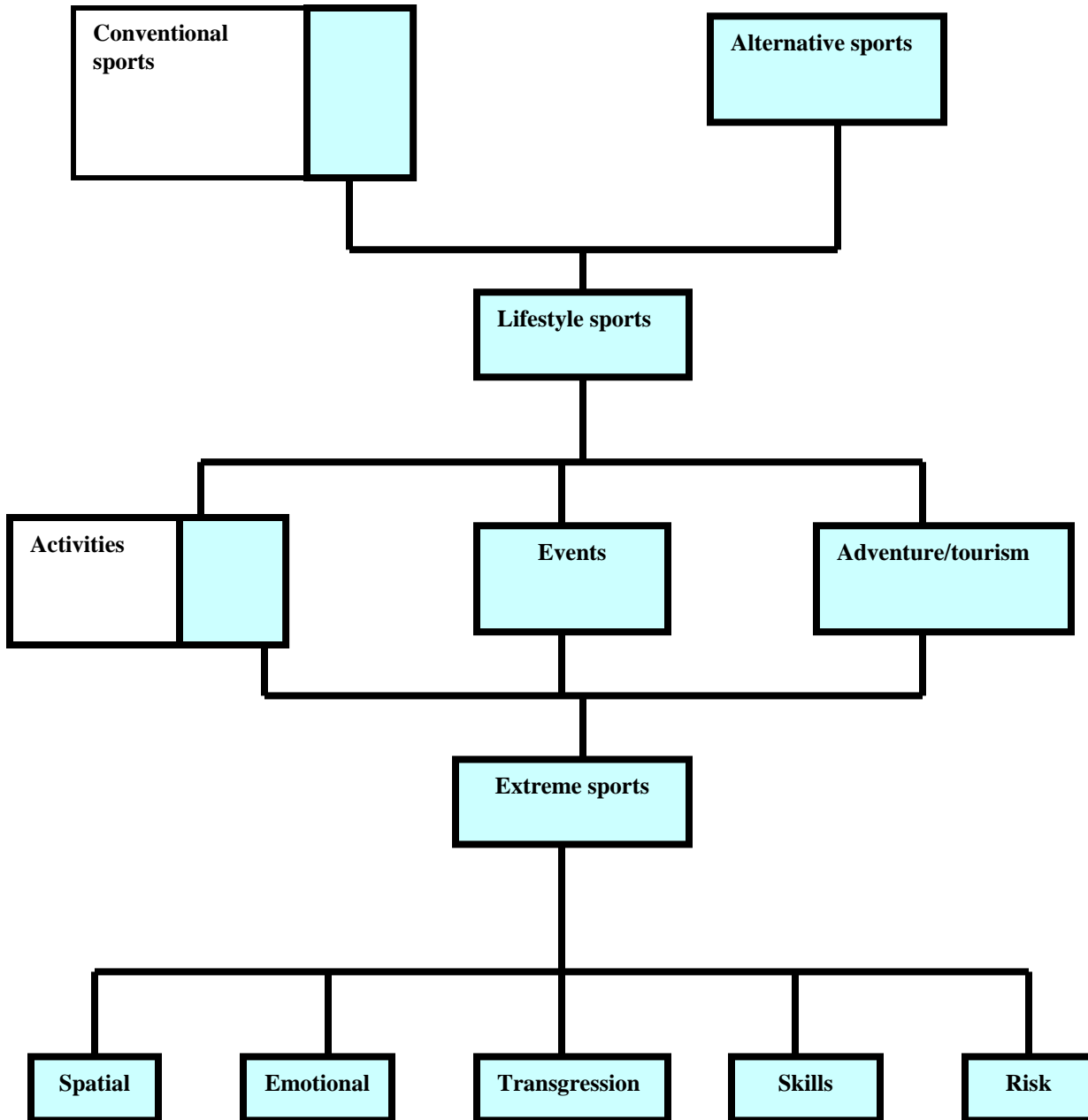
From section 2 it is apparent that there are overlapping terms and meanings that have been applied to lifestyle sports. However, what emerges are three central concepts:

- ‘alternative’ (practiced in different ways to conventional sports and incorporating descriptions such as ‘new’, ‘post modern’ and ‘post industrial’);
- ‘lifestyle’ (meanings related to personal factors beyond success in competition – although not denying that competition can be an element of the practice of lifestyle sports, and incorporating descriptions such as ‘action’, ‘wizz’ and ‘panic’ sports);
- ‘extreme’ (a label given to some aspects of practice associated with risk-taking; also associations with branding and commodifying some aspects of practice);

The first of these descriptors refers to the institutional structures in which participation takes place. These are contrasted with the conventional regulation of sport, although it is recognised that the boundary between these two constructs is far from certain. The second and third concepts refer to the practice elements of the sports, with ‘lifestyle’ denoting a broad taxonomy of practices, many of which can be (or are) practiced in an extreme way. As Figure 1 illustrates, lifestyle sports consist of all alternative and some conventional sporting practices, the latter comprising conventional activities that have been reinterpreted as lifestyle practices (the reinterpretation of Olympic sports, for example). Lifestyle sport itself is divided into three core areas: general activities, events and adventure tourism, all of which can be practiced as extreme sports (note here that the activities category is sub-divided since not all lifestyle sport activities are necessarily extreme – this may equally be the case for events and adventure tourism, but is not illustrated in Figure 1). At the bottom of Figure 1 it is indicated that extreme sports can be understood from five distinct (but not mutually exclusive) categories: spatial locations; emotional responses; transgression; skill requirements; and danger/risk.



**Figure 1 Lifestyle Sports**



### 3.2 Alternative sports: issues of governance

In contrast to the regulation of conventional sports, one of the core tenets of alternative sports is a relative lack of regulation, or a customary refusal to follow regulatory codes. In the conventional sector, regulation is generally a function of legislation and statutory and voluntary codes enforced by National Governing Bodies (NGBs), which are themselves financed and regulated by Sport England. However, it should be recognised that, in many conventional sports, the majority of participants are not members of NGBs and do not necessarily follow the codes established by them. In addition, it is largely the case that legislative regulation is limited to issues of public safety and child protection (see Appendix A for an example of the regulation of adventure activity centres).

Despite these external regulatory regimes, some sports have a long history of resistance to forces of institutionalisation. Mountaineering, for instance, has no substantial governing bodies, no written rules, and no means of enforcing the socially constructed and socially accepted rules that do exist. Instead, there are strict cultural conventions that govern the practice, which are learnt and adhered to as part of an individual's socialisation into the activity. Important in this respect are the relationships of trust between participants, with more experienced and trained individuals acting as mentors or guardians to the less experienced. So, although safety, sporting and performative norms exist, there is an uneasy relationship to rules. As Ward (1996b, p.2) writes,

“Climbing is a game without rules. Many people can't handle that. So they put their trust in ever more seductive technology, blindly follow their guidebook grading or utterance, no matter how daft. If the only rules is that there are no rules, then following the rules can get you killed.”

Reinhart (2000) has also noticed a paradox involved with lifestyle sports. Despite these forms of regulation for novice participants, and voluntary codes of conduct, those who seek to operate at the extremes and become elite participants increasingly feel a need to push the boundaries, to take more risks. There is both a commercial element at work here (to secure sponsorship and patronage by performing at an elite, record-breaking or maximal level) and also a desire to set the new standards for the sport itself. There could also be a principle of maximin welfare or excellence that operates in lifestyle sports, in that through the efforts of elite individuals the wealth of the community of practice improves for all, especially in adding to the traditions of the sports and in providing new avenues of risk or thrill for other participants.

Although information about the governance structures of alternative and lifestyle sports is incomplete, the current position for a number of sports is set out in Appendix B. As this shows, there is a considerable range of governance formations and structures, from small associations in development to arms or departments of major NGBs. There is equally a broad range of issues covered by these structures and formations, from putative codes of

conduct to (most usually) competition structures. This is very much an emergent area and one that is in need of further monitoring and research (see below).

### 3.3 Classifying Lifestyle Sports

In its first market research and intelligence report on lifestyle and extreme sports, Mintel (2001) subcategorised lifestyle as one of five categories of ‘extreme sports’. By the publication of the successor report, *Extreme Sports, Leisure Intelligence, November 2003* (Mintel, 2003a), however, the categories had been collapsed to reflect the particular locations or spaces for participation, with lifestyle featuring as a broad explanatory and subcultural background to the emergence and development of these various sporting forms (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 The Mintel Extreme Sport Classification, 2003**

Land-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BMX</li> <li>• Mountain biking</li> <li>• Motocross</li> <li>• Skateboarding</li> <li>• Snowboarding</li> <li>• Extreme skiing</li> <li>• Inline skating</li> </ul>
Watersports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wakeboarding</li> <li>• Surfing</li> <li>• Windsurfing</li> <li>• White-water rafting</li> <li>• Canyoning</li> </ul>
Air based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BASE jumping</li> <li>• Bungee jumping</li> <li>• Sky surfing</li> <li>• Hang gliding and paragliding</li> </ul>

Notable by their absence in these reports are canoeing and kayaking (especially white water), and various categories of yachting (land, sand, ice), which have featured in the academic literature (Rinehart, 2000).

A more comprehensive approach has been taken by Reinhart (2000, p.507), under the collective title of ‘alternative sport’ (2000, p.507) (Figure 3). These include activities that might be called ‘extreme’ or ‘lifestyle’ activities yet they are united under the ‘genus’ of the alternative through their opposition to ‘mainstream’ sport. This can be expressed as an ideological stance, or as a lack of broader public acceptance, even legitimacy, to the activities (Rinehart, 1998a, p.403). Included in the listing are activities which have featured recurrently in the ‘adventure tourism’ market, which involves participation in active or adventurous outdoor activities, either as a primary or secondary purpose of a holiday or day visit” (Keeling, 2003). The listing and hierarchy suggested by Rinehart thus conveys the breadth and complexity of the field. It also indicates an important organisational schema: many of the activities listed have well-established and regulated conventional forms, out of which new lifestyle activities have been carved; in some cases

these new activities are extreme, or have extreme forms; and in addition to these redefinitions, some sports have been created specifically as lifestyle sports, with no conventional antecedents (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**      **Categorisation of Lifestyle Sports**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>Mutants</b>
Climbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ High-altitude mountaineering</li> <li>➤ Solo climbing</li> <li>➤ Ice climbing</li> <li>➤ Indoor climbing</li> <li>➤ Rock climbing</li> <li>➤ Sport climbing</li> <li>➤ Abseiling</li> <li>➤ Bouldering</li> <li>➤ Sea-level traversing</li> <li>➤ Coastering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ BASE (buildings, antenna tower, span, earth) Jumping</li> <li>➤ Extreme ironing</li> </ul>
Caving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pot-holing</li> <li>➤ Mine exploration</li> </ul>	
Motorised watersports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Water-skiing</li> <li>➤ Ribbing</li> <li>➤ Wakeboarding</li> <li>➤ Jet skiing</li> <li>➤ Powerboat racing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Barefoot waterski jumping</li> </ul>
Wind-powered watersports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Windsurfing</li> <li>➤ Dinghy sailing</li> <li>➤ Cruiser sailing</li> <li>➤ Yachting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Speed sailing</li> <li>➤ Endurance sailing</li> <li>➤ Trifoiling</li> <li>➤ Ocean yacht racing</li> <li>➤ Kitesurfing</li> </ul>
Wave/ water-powered watersports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Body boarding</li> <li>➤ Surfing</li> <li>➤ Rafting</li> </ul>	
Muscle-powered watersports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Canoeing</li> <li>➤ Kayaking</li> <li>➤ Dragon boating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Canoe polo</li> <li>➤ Play canoeing</li> <li>➤ Whitewater kayaking</li> <li>➤ Open water swimming</li> <li>➤ Deep water swimming</li> <li>➤ Snorkelling</li> <li>➤ Underwater hockey</li> </ul>
Diving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ SCUBA diving</li> <li>➤ Free diving</li> <li>➤ Deep water diving</li> </ul>	
Motorised land sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 4x4 driving</li> <li>➤ Enduro biking</li> <li>➤ Motocross</li> <li>➤ Rally driving</li> <li>➤ Quad biking</li> </ul>	
Non-motorised land sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Skateboarding</li> <li>➤ Snowboarding</li> <li>➤ Land yachting</li> <li>➤ Street luge</li> <li>➤ Rollerblading/ in-line skating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ice yachting</li> <li>➤ Ice sailing</li> <li>➤ Mountainboarding</li> <li>➤ Sandboarding</li> <li>➤ Speed skiing</li> <li>➤ Barefoot snowskiing</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Parachute skiing</li> <li>➤ Mono skiing</li> <li>➤ Extreme skiing</li> </ul>
Air sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Hang-gliding</li> <li>➤ Parachuting</li> <li>➤ Microlighting</li> <li>➤ Gliding</li> <li>➤ Paragliding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ High wire</li> <li>➤ Ski flying</li> <li>➤ Soaring</li> <li>➤ Air chair</li> <li>➤ Para bungee</li> <li>➤ Heli-bungee</li> <li>➤ Hot air balloon epics</li> </ul>
Cycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Trail riding</li> <li>➤ Downhill riding</li> <li>➤ BMX</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Speed biking</li> <li>➤ Bicycle polo</li> <li>➤ Bicycle stunt</li> </ul>
Other land-based activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Orienteering</li> <li>➤ Gorge walking</li> <li>➤ Canyoning</li> <li>➤ Bungee jumping</li> <li>➤ Rope courses</li> <li>➤ Parakarting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ultra marathoning</li> <li>➤ Ultimate fighting</li> <li>➤</li> </ul>

(Keeling, 2003; Rinehart, 2000; Anderson, 1996)

### 3.4 Events

Some of the sports listed above are present in media-friendly and commercial sporting events, particularly those events included, since 1995, as part of ESPN's Summer and Winter X Games. The following are included:

- Skateboarding (street and both single and doubles vert; and, as exhibitions, downhill, women's halfpipe and off-road skateboarding);
- In-line skating (aggressive, street, vert and vert triples, and downhill);
- Sky surfing;
- Street luge (dual and 'Super Mass Street' events);
- Extreme Adventure Race;
- Bicycle stunt (flatland, dirt jumping, street, single and doubles vert);
- Barefoot waterski jumping;
- Wakeboarding;
- Sportclimbing (difficulty and speed);
- Snowboarding big air
- Super-modified shovel racing
- Ice climbing
- Snow mountain bike racing
- Crossover slopestyle snowboarding
- Snocross (snomobiles racing)
- Free skiing

In the UK competitions are on a smaller scale, and tend to be arranged as ‘festival’ type events, with the presence of retailers and manufacturers (see Mintel, 2003a). Events of note include:

- **Urban Games** (Clapham Common), with skateboarding, BMX, inline skating and mountain biking as key events
- **The Gold Coast Oceanfest** (north Devon), devoted to a range of lifestyle sports including skateboarding, surfing, kitesurfing and parakarting
- **National Adventure Sports** weekend (Shepton Mallet), for motocross, BMX, skateboarding and snowboarding
- **World Skateboarding Championships** (London, Docklands Arena), held in August 2001

### 3.5 Extreme sports

#### 1. *Spatial dimensions: extreme locations – wilderness, remoteness, the forbidden*

This includes the objective attributes of land and other physical features (e.g. waves, boulders, rock faces, caves, cliffs)

- Snow and ice environments (extreme skiing, snowboarding, ice yachting, ice climbing, glacier safaris, arctic treks, cross-country skiing, dog-sledging, snowshoeing, wilderness experiences)
- Hills and canyons (mountain biking, hang gliding, canyoning, abseiling, paragliding, caving)
- Islands (sea trekking, wilderness experiences, SCUBA diving)
- Mountain ranges (mountaineering, mountain boarding, skiing, snowboarding, ski tours, rafting)
- Rivers (canoeing, rafting, caving, abseiling, rock climbing)
- Volcanoes (volcano boarding, mountaineering)

There is also a psychological sense in which the wilderness or remote environmental landscapes feature. What is valued, beyond the physiological interest in the sporting activity, is the mental state the environment adds to the sport: feelings of awe, experiences of beauty. This is not only related to natural environments but also urban spaces, where physical features can be interpreted as part of the experience in the activity, for example skateboarding (see Borden, 2001)

#### 2. *Emotional dimensions: extreme pleasures*

This category refers to the psychological states induced by the sports. This can take the form of an adrenaline rush, but certainly denotes an intense sensory experience. Extreme sports are conceptually akin to what the French sport philosopher Roger Caillois has called vertigo games, which promote and/or induce repressed bodily and emotional

feelings (spasm, seizure, shock) commonly sought for their own sake and involve a “simple intoxication with the permeation of terror and anxiety” (Caillois, 1961, p.95). These vertiginous activities involve “aberrant disciplines, heroic feats accomplished to no purpose or profit, disinterested, mortally dangerous and useless, they are of merit in finishing admirable witness, even if not generally recognised, to human perseverance, ambition, and hardness” (ibid., p.138).

These elements are therefore linked to the particular personal satisfactions and sensory and bodily experiences people derive in the course of partaking in the activity. Perhaps this notion could be extended further to include activities that are of value to mental states (happiness, satisfaction), value to self-realisation (awareness of other humans, the body and the joy of embodiment), and a wider or holist sense of self, Self-realisation, where the individual becomes one with the environment, akin to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) notion of ‘flow’ (see also MacAloon and Csikszentmihalyi, 1983).

Elias and Dunning (1970) provide a general explanation by suggesting that mimetic leisure activities, like extreme sports, facilitate the release of instinctual, affective and emotional impulses, offer an experience of intensity, involve a degree of risk and represent “the quest for excitement in unexciting societies”.

### 3. *Transgression: beyond the norm*

Although related to other aspects, there is a central place for the element of transgression. Firstly, in challenging our notion of sport as based around competition and (relatively) safe bodily practices. As Donnelly (1981) writes,

“Risk of death is somewhat of an anathema to the very concept of sport since sport is generally considered to be an aspect of the non-serious side of life. Consequently, the vertigo sports which involve a risk of death are intriguing, particularly since modifications in equipment which are designed to increase safety in the sports do not lead to fewer accidents but to increased performance.”

Secondly, lifestyle sports can be considered to be liminal or liminoid spaces. The term liminal, derived from *limen* (the Latin for threshold) is a highly adaptable term but has been used to denote a transitional phase and a challenge to regular norm-governed social relations (see Turner, 1967; 1974; 1977; 1982). In this case extreme sports could be considered to challenge ‘mainstream’ sport and offer an alternate social/sporting space. Features to be noted include the linking of participants by a perception of shared emotional states, and an alternate organisation of social relations, akin to what Turner calls *communitas*, which is the type of loose, unstructured sociality or ‘togetherness’ that prevails in times of crisis (Turner, 1977, pp.96-99).

Thirdly, whilst many extreme sports transgress social rules and norms they also establish restrictive sport rules and subcultural codes to ensure the safety of participants. In free diving and solo climbing, for instance, which go beyond the officially-sanctioned advice

of the general governing bodies, safety precautions are taken in performing the activity, and in the case of the former an extensive medical infrastructure is present to reduce the risk of death (see Midol, 1999). There is a tension, however, in reconciling a competitive ethos, which may be driven by commercial demands, with the requirement for personal safety which limits an individual's own capacities and may result in an under-performance (see Palmer, 2004). Fourthly, there is also a transgression of scientific theories of the human capacity and a medical interest in the achievements of individuals in extreme locations (e.g. in the sponsoring of mountaineers by medical organisations to climb at high-altitude).

Lastly, legal extremes should be considered as a mode of transgression. This would take into account activities like 'radical rambling' and 'bandit canoeing', where the participants do not recognise or tolerate barriers to their participation and trespass, either knowingly or in ignorance. Where the former is concerned this could be considered as a matter of civil disobedience. Research conducted into canoeing (University of Brighton, 2004) found the presence of 'bandit canoeists', who claim a 'right' to paddle beyond inland waterways where participation is permitted through public rights of navigation or formal access agreements. In other locations canoeing takes place without the agreement of owners or occupiers and may as a result constitute a source of considerable conflict between paddlers, anglers and landowners.

#### *4. Extreme physical ability and difficulty*

These activities also include the requirement of technical competence, in that individuals must calculate the effort, time, distance and skill required for the completion of the performance. All of these activities involve a relationship to a piece of technology or machinery that needs to be mastered in order for sporting prowess and the experience of thrill or vertigo to accrue. For some activities (parachuting, gliding) specific licences are required in order to participate, whilst for others entry to the sport is often through individuals who have obtained accredited qualifications of competence (e.g. canoeing and kayaking, mountaineering). Where technology is absent (e.g. in ocean or deep water swimming) high-level skills are required which would take years of practice, dedication and training. Under this broad sub-category a further distinction can be made between skilled and unskilled or less-skilled inputs. Knee boarding, for instance, is considered less skilled than waterskiing, mountain biking less so than stunt biking, touring canoeing less so than white water canoeing. There are also differences in the socially necessary time needed to complete the activity (e.g. difference between high altitude mountaineering and sport climbing).

#### *5. Danger and risk*

As seen in the media reactions to the deaths of Alison Hargreaves (climbing), Steven Hilder (Sky diving) and Dwane Weston (BASE jumping) and accidents to other participants (e.g. Eddie Kidd in stunt motorcycling) these activities are associated with risk to life and limb. However, another paradox is present which has militated against public reactions, namely that risk may be officially sanctioned if it brings national



prestige, whilst condemnation is more likely if a life is lost in pursuing the activity for commercial gain, entertainment and spectacle (Donnelly, 1981; Palmer, 2004).

High-risk leisure practices are a feature of contemporary society. Efforts to explain this phenomenon in sociological terms have tended to concentrate on the cathartic properties of risk-taking in the context of modernity and the uncertainty inherent in the current rapid rate of social change and risk as part of an embodied outdoor experience. Ward (1996a, p.2) comments of climbing, for instance, that if it is a game worth playing “there must be something which can be won and something which can be lost. The winning can be the unutterable joy as your questing fingers latch a crucial edge. The losing can be life itself. Either way we choose.”

It would be misleading however to characterise these sports as solely about risk and facing death (especially climbing, deep diving, freefall parachuting, kayaking, caving, canyoning). Rather, there is an alternation of risk and responsibility, which, as Mazel suggests, is a hidden narrative which carries gender-connotations. He writes (1994, p.22) on climbing, for instance, that the sport’s most basic rhythm,

“is that of one climber advancing cautiously while the other tends the rope in order to safeguard her – an ethic of reciprocal caring and support that is always latent in the climbing experience but tends to be repressed in the mountaineering narrative, which traditionally attempts to embody in its place an outmoded ethic of personal glory, domination, and conquest.” (Mazel, 1994: p. 22)

Risk, therefore, (as part of individual motivation and satisfactions and the narrative of these sports) should be considered in relation to trust or responsibility (as part of the interpersonal and cultural norms governing the sport). For the governing bodies of some of these lifestyle sports the notion of managed risk or following approved codes of conduct is a key to their regulative function, particularly in protecting novices. For elite and serious participants these institutional securities offer little but other forms of security become more important – e.g. trusting knowledge, skills, nature, equipment, and colleagues.

### **3.6 Implications for future research**

As this section has illustrated, while the sociological and philosophical constructions of lifestyle sports may be relatively well understood and articulated, their practical implications are not. In particular, there are no universally agreed terms to describe the sports, no agreed categorisations through which to order and understand them and little in the way of governance structures to regulate them. There is clearly a need to address all three areas as a prerequisite to being able to delineate, quantify and analyse the area.

In commencing this it is clear that representative, if not governing, bodies are being developed. There is a need to study these in detail to determine what they offer (e.g.

licensing, competition authority, promotion and lobbying, local liaison, codes of conduct, etc.) and how they might be encouraged to develop. One idea might be the development (by Sport England) of a Lifestyle Sport Forum, to bring together the representative and governing bodies on issues such as safety, insurance, codes of conduct, events, cross-over events, sports development. There could also be an emerging role for Skillsactive, the Sector Skills Council, perhaps in developing its outdoor sport skill and training clusters, for example.

## **4 Participation in Lifestyle Sports**

### **4.1 Overview**

The principal source of information on participation is the Mintel market intelligence series (Mintel, 2001, 2003), which deals with what it terms 'extreme sports', but which actually reflects a relatively narrow interpretation of lifestyle sports. As such, the data must be treated as an indication of the likely position with regard to participation. The key findings from the Mintel series are that most participation occurs in the 15-24 age group, with decreasing interest after this age. The most popular sports for the 15-24 age group are snowboarding and BMX/mountain biking, while many also claim an interest in extreme sports in general.

However, the majority of those surveyed by Mintel do not participate (and are not interested in participating) in lifestyle sports. This can be seen in Appendix D, which suggests that only around 10% of the population are interested in participating at all (comprising approximately twice as many men as women, and having a relative over-representation of socio-economic groups A,B,C1,C2). Indeed, even in the most active age group (15-19 in Appendix D), less than half of the group is interested in participating in even the most popular activity (bungee jumping), while interest has declined to virtually nil by age 45.

According to a survey of attitudes conducted by Mintel (2001) 62% thought extreme sports were adventurous, 56% thought they were exciting and 41% thought they were only for the fit. Linked to this sense of adventure and excitement is a concern for safety, with 37% of respondents thinking extreme sports were unsafe. Mintel (2003a) also estimates that activity holidays involving extreme sports account for between 8% and 15% of the domestic activity holiday market, and between 15% and 22% of the overseas activity holiday market. This puts the estimated value of the domestic extreme sports holiday market at about £300 million and the overseas market at about £400 million in 2001 (Mintel, 2003a).

### **4.2 Participation rates for lifestyle sports**

#### **Youth**

In a survey of 11-14 year-olds it was found that rollerblading and skateboarding were the highest in terms of participation, for both genders, with just under one in five taking part in mountain biking. In terms of gender, both boys and girls were similarly placed in terms of participation in mountain climbing, whilst the other sports, except rollerblading, showed a uniformly higher interest for boys (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Extreme sports that 11-14 year-olds participated in, by gender, 2003**

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Mountain biking	22.7	13.3	18.1
Snowboarding	8.1	4.0	6.1
Mountain climbing	10.6	9.3	10.0
Skateboarding	27.5	13.8	20.8
Rollerblading	21.7	31.7	26.6

Taken from TGI Youth survey of 5,859 youths aged 7-19 years

(Source: Mintel, 2003a)

### Adult participation

NSO (2004, p.12) reports that the 2002 General Household Survey asked respondents whether there were any sports or recreational activities that they did not do but would like to do. In this statistic for demand, 5% of respondents stated that they would like to take up skiing and snowboarding. The survey also asked residents aged 16 and over about their participation in sports, games and physical activities and selected leisure activities (Figure 5). This indicates that over 65% of the sample undertook at least one activity at least once during the preceding year, with over 40% of them doing so in the month preceding the interview and over 30% of them doing so at least 4 times in the preceding month. However, this figure drops to below 15% of the sample who participate at least three times per week (12 or more times in the preceding month).

**Figure 5: Participation in sports, games and physical activities (2002)**

Active sports, games and physical activities	(a) participation rates in the 12 months before the interview	(b) participation rates in the 4 weeks before interview	(c) percentage who have participated in sports 4 or more times in the 4weeks before interview	(d) percentage who have participated in sports 12 or more times in the 4weeks before interview
Climbing	2.3	0.7	0	0
Canoeing	1.8	0.3	0	0
Windsurfing, boardsailing	0.9	0.1	0	0
At least one activity (except walking)	65.5	43.2	31.3	14.6

(Source: NSO, 2004)

Although extreme sports were not included in the trends in sporting participation statistics for 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996 and 2002, Figure 5 shows the relative popularity of each activity. It should be noted, however, that other lifestyle sports were not included as the survey concentrated on the main participation sports, games and physical activities

(walking, swimming, keep fit, yoga, snooker, pool, billiards, cycling, weight training, weight lifting, running, jogging, soccer, golf, tenpin bowls, tennis, darts, badminton, fishing, lawn and carpet bowls, squash, table tennis, horse riding).

The findings of this survey are confirmed by Mintel (2000), which found that, in the 12 months prior to March 2000, 3% of adults regularly participated in watersports (whether it was extreme or not, and what it included is not distinguished) whilst 8% did so at least once. For skiing/snowboarding, 2% participated on a regular basis and 4% did so occasionally, while for climbing 1% participated regularly and 5% did so occasionally. In a similar survey Target Group Index (TGI) surveyed sports participation by adults and in 2001 also used a distinction between regular and occasional sporting participation. No figures were given to suggest any cross-over participation (see Key Note, 2002, p.51). Occasional participation refers to partaking in the activity either once or twice a year

For water sports, taken to include motor-boat cruising, water-skiing or power boating, SCUBA diving, sailing, yachting, boating, canoeing and windsurfing, undertaken on holiday by British tourists in the UK (based on % of adults participating, 2001) 9% participated at one point in the activity, whilst 1% did so as their main holiday purpose (United Kingdom Tourism Survey, sponsored by the four National Tourist Boards, undertaken by BMRB – cited in Key Note, 2002, p.54). The report also mentions that some extreme sports, especially snowboarding, offer a substitute for those who participate in water sports in the summer. It also states that “there is an interesting overlap between snowboarders, surfers and so-called ‘extreme sports’ enthusiasts (e.g. BMX biking and skateboarding), who are all united by a ‘boarding’ lifestyle and look”. (Key Note, 2002, p.64).

All these data are recorded in Figure 6, which indicates that regular participation in the sports for which there are data doubled between 2001 and 2003, from the equivalent of 2.5% to 5% of the adult population. In contrast, occasional participation changed very little over the same period. No interpretation is offered about why this should be the case, and whether the doubling of regular participation represents a shift from occasional to regular participation, or new regular participants taking up the sports. In addition, there is no indication of how many actual people participate, given that some individuals may participate in more than one activity. The only sports for which some data exist are 1998 figures for watersports, collated by Mintel. These data suggest that 640,000 people regularly participated in windsurfing, and up to 100,000 regularly participated in water-skiing and in canoeing/kayaking (see Appendix C). However, the disparity between the figures for windsurfing and water-skiing seem sufficiently at odds with the percentages given in Figure 6 to cast some doubt on the reliability of these data.

**Figure 6: Penetration of popular sports and fitness activities (% of adults), 2001 and 2003**

	2001 regular	2001 occasional	2001 total	2003 regular	2003 occasional	2003 total
<b>Outdoor pursuits</b>						
Mountain biking	0.7	1.9	2.6	1.3	2.0	3.3
Climbing or mountaineering	0.5	2.0	2.5	1.0	2.1	3.1
Roller skating/blading	0.4	1.2	1.6	0.6	1.5	2.1
Extreme sports (BMX, skateboard)	0.3	1.0	1.3	0.8	1.2	2.0
skating				0.6	No data	
<b>Water sports</b>						
Surfing	0.2	0.9	1.1	0.3	0.9	1.2
Windsurfing	0.2	0.9	1.1	0.2	0.7	0.9
Water skiing	0.2	1.2	1.4	0.2	No data	
TOTAL*	2.5	9.1	11.6	5.0	8.4	13.4

\* note: totals relate to participation, not participants

(Source: Key Note, 2002; TGI, BRMB International, 2003 cited in Key Note, 2004c, pp.54-55.)

### 4.3 Future Trends

Mintel (2003a) has undertaken some market analysis of people's attitudes towards extreme sports and their likelihood of participating (see Appendix D for a summary of the findings). The analysis gives the percentage of potential participants in a range of sports according to different socio-demographic characteristics. The results suggest that about 12% of the adult population (c. 5.8m people) would like to participate in extreme sports. This is certainly an increase on present participation levels, although the extent of this increase cannot be determined from the available data. However, what Appendix D makes clear is the very narrow age-related appeal of lifestyle sports: the overwhelming majority of all interest is in the age groups 15-34. After this, interest drops to virtually nil. Appendix D also indicates that the prime characteristics of those interested in lifestyle sports are:

- Terminal age of education (19+ students have high participation rates);
- Marital and parental status (single people without children have high participation rates);

- Economic activity of local community (those living in ACORN classified areas B and C – affluent urban and suburbanites – have high relative rates of participation).

While these data are interesting, it is not possible to establish precisely how they were derived nor how they relate to other participation data. In particular, it is not clear what is inferred by ‘interest in participation’: does this translate to potential/latent demand, or some lesser concept related to desire?

#### **4.4 Lifestyle sports and the activity holiday market**

It is widely believed that lifestyle sports participation comprises a significant element of the activity holiday market. For example, in the University of Brighton Consortium (2001) report on water recreation, many interviewees commented that they only undertook watersports when on holiday, principally because of the better weather, the availability of equipment and tuition and a general impression that many British waters are polluted. There are a number of destinations that are of particular interest to thrill seekers who want to participate in lifestyle sports, most notably North America and Australasia. General destinations include:

Arctic circle (glacier safaris, arctic treks, cross-country skiing, dog-sledging, snow-shoeing, wilderness experiences);  
 Hills and canyons (walkers, cyclists, horse riders, abseiling, paragliding, caving);  
 Islands (sea trekking, wilderness experiences, SCUBA diving);  
 Mountain ranges (mountaineering, mountain boarding, skiing, snowboarding, ski tours, rafting);  
 Rivers (canoeing, rafting, caving, abseiling, rock climbing);  
 Volcanoes (volcano boarding, mountaineering);  
 Urban spaces (inline skating, street luge, BMX, skateboarding).

A number of reports (Mintel, 2003a; Key Note, 2004a) note a growth in the outbound package holiday market, driven by the development of niche consumer products which incorporate, or offer as a specialist interest, the chance to participate in lifestyle sports. Adventure holidays have grown out of an appeal to travel to unusual, exotic, remote or wilderness locations. They include a range of activities, most of which are outdoors, where various sporting pursuits can be followed, some tending toward higher degrees of danger, risk, and excitement; others toward more tranquil and less physically demanding activities. In both, however, a sense of personal pleasure, challenge and enrichment can accrue (Mintel, 2003b).

With respect to domestic activity holidays, between 1996 and 2001 1.9 million adults in Great Britain took an activity-based holiday. However, this statistic includes fishing alongside more ‘extreme’ or pursuits such as diving, rock climbing, motor sports and air sports. A further 2.1 million people took multi-activity holidays which offered a range of sporting experiences (Key Note, 2001, p.24). These activities are, however, undertaken by too few participants to permit any detailed analysis of consumer behaviour. Martin

and Mason (1993) estimated that 47% of adult activity holidays are based on sports participation and that 8% are based on watersports.

It is important, however, to differentiate between two broad types of activity experience: 'soft' and 'hard' adventure. According to Mintel's *Adventure Travel – Europe* report (2003b) 'hard adventure' involves activities with "high levels of risk that require intense commitment and a high level of skill from the traveller. This type of adventure travel is likely to appeal to travellers who search for an 'adrenaline rush' and thrive on an element of challenge, danger and risk both from the activity that they are undertaking and from the conditions under which they are travelling". Included under this category are activities such as abseiling, caving, canyoning, mountaineering, wilderness survival, white water rafting and sky diving.

'Soft adventure' involves activities where the perception of risk outweighs the real risk involved. The traveller tends to be a novice or dabbler with little to no previous experience. The element of self-discovery or escape features here, but higher levels of comfort are involved than with 'hard adventure'. Included here are activities such as diving, walking and trekking, cycling and sailing.

The size of the European adventure travel market is estimated as around 200,000 trips for independent adventure travel and 245,000 for package adventure holidays. This accounts for a total of 0.1% of all tourist trips in Europe. Great Britain accounts for 16% of this market, with 71,000 adventure travel trips to Europe (Mintel, 2003b). Mintel (2003a) estimates that activity holidays involving extreme sports account for between 8% and 15% of the domestic activity holiday market, and between 15% and 22% of overseas activity holiday market. It is further estimated that the value of the domestic extreme sports holiday market is about £300 million, with the overseas market, involving Britons, worth around £400 million in 2001. These figures are corroborated by those given by the United Kingdom Tourism Survey (UKTS) (see Keeling, 2003). Over 10% of holiday trips in the UK include participation in an adventure activity. However, included in this statistic are 'soft' activities like hill walking and cycling. These proportions are even higher for Scotland (15%) and Wales (17%). This is translated as 11 million UK holidays each year that include taking part in an adventure activity. However, the overall figure for adventure holidays for the UK is 4%, lower than that given by Mintel. Niche markets are developing both in the UK and Europe that offer a range of 'extreme' sport experiences, which are being marketed toward the 16-34 youth market (Mintel, 2003b). In the UK this age group accounts for 55-60% of adventure activity trips, yet participation is noted across the entire age range (Keeling, 2003).

This growing interest in lifestyle sport is shown in the development of multi-activity extreme sport centres in the UK (see Robathan, 2004). The following are of note:

Ex Parks (part of The Extreme Group) plan to develop a chain of leisure and retail facilities with skateparks and waveparks as their centrepiece, with extreme sport featuring strongly in a multi-sport, multi-media recreational experience. The company also plans to



offer consultancy services to councils and organisations seeking to provide facilities for extreme sports;

Adventure Concepts, a sports consultancy, is currently involved in the £500m redevelopment of 250 acres of Middlehaven by Tees Valley Regeneration, to include water-based sporting opportunities (surfing, wakeboarding, waterskiing) as part of a broader leisure and retail development. This is to complement existing white water and waterskiing facilities at the Tees Barrage.

Venture Xtreme has proposed to develop the Venture Xtreme adventure centre in Manchester, which will offer 20 'adventure sports' under one roof (e.g. an indoor climbing, an ice climbing wall, a cave system, and a surf centre). Again, this will be alongside other leisure and retail developments including: a travel agency, bars, restaurants, hotel accommodation and a health and fitness club with a swimming pool.

In Cardiff, work is due to begin on the £700m 'international sports village', to be completed by 2011, based around the themes of water, snow and ice.

Indoor snow centres are being proposed for Glasgow (Xscape) and Great Blakenham (SnOasis), which follow the success of the Tamworth Snowdome, which opened in 1994, and the recently opened Xscape Castleford.

## **4.5 Findings**

The most immediate conclusion to draw from these data is that information on participation in lifestyle sports is rudimentary at best. The definitions used are hard to determine and none give a comprehensive overview of participation. It is apparent, for example, that the decision about what participation counts as lifestyle or extreme is determined for each sport or activity, rather than according to how it is practiced. Thus, some sports that are legitimately considered to have lifestyle elements (canoeing and kayaking, for example) are not considered at all, while mountain biking is separated from the broader category of cycling on the apparent assumption that no other form of this activity constitutes a lifestyle pursuit. There are thus severe definitional limitations that are then exacerbated by seemingly contradictory findings, presumably caused by differing definitions and data collection methodologies.

The Mintel and Key Note data are useful guides for the areas covered, and indicate that most 'extreme' sports appeal to reasonably well-educated aspirant single young men (and in some cases young women). On becoming parents, or reaching 35, participation falls away, especially in the more demanding activities. This is certainly a generalisation, with activity in some areas of lifestyle sport (kayaking, sailing, climbing) continuing well into middle age and beyond. There is also evidence of a separation between regular participants and those who engage in lifestyle and extreme sports as part of their vacations. However, it has to be recognised that these data come from market research; their purpose is not to track participation nor to offer evidence of the extent to which

participants in lifestyle sports differ from those who participate in conventional activities. In these terms the data are invaluable, especially in recognising the links between age, gender, activity and interest. In terms of tracking the broader significance of these sports they are extremely limited and must be used with caution.

What the data clearly suggest, however, is that while being known as 'lifestyle sports', relatively few members of the population have lifestyles that include either interest or participation in them. Indeed, even in the most active age and educational groups and locations, participation does not rise above half the population (nor does people's stated wish to participate). In this respect lifestyle sports are remarkably similar to conventional organised sporting activities. For example, the 12% of the adult population who wish to participate in at least one lifestyle sport (using the Mintel data) represents about one-third of those who currently swim and about half of those who cycle – and the 12% is aspirational rather than actual.

A more reliable indication of the significance of lifestyle sports is reached by using the Key Note data on regular participation, which is low in all physical activities but relatively high in lifestyle sports. For example, the proportion of the adult population who are regular participants in mountain biking (the most popular regular lifestyle sport) is approximately the same as for most conventional organised sports other than snooker, golf, bowls, darts, football and badminton (which all have more regulars). It is also about the same as most conventional outdoor physical activities such as shooting, riding, sailing and game and sea fishing.

When added to the very narrow age band of participation in lifestyle sports, it is apparent that this type of regular commitment is highly significant. This is especially so given the conventional school-leaver drop out from sport and audited physical activity. Indeed, it seems apparent that lifestyle sports tend to enjoy high levels of regular participation and comparatively low levels of occasional use, suggesting that occasional participants progress rapidly to either regular or non-participation. Given the continuing decline in curriculum physical activity at school and the often limited availability of non-school sports activities, regular participation in lifestyle sports between the ages of 15 and 24 could be highly significant in terms of Government targets. It would also be interesting to know the extent to which these participants remain active in sport once they 'retire' from lifestyle sports – for there is no reason to believe that the sports literacy offered by these sports is any less valuable than that offered by the more conventional activities offered in schools.

However, this level of analysis is not currently possible given the lack of data. Indeed, it is not yet possible to ascertain even the most basic information about the participants in lifestyle sports – especially their participation profiles. For example, while there is some evidence about the popularity of multi-activity holidays, there is no indication of who is attracted to them (regulars, occasionals, or previously non-participants), nor how this relates to the number of different activities routinely undertaken by those involved in lifestyle sports. Indeed, other than some claims about the relationships between 'summer' and 'winter' sports (skateboarders being interested and participating in snowboarding)

there is little evidence - and even this is complicated by the fact that few people in England can engage in snowboarding as a 'regular' activity. The new breed of multi-sport venues will certainly allow more regular participation in 'winter' activities, which should provide some evidence of the extent of cross-over between activities.

## 5 Policy Implications

### 5.1 New understandings of signification, socialisation and participation

It is without doubt that sport and lifestyle are closely associated, both through participation and through association (it is no coincidence that David Beckham and Tony Hawk are global lifestyle icons in ways that used to be the preserve of film stars). The link here is consumption and commodification: the ways in which sport has been reconceptualised from a product of production and discourse to one of style and consumption. As such, it fits well with Chaney's (1996) thesis about lifestyles, in offering new ways to display style as lived experience – Wheaton's (2000) 'doing it'. It also connects with Willis' (1991) work on common cultures, particularly in offering an arena through which to challenge conventional institutional forms and understanding of bodily practices, through:

- i) relativizing taste, and so “acting as a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion” (Chaney, 1996: p. 133);
- ii) providing “a bridge between social and personal identities” (Chaney, 1996: p.134); and
- iii) having the potential to develop “an oppositional discourse” (Chaney, 1996: p. 133)

These points are crucial for thinking about the social significance and cultural profile of lifestyle sports. They also offer a prism for questioning how activities are (re)generated as lifestyle sports - this could be something to do with broadening access to the thrill of the jump or the race or the flight or the surf, to the public performativity of the sporting action. Yet, this sort of conceptual language has not come into participation analysis, certainly in ways that can then coherently inform policy.

There is clearly a need here to make links and engagement between sports studies and other social practices such as tourism and consumption. There is some evidence about the significance of activity holidays as a means of generating the skills necessary to participate in lifestyle sports – most people have their first taste of scuba diving and other water activities while on holiday, while many regular divers use short breaks to practice their activity in well-known or even hallmark locations (University of Brighton Consortium, 2001). The developers of the new multi-activity centres are clearly trying to capture some of this predominantly youth market, particularly by linking it to retail and other consumption opportunities (in the same ways that cinema, bingo and bowling operators have tried to capitalise on the retail boom).

The significance of these practices and venues certainly opens up fundamental questions about how people are socialised into particular sports and sporting practices. The University of Brighton Consortium (2001) work on watersports found that school and parental influences remained the dominant means of socialisation, with many young people embodying a range of sporting practices as a result of exposure to these

influences. The types of skill developed through practices such as sailing have proved effective in taking up new lifestyle sports such as skateboarding, as well as new watersports. However, very little is known in detail about how the socialisation process occurs in sports for which there has been no antecedent training or embodiment – yet such an understanding is fundamental to the formulation of policy and governance structures for lifestyle sports.

## **5.2 Data availability, collection and analysis**

As is clear from section 4, the quality of data available on lifestyle sports is poor. Most data that do exist were gathered as part of market research surveys – and often relatively small scale surveys at that. Little information is available on the reliability of the statistics generated from these data, meaning that the opportunities to develop policy on the basis of the data are strictly limited. Other sources of information, such as the representative clubs, is equally partial and poor, with few data available on club and individual memberships and participation. It is possible that more information could be gleaned from these sources, but no indication that it would add significantly to the picture already available.

As a result, the data that are available reflect numbers of participations in different sports rather than the overall number of people who engage in lifestyle sports. This is, of course, consistent with the way in which all participation data are collected. However, what does not exist at present is any indication of how many activities an individual commonly participates in, nor whether people who participate in lifestyle sports also participate in conventional activities and sports. This is a highly significant issue with the data, particularly for the highly participative category of 15-34 year olds. At present, the only safe conclusion to draw from the data is that nearly 50% of this age group would like to participate in one or more lifestyle activities. It could be that it is roughly the same 50% that identify a range of activities in which they would like to participate, or it could be that a considerably greater number of people each identify one or two activities. Understanding this dynamic is crucial to addressing Government activity targets, particularly if it can be linked with information about how many aspirants from this group are not currently active in other sports and activities that are already audited in connection with the targets.

## **5.3 The player not the sport**

What emerges strongly from this review is the continuing definitional problem about lifestyle sports. As section 3 indicated, lifestyle is a construct that relates to the ways in which individuals interpret their lives for themselves and for others. Participation in sporting practices may be – and is for some people - part of this interpretation. For many relatively affluent young people, an increasingly common interpretation is through what have been labelled ‘lifestyle sports’, understood as a set of largely individual practices performed outwith conventional governance and often competition structures (and often in conjunction with other consumptive practices such as retail or tourism). Thus, when

applied to sport, the label 'lifestyle' takes on multiple meanings relating to a mix of factors such as practice, location, emotion and resistance (Figure 1).

To understand lifestyle sports, therefore, it is important to start with the participants and their understandings, rather than to select a group of activities that are associated with (increasingly commodified by) certain types of lifestyle. This is where the market research data are most valuable. By identifying so clearly the socio-demographic profile of those interested in participating in lifestyle sports, the focus for future research is already clear. And it is an interesting group in terms of sports participation, since school leavers have conventionally been those who have ceased to play sport once away from the ease and compulsion of school provision. Of course, many of these will have become active in skateboarding, BMX and mountain biking while still at school, but largely through extra-curricula activities. It will be interesting, therefore, to examine how far this different socialisation into sport affects people's future patterns of participation.

Also potentially important here is the development and changing physical location of bespoke facilities for many lifestyle sports. While counter-cultural style might demand that activities take place in liminal spaces (the street, for example), many developers and local authorities clearly believe that there is a demand for a commodified form of provision, linked to spaces of consumption like retail centres. This association between physical spaces for retail and leisure is highly significant, since it has largely been driven by retailers trying to win back market share from internet and virtual shops. In such cases it is the lifestyles of the consumers that are more significant than the sports per se, with the developers intent on creating spaces that mesh with particular lifestyles and attract a clientele who, as an expression of their lifestyle, use the sporting facilities as well as the retail outlets.

#### **5.4 Understanding the participants**

With this emphasis on the participants rather than the sports, there is clearly a need to develop a cognitive structure within which they can be understood. The work on serious leisure, by Bob Stebbins (1992, 1997), offers one approach that has relevance to policy formulation. Stebbins' categorisations of serious leisure participants are particularly useful for unpacking the levels and meanings of identification with the activity. 'Serious leisure' is defined as:

“the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge” (1992, p.3).

This is counterposed against 'casual leisure', defined as “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins, 1997, p.17) Serious leisure therefore has a work-like character, involves the acquisition of skills, training and specialist knowledge and conveys a sense

of deep immersion into the activity. Stebbins (1992) expands this definition to take account of six qualities.

1. *the occasional need to persevere* – the notion of sticking with the activity through thick and thin, overcoming short-term obstacles and constraints, and conquering both internal and external adversaries
2. *tendency toward careerism* – where individuals gain a sense of achievement within the activity, are able to construct the activity as part of a personal narrative of success (or failure) and they may earn a small living from their participation
3. *significant personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training, or skill* – the idea that the ends of the sport can be achieved through discernible forms of training or education in the requirements of the activity, which tend to be gained through self-directed learning
4. *durable benefits* – which Stebbins lists as self-actualisation, self-enrichment, self-expression, recreation or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of the activity
5. *the development of a unique ethos* – or subculture around the activity. Participants construct a distinct ‘lifeworld’ and recognise its beliefs, norms, values, events, traditions, moral principles, and performance standards
6. *strong identification with the chosen pursuit* – “They are inclined to speak proudly, excitedly, and frequently about them to other people, and to present themselves in terms of these pursuits when conversing with new acquaintances.” One can also speak of a deep immersion into the activity where the participant sees the world through the ‘lenses’ of the activity.

These elements help differentiate the types of participant that might be labelled as lifestyle sports enthusiasts. Whilst sociologically interesting, these elements can also aid an understanding of the distinct personal and interpersonal goods derived from the activities and the ways in which insider or outsider statuses may be constructed and the degrees to which participation is stratified. Keeling (2003), in research into the Welsh adventure tourism market, for instance, differentiates the following, which align roughly to skills and commitment levels of participation:

- *Samplers* – people undertaking an adventure activity, or range of adventure activities, for the first time, either on a packaged multi-activity holiday or through a taster session. In many cases, participation in activities will be very much on an incidental and one-off basis, and will not be a factor in holiday and destination choice.
- *Learners* – people wanting to learn an adventure sport or activity, or develop their skills, with a view to future independent participation.
- *Enthusiasts* – experienced adventure sports participants, undertaking their chosen sport/s on a regular basis, including participation in competitive adventure sports events.
- *Dabblers* – people who have learned how to undertake an adventure activity but who participate only on an occasional basis.

Thus, rather than the regular/occasional dichotomy offered by market research, work on serious leisure and activity holidays offers an alternative construct that shifts the emphasis from activity rates to activity meanings (and consequent rates). Not only does this offer increasing sophistication, but it also aligns well with the central finding that policy development related to lifestyle sports should focus primarily on the individual participants rather than the sports themselves.

## **5.5 Overview**

Given the undoubted popularity of lifestyle sports among relatively affluent young adults, it is probable that some people who would otherwise seem to be inactive are in fact achieving the Game Plan targets, but through alternative and currently unaudited ways. From the data available it seems that lifestyle sports seem to attract a relatively large group of regular participants from a narrow age and socio-demographic background. Since most of these activities tend to be physically demanding, it is likely that most of the participation also has a positive impact on the health of the participants (discounting here the relatively high risk of injury attached to some ways of performing some of the sports). However, the extent to which these sports genuinely make an input to policy cannot be ascertained with any certainty until there are better and more consistent data on participation.



## 6 Research Agenda

This is clearly an area worthy of extensive and sustained research, on a number of levels. The principal areas identified in this report are as follows:

- Data collection on participation in lifestyle sports: working from the Mintel findings, a large-scale exercise to collect lifestyle data from an age and demographically stratified sample of people (ie working with people rather than sports, to examine multiple participation and the ways in which sports participation helps interpret particular lifestyles);
- Detailed categorisation of the participants, following Stebbins' work on serious leisure;
- Small scale follow up work on specific sports (individual or group interviews), to tease out deeper levels of meaning and connections between sporting and other social practices;
- Detailed work on the emerging cultural and governance structures relating to the principal lifestyle sports – how are practices regulated? How do people develop skills? Is there organised competition – and if so how are the rules developed and enforced? What is the relationship between commercial and cultural interventions?
- Work on how to bring lifestyle sports into the policy arena, including examining the potential for new and different forms of engagement, consultation and deliberative participation in policy agendas. This would also include examining new ways in which governance structures – and governing bodies – could work with Sport England and other agencies.

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## Appendix A: The Regulation of Adventure Activity Centres

The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) was set up in 1996 to issue licenses and carry out inspections of safety guidelines and procedures of *commercially oriented* adventure activity centres (a key arena in which individuals are introduced to some lifestyle sports). This followed legislation whereby it became a legal requirement under The Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995 for providers of certain adventure activities to undergo inspection of their safety management systems and become licensed. This licensing scheme only applies to those who offer activities to young people under the age of 18 years and who operate these activities in a commercial manner. The scheme exists to promote safety in the provision of outdoor activities to children, but also to provide an assurance to the public that the activity provider has been inspected and is operating to acceptable safety standards. There are important exceptions to be made, however. A license is not required for the following:

- Voluntary associations offering activities to their members (e.g. scout groups, local canoe clubs)
- Schools and colleges offering activities only to their own pupils or students
- Activities where youngsters are each accompanied by their parent or legally appointed guardian (does not include teacher or youth leader)

The legislation therefore exempts a series of groups and individuals from statutory cover. It recognises the freedom of voluntary and national organisations to offer the opportunity to members to participate on a non-commercial basis, and considers that the organisers and the parents of the young people involved in these activities should take responsibility for their own affairs. Voluntary codes of practice are encouraged though in the following: schools, colleges, scout groups, local clubs, national governing bodies (e.g. British Canoe Union, Royal Yachting Association). Licensable water sport activities include: canoeing, kayaking, dragon boating, wave skiing, white-water rafting, improvised rafting, sailing, sailboarding, windsurfing.

## Appendix B: Governing bodies

Sport	National Governing Body/ lead association	Brief detail
Ballooning	British Balloon and Airship Club  <a href="http://www.bbac.org">www.bbac.org</a>	The British Balloon and Airship Club, established in 1965, exists to promote the discipline of lighter-than-air flight. It offers a code of conduct for pilots and farmers and has a network of fifty local and regional BBAC Landowner Relations Officers, who work with the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Countryside Business and Land Association (CLA). It also offers inspection of balloons. Pilots are required to have a Private Pilot's License issued by the Civil Aviation Authority. Other licenses are required for commercial operation.
Bungee Jumping	The British Elastic Rope Sports Association (BERSA)  <a href="http://www.bersa.org.uk">www.bersa.org.uk</a>	The British Elastic Rope Sports Association (BERSA) is the governing body for bungee jumping. It was founded in the early 1980s to ensure the highest safety standards and provide staff training and club licensing. BERSA has working in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, who have an interest in risk entertainments, to produce a Code of Safe Practice, which offers a comprehensive safety system for the conduct of Bungee Jumping
Canoeing and kayaking	British Canoe Union  <a href="http://www.bcu.org.uk">www.bcu.org.uk</a>	Canoeing in England is represented by one governing body, the British Canoe Union (BCU), with its affiliate body, Canoe England. The BCU is responsible for the organisation of competition canoeing across a range of disciplines, and has an active coaching programme for both competition and non-competition paddling. The BCU is a small organisation consisting of just under 43,000 members and a few paid officials. Its regions are thus run voluntarily, and its river and access officers are, for the most part, volunteers. Many individual clubs are affiliated to the BCU, with all members covered by third party insurance and gaining the right to use BCU negotiated access agreements over private waters. There are also some clubs that are not affiliated to the BCU, or which have broken away from BCU affiliated clubs.
Caving	British Caving Association  <a href="http://www.british-caving.org.uk">www.british-caving.org.uk</a>	The British Caving Association is currently in development
Cycling	British Cycling  <a href="http://www.britishcycling.org.uk">www.britishcycling.org.uk</a>	British Cycling is the brand name of the British Cycling Federation, the internationally recognised governing body for cycling in Great Britain. This organisation oversees the sport and club development of different cycling disciplines (including the more 'extreme' variants of BMX, mountain biking and cyclo-cross), it selects



	or <a href="http://www.bcf.uk.com">www.bcf.uk.com</a>	national teams, administers racing licenses for competitions, and offers legal advice and third party liability insurance
Diving	British Sub Aqua Club	The British Sub Aqua Club delivers diver training programmes.
Gravity sports	UK Gravity Sports Association  <a href="http://www.ukgsa.com">www.ukgsa.com</a>	The UK Gravity Sports Association is the UK's leading body dedicated to promoting gravity sports. It is committed to bring a fully recognised national race series to the UK. The UKGSA run to the Gravity Bike Association rules for gravity bikes
	Gravity Bikes Association (US)  <a href="http://www.gravitybike.com">www.gravitybike.com</a>	The Gravity Bike Association (US) is dedicated to the preservation and growth of gravity bike downhill racing and has an interest in the development of the sport in the UK
Hang Gliding and Paragliding	British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association  <a href="http://www.bhpa.co.uk">www.bhpa.co.uk</a>	The British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association oversees pilot and instructor training standards, provides technical support such as airworthiness standards, runs coaching courses for pilots and provides an administrative infrastructure for UK hang gliding and paragliding.
Inline Skating	Aggressive Skaters Association (US)  <a href="http://www.asaskate.com">www.asaskate.com</a>	The Aggressive Skaters Association (ASA) is the international governing body of the fast-growing sport of aggressive inline skating. Although it is an American organisation it organises tours and championships throughout the world. Besides administering the development of inline skating on a global basis, the ASA owns and manages the worldwide competitive professional circuit, called the ASA Pro Tour. The British circuit of this international competition takes place every year at the PlayStation Skatepark in London
Kite Surfing	British Kite Surfing Association  <a href="http://www.kitesurfing.org">www.kitesurfing.org</a>	The British Kite Surfing Association governs the sport of kite surfing in the UK. The BKSA aims to promote safe kitesurfing practices, to publicise information about kite surfing, to help develop a recognised training scheme for beginners to instructors, provides 3 <sup>rd</sup> party liability insurance to members, and lobbies to maintain beach access for kitesurfers in the UK.
Kneeboard Surfing	British Water Ski	(See Wakeboarding below)
Motocross	Auto-Cycle Union  <a href="http://www.acu.org.uk">www.acu.org.uk</a>	The Autocycle Union (ACU) is the governing body of motorcycle sport throughout Britain. It is recognised by the Federation de motorcyclisme (FIM) as the British National Motorcycling Federation and was a founder body in 1904. Its main aims are to provide all participants in motorcycle sports with enjoyable, safe and competitive sporting action, to set the rules for the various aspects of the sport, ensure fair play and encourage the highest levels of safety standards. It has over 7,000 registered clubs divided into 20 centres throughout the UK.
Mountaineering	British	The British Mountaineering Council exists to protect the

	<p>Mountaineering Council</p> <p><a href="http://www.thebmc.co.uk">www.thebmc.co.uk</a></p>	<p>freedom and promote the interests of climbers, hillwalkers and mountaineers. It provides information on planning an expedition, expedition reports, waste management and cultural issues. It is also involved with negotiating access improvements and promoting cliff and mountain conservation as well as training and development. It has over 25,000 individual members and 25,000 club members.</p>
Open Water Swimming	<p>Amateur Swimming Association</p> <p><a href="http://www.britishswimming.org">www.britishswimming.org</a></p> <p>British Long Distance Swimming Association</p> <p><a href="http://www.bldsa.org.uk">www.bldsa.org.uk</a></p> <p>Channel Swimming Association</p> <p><a href="http://www.channelswimmingassociation.com">www.channelswimmingassociation.com</a></p> <p>Channel Swimming and Piloting Association</p> <p><a href="http://www.channelswimming.net">www.channelswimming.net</a></p>	<p>The Amateur Swimming Association is the English national governing body for swimming, diving, water polo, open water and synchronised swimming. It organises competitions throughout England, establishes the laws of sport and operates comprehensive certification and education programmes for teachers, coaches, officials and swimmers.</p> <p>The British Long Distance Swimming Association is the national governing body for long distance swimming</p> <p>The Channel Swimming Association, established in 1927, organises and regulates swimming of the English Channel.</p> <p>The Channel Swimming and Piloting Federation aims to promote long-distance swimming, assist, observe and authenticate crossings of the English Channel, offers a registration of recognised pilots and provides information, advice and guidelines in co-operation with the relevant authorities.</p>
Parachuting and Sky Diving	<p>British Parachute Association</p> <p><a href="http://www.bpa.org.uk">www.bpa.org.uk</a></p>	<p>In the UK, the British Parachute Association governs the sport of sky diving. This association was founded in 1962 to organise, govern and further the advancement of sport parachuting in the UK. It aims to encourage participation and promote excellence at all levels of skydiving from novice to world class competitor. There are around 35 affiliated parachute clubs in the UK with a membership of more than 30,000.</p>
Parakarting	<p>Parakarting Association (PKA)</p> <p><a href="http://www.pka-online.org.uk">www.pka-online.org.uk</a></p>	<p>The Parakarting Association (PKA) is the official governing body for parakart racing in the UK. Part of the Land Yachting Association, the PKA provides instruction, pilot licensing, third party liability insurance and race meetings for parakarters. It works closely with local councils, the community, manufacturers and other worldwide parakart clubs</p>
Roller Sports	<p>British Roller Sports Federation</p> <p><a href="http://www.brsf.co.uk">www.brsf.co.uk</a></p> <p>Federation of Inline Speed Skating</p>	<p>The British Roller Sports Federation</p> <p>Is the recognised governing body for UK roller sports, including speed skating, as acknowledged by Sport UK</p> <p>The Federation of Inline Speed Skating (FISS) is the internationally recognised governing body of inline and</p>

	<a href="http://www.inlinespeed.co.uk">www.inlinespeed.co.uk</a>	roller-skate racing in Great Britain
Sand and Land Yachting	British Federation of Sand & Land Yacht Clubs <a href="http://www.bfslyc.org.uk">www.bfslyc.org.uk</a>	The British Federation of Sand & Land Yacht Clubs (BFSLYC) represents sand and land yacht clubs in the UK at national and international level. It is a member of the International Federation of Sand and Land Yacht Clubs (FISLY). It officiates at a series of regattas, selects a team to represent the UK, offers 3 <sup>rd</sup> party insurance for its members and maintains links with local and national authorities, regional councils and English Nature.
Skateboarding	No NGB	
Skiing	Snowsport England	Snowsport England provides a coaching award scheme to coaches, instructors, performers and officials, which covers Nordic and grass skiing, organises events and competitions in Europe and the UK. Although predominantly concerned with skiing it also covers an 'extreme' discipline, speed skiing, as well as representing snowboarding.
Sky Surfing	No NGB	Sky Surfing does not have a UK-based governing body. Instead, Sky Surfing International (SSI), based in America, serves as the sanctioning and organising body for the sport
Snowsports	Snowsport England <a href="http://www.snowsportengland.org.uk">www.snowsportengland.org.uk</a>	Snowsport England provides a coaching award scheme to coaches, instructors, performers and officials, which covers Nordic and grass skiing, organises events and competitions in Europe and the UK. Although predominantly concerned with skiing it also covers an 'extreme' discipline, speed skiing.
Street Luge	Street Sled Sport Racers International (SSSPrint) <a href="http://www.oxfordstunfactory.com">www.oxfordstunfactory.com</a>	The Street Sled Sport Racers International has been set up by a group of enthusiastic Lugers, all members of Oxford University's dangerous sports club, the Oxford Stunt Factory. Its aim is to promote Street Lugging in the UK. Membership of SSSPrint entitles members to guidelines regarding the safe construction of a Luge, protective clothing requirements and race rules. SSSPrint also offers access to specialist equipment and insurance and organised races in the UK.
Surfing	English Surfing Federation <a href="http://www.englishsurfingfederation.com">www.englishsurfingfederation.com</a>  British Surfing	The English Surfing Federation, established in 1979, represents the interests of English surfers in Britain and abroad; aims to promote, maintain, improve and advance surfing and encourage friendly and sporting competition amongst English surfers; organises and oversees the running of the national championships; controls the English teams at British and international events and helps to maintain safety standards; liaises with the appropriate bodies to gain adequate protection of beaches and to assist those bodies to protect the environment for surfing enthusiasts.  The British Surfing association website lacks

	Association <a href="http://www.britsurf.co.uk">www.britsurf.co.uk</a>	information, but does offer a code of conduct for surfers, organises events and approves surf schools
Wakeboarding	British Water Ski <a href="http://www.britishwaterski.org.uk">www.britishwaterski.org.uk</a>	British Water Ski oversees the activities of affiliated clubs and aims to promote water skiing through these clubs who control the activity and make sure it is carried out safely and with respect to other users. The organisation does so through making available Codes of Practice. For competition in various disciplines (barefoot, kneeboard, wakeboard) participants need to be a member of British Water Ski and hold a competitive licence issued by the relevant divisional committee.
White Water Rafting	English White Water Rafting Committee	The English White Water Rafting Committee represents the sport of rafting from competition and training to access and the environment. In this way the Committee provides a valuable contribution to the British Canoe Union by bringing in new members and developing an increasingly more accessible river sport for both experienced canoeists and non-canoeists alike.
Windsurfing	Royal Yachting Association <a href="http://www.rya.org">www.rya.org</a>	The Royal Yachting Association governs the sport of windsurfing in the UK and has a specialist committee devoted to the sport.

(Sources: Mintel, 2003a and websites)

## Appendix C: Participation in Water Sports

There were an estimated 640,000 board sailors or windsurfers in 1991 (Leisure Consultants, 1991) making use of both coastal and inland waters. Board sailing enjoyed significant increases in the 1980s and declined steadily through the late 1980s with a small resurgence in the early 1990s. Mintel (1998) reported a slight reduction in board sailing in the UK between 1991 and 1995. The overall decline in board sailing may indicate a maturing and consolidation of the market, with a higher proportion of expert wind surfers and a reduction in casual participation. However there are fewer elite young windsurf racers nationally than in the late 1980s (Coalter and MacGregor, 1998). A new type of short but high volume board came on the market in 2001 and this may stimulate demand by making wind surfing easier for beginners. The stakeholders interviewed as part of a national study of water sports (University of Brighton Consortium, 2001) agreed with this notion of declining participation in windsurfing, although many felt that such a notion was hard to measure, as windsurfing is highly non-affiliated (University of Brighton Consortium, 2001), see Table.

### Participation estimates for a range of water sports in the UK

	Club members	Regulars	Occasional	Trends over time
Windsurfing	-	640,000	-	Down
Water-skiing	9,000	80 – 100,000	400,000	Static
Canoeing	35,000	100,000	500 – 1,000,000	Up

Source: Mintel (1998)

Estimates of participation in water-skiing vary from 70,000 – 80,000 (O’Dell, 1999) to 100,000 (BMIF, 1997) making use of both inland and coastal waters. In addition O’Dell (1999) suggests up to 400,000 people may ‘have a go’ each year. The British Water-ski Federation had 9,600 members in 2001, up from 9,000 in 1990. Wake boarding has recently become popular with young people and newcomers (in a similar way that snowboarding expanded alongside skiing) (University of Brighton Consortium, 2001) Another innovation is knee boarding, which has a lower skill threshold than water-skiing. Mintel (1998) reports that water-skiing is expected to grow as interest in activity holidays increases. There is significant interest from young people in water-skiing as a sport they might take up in the future (Anderson, 1996).

For canoeing, in terms of popularity, a survey conducted by the Environment Agency at the International Canoe Exhibition in 2003, white-water canoeing (25%) emerged as the predominant types of activity undertaken by participants, with 23% preferring canoe touring. Other types of ‘extreme’ activity include surf kayaking (14%) and sea kayaking (9%). However, the survey also found that older people had a tendency toward touring canoeing, which is less physically demanding, whilst younger people tended to seek access to white-water sites. Despite this division, both types of water were of equal

appeal to those within the 31-40 and 41-50 age categories (see University of Brighton, 2004).



## Appendix D: Future Participation in Extreme Sports

### Likely and future participation in extreme sports, by gender, age, and socio-economic group, August 2003

	White-water rafting	Sky diving	Snowboarding	Bungee jumping	BMX/ mountain biking	Motocross	Mountaineering	Inline skating	Skateboarding*
All	12	11	11	11	10	7	7	5	4
Men	14	15	15	13	14	11	10	4	6
Women	10	7	7	9	6	3	5	6	2
15-19	30	38	33	44	26	23	15	19	17
20-24	26	35	31	35	27	16	19	12	11
25-34	20	15	19	16	19	10	14	6	6
35-44	14	9	11	7	8	7	7	6	5
45-54	7	2	2	4	4	4	3	2	-
55-64	4	3	2	1	3	2	3	-	1
65+	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
AB	14	11	14	8	13	5	8	4	3
C1	16	13	15	13	12	8	10	6	6
C2	13	12	10	10	9	8	7	4	3
D	8	8	6	14	10	7	6	5	5
E	6	6	6	8	4	5	4	4	3

(Source: Mintel, 2003a)

\*Low sub-sample



**Likely and future participation in extreme sports, by special lifestage groups and terminal age of education, August 2003**

	White-water rafting	Sky diving	Snowboarding	Bungee jumping	BMX/mountain biking	Motocross	Mountaineering	Inline skating	Skateboarding*
Special lifestage groups:									
Pre-/no family	25	26	27	27	23	15	17	10	11
Pre-/no family singles	29	31	30	34	25	17	17	13	12
Pre-/no family couples	20	16	21	12	16	9	15	8	8
Pre-/no family working	25	21	24	23	24	14	15	9	8
Pre-/no family 2 earners	21	16	21	12	17	9	12	6	8
Parents aged under 35	13	12	12	13	11	9	7	7	4
Parents aged 35+	10	9	8	7	7	7	6	5	3
Terminal age of education									
13-14	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	1	1
15	5	5	3	5	3	5	2	2	1
16	10	9	8	11	10	9	6	4	4
17-18	11	11	11	9	9	5	7	5	5
19+	20	13	18	10	14	5	12	5	4
Still studying/full-time student	32	37	36	41	28	16	20	19	18

(Source: Mintel, 2003a)

**Likely and future participation in extreme sports, by region and ACORN categories, August 2003**

	White-water rafting	Sky diving	Snowboarding	Bungee jumping	BMX/ mountain biking	Motocross	Mountaineering	Inline skating	Skateboarding*
London	13	14	12	12	9	9	8	6	5
South	13	14	13	10	8	3	6	6	3
Anglia/Midlands	13	10	11	13	10	7	8	5	5
South West/Wales	11	9	11	9	9	8	6	4	3
Yorkshire/North East	10	11	10	10	8	5	6	6	3
North West	13	8	10	8	9	9	7	2	3
Scotland	12	7	8	12	16	4	7	3	6
ACORN categories:									
A – Thriving	9	8	7	7	8	5	6	3	2
B- Expanding	11	14	17	14	9	10	8	5	7
C- Rising	23	21	23	17	19	7	15	6	8
D – Settling	12	8	9	8	8	5	5	4	2
E – Aspiring	9	9	8	12	8	6	8	5	3
F – Striving	11	10	7	12	9	9	7	6	4

**(Source: Mintel, 2003a)**

*ACORN: A – Thriving; B – Expanding; C – Rising; D – Settling; E – Aspiring; F – Striving*