

'Soulriding' and the spirituality of snowboarding

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Thesis conclusion - "It's special but is it spiritual?"

The issue at the heart of this research can be expressed in the question "It's special, but is it spiritual?", from the interview with WA. What is it that makes snowboarding a spiritual experience for many of its participants? If it is spiritual for some, why is it not spiritual for others? This thesis has developed and explored a model of spirituality which helps to understand the answers to these questions. This model identifies the significance of context as the third dimension of spirituality alongside experience and identity. The model locates spirituality as a subjective frame of reality. In this chapter I will first summarise the argument I have made in this thesis, and consider whether the model is effective. I will comment on issues of constructionism and circularity within the thesis. I will then clarify how this thesis contributes to the sociology of religion. Finally, I will suggest areas of further research on the model of spirituality I have presented here.

Summary of the thesis

My research has examined the snowboarding concept 'Soulriding', to discover more about contemporary understandings of spirituality. The thesis started by introducing the three dimensions of spirituality (experience, identity and context), and the frame model of spirituality. It then situated the term soulriding in snowboarding culture. Next it examined some of the definitions of spirituality in a variety of disciplines. Classic accounts from the sociology of religion were used to identify the significance of context for spiritual experience. The dimensions were then developed using the paradigm of constructionism developed by Berger and Luckmann and used a term from Goffman to give an understanding of spirituality as a frame of reality. Elements of spirituality within each of the three dimensions were suggested within snowboarding. This theoretical model was explored in the understandings which experienced snowboarders have of their sport. The approach was that of interviewing snowboarders to find their understandings of soulriding. The results of these interviews were compared with the theoretical model in the four analytical chapters. Each of these stages will now be reviewed in more depth, and this part will conclude by considering whether the model is effective.

Why 'soulriding'?

Snowboarding is a relatively new sport with an increasing participation and some counter-cultural or sub-cultural association. Whilst the activity takes place in the same environment as skiing, snowboarding has its own culture and practice. This culture may be observed in assorted types of media, and products, and the associated cultural elements of norms, symbols, values, and language. Snowboarding has become not just a sport, but a "lifestyle" activity, one in which the products and "codes of behaviour" are as significant as the activity, and one can live life through one's sport. This places snowboarding in a small group of "lifestyle" sports, such as skateboarding and surfing.

Soulriding is a little used, but demonstrably extent, term within the vocabulary of snowboarding. The etymology of the term might suggest that there is some spiritual referent within it and it was the discovery of this term which was a particular prompt to investigate the connection between snowboarding and spirituality. As a little used term, there is no exact understanding of what the word means. Part of the aim of this research was to discover the range of meanings and to see what light this might shed on the understanding of spirituality within snowboarding and in wider culture.

Snowboarding is a particularly appropriate environment to study spirituality. It is not obviously a

spiritual context. It does not have any links with organised religion, and thus forms a good location for the study of the possibility of spirituality outside religion, yet there are features, including the term 'soulriding', which might point to a form of spirituality existing.

The nature of spirituality

The research is located in the debate about the nature of the term 'spirituality' within the sociology of religion. Whilst other disciplines have been working with the term spirituality for a number of years and have established working definitions, sociology of religion is engaged in a debate about how the term should be understood and its significance for the discipline. The study of spirituality within sociology of religion fits into a wider discourse around the topic of secularisation, and the future of religion, which has been the major theme of sociology of religion since its inception.

Consideration of two disciplines revealed some useful understandings. Within education there is a range of understandings of spirituality which generally focus on the psyche of every human being. This is in sharp contrast with the religious studies definition where spirituality is understood to be concerned with prayer and the life of faith. These understandings can be characterised by the dimensions of either experience or identity spirituality. Identity spirituality refers to spirituality as the essence of being human, whilst experience spirituality refers to a connection with some 'other', whether that is the divine, or the greater consciousness, or the ecosystem of which we are a part. Identity spirituality is generally understood as a universal spirituality, whereas experience spirituality is an individual, or communal, choice.

Within each disciplines there is a different history of the use of the term which is in itself revealing. The different disciplines have clearly defined the term spirituality in a way that fits their agenda. The difficulty with this is that the understanding from within the discipline is then presumed by members of that discipline to be a universal understanding, rather than a technical and restricted understanding. The education definition is shaped to include all students, irrespective of the personal beliefs of the individual. The religious studies definition is shaped to restrict the study of spirituality to that academy. Thus the definitions in use by the different academies are shaped by the agenda of each academy, and serve the interests of that academy. The education definition gives teachers a model for engaging with their role as social and moral educators in a pluralist environment. The religious studies definition functions as academic protectionism, denoting spirituality as the exclusive field of study for religious studies academics. A more recent area of development has been in sport and spirituality. Religion and spirituality are seen as resources to enable athletes to better achievements, thus locating the spirituality within the identity dimension. The growing work on flow locates the spiritual experience within the experience dimension.

There is an associated debate within the sociology of religion about the relationship between spirituality and religion. This is of course partially a debate about the meaning of each of these terms, both of whose meanings have been in transition over at least the last fifty years. This debate is focussed around the popular perception that one can be 'spiritual but not religious'. Sociology of religion has generally assumed, with religious studies, that spirituality is a sub-set of religion, but there is evidence that spirituality may be becoming the superset, or the complement, or a substitute term for religion.

Context and the frame model of spirituality

A consideration of three formative analyses of religion within the social sciences, those of James, Durkheim, and Weber, showed a focus on spiritual experience, and a disregard for the significance of context. James' work, although that of a social psychologist, was formative for all of the approaches to religion of his time. His particular genius was to focus on religion in the subject, the believer, rather than the object, the divine. He looked to the distinctive quality of religion and found the mystic state of

consciousness, which would correspond to a spirituality of experience. Durkheim picked up this theme in his work, and suggested that the “collective effervescence” experience was basis for the religious impulse. However, whilst Durkheim includes accounts of the experience in his work, he does not give the context for the experiences any significance. The contexts are transparently artificial, both through the use of man-made objects, and through the use of facets of the environment, like holding rituals through the night. Weber also focuses on ecstatic experience as the root of religion, and particularly includes both drugs and music as prompter for this experience. Of course, Durkheim and Weber take their theses in different directions from these common starting points.

The premise of this thesis is that the significance of context is overlooked in these theories. Context is not a neutral part of an objective reality, but is a constructed part of a subjective reality. James, Durkheim and Weber argue that religion emerges *a posteriori* from certain experiences. But the contexts are constructed *a priori* in order to provide a religious experience. A religious expectation is required for the experiences to have a religious significance. In other words religion is *a priori* to experience, as Otto (1923) suggests.

This understanding finds a theoretical background in the social constructionism of Berger and Luckmann, and a terminology in Goffman’s “Frame”. In this understanding, spirituality is a perspective, a set of lenses with which reality is viewed, such that it is itself a frame, a subjective reality. The spiritual is not located in what we see, it is how we see. It is part of a number of frames which humans, particular modern, urban humans use. This is an extension of Simmel’s understanding that “Religiousness is the fundamental quality of being of the religious soul” (1997/1911, p10).

Frame spirituality relates to both experience and identity spirituality. As I have suggested above, frames form the basis on which the experiences may be interpreted as being spiritual or religious. Frame also forms the basis for seeing the “essence of being human” as spiritual. This is more than a ‘simple’ contextualisation. This is the creation of reality. If constructionism can be defined as the reality construction activity of humans, then frame spirituality is a significant part of that constructionism.

The three dimensions of spirituality arise from this analysis. These three dimensions are context, experience and identity. The three dimensions may not all be explicitly present in any particular understanding or definition of spirituality. Each of the dimensions or the elements within them elements may or may not be framed as spiritual by an individual. Context is the external dimension, and includes those elements or aspects of spirituality which appear have an objective existence. This thesis has considered nature, freedom, risk, and play as contexts. Whilst the existence of the elements may appear to be objective, this thesis has also shown how the elements are socially and individually constructed. Identity is the internal dimension of spirituality. It involves the shaping of one’s sense of self. Here, community, lifestyle and meaning and purpose have been considered. Experience is the interface between the internal and the external. It is the dimension which is most commonly perceived as spiritual.

In the main body of this thesis, background theory was suggested for many of the ten elements. However, in this final chapter, the theoretical perspectives will be reviewed alongside the interview areas to which they relate.

Interpreting snowboarding as spiritual

The central question for this research started by being a general investigation into the relationship between snowboarding and spirituality and evolved in the light of the initial research into the following: “What is the spiritual content of ‘soulriding’ within snowboarding and how significant is ‘framing’ for this spirituality?” It is clear that this assumes both that snowboarding has a spiritual content, and that ‘framing’ describes a potential approach to this spirituality.

The research is located within a constructionist ontology because the theoretical structure of ‘framing’ is constructionist. Generally constructionism can be contrasted with realism, and there is an ongoing debate between proponents of these two views within the sciences. I have made the argument that the nature of this subject places it clearly in the scope of a constructionist approach. I have further argued that whilst there is a further debate on the actor/structure, constructivist/constructionist divide, this research clearly involves significant input from actors.

In order to gain understanding of an individual's subjective reality, the most effective way is to ask them. Such research is termed interpretivist, and a number of specialised areas exist within this general field. However, the generalised approach has an academic pedigree, and it is this general interpretivist approach that was adopted here. The research then is premised on a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology.

A pilot study was undertaken to establish both the content and structure of the method for the main study. By examining the various snowboard media it was possible to see that the term soulriding had a small, but distinct presence. It was also clear that overt references to spirituality were few within the mainstream media, although some associations were made. Unstructured interviews with three diverse sources helped to clarify the elements of spirituality which might be present within snowboarding.

The ten elements of spirituality which were derived through the pilot study formed the basis for semi-structured interviews with around thirty snowboarders from both the UK and Canada. The ten elements identified were, risk, freedom and escape, community, lifestyle, play, rhythm and flow, nature, peace, transcendence, and meaning and purpose. These ten were chosen to incorporate features of snowboarding which might also be construed as spiritual. For analytical purposes they were divided into three sections which reflected the three dimensions of spirituality identified above. The first group were those elements which provided a context for snowboarding. These were the context spirituality elements and in this type were nature, escape, risk, and play. Each of these elements emerged in the interviews as part of the mental approach of the snowboarders to their snowboarding. The second type was elements which consisted of some immediate spiritual experience whilst the snowboarder was snowboarding. These elements were flow, peace, and transcendence. The third type was elements which in some way contributed to identity, the elements concerned being community, lifestyle, and meaning and purpose. Whilst the pattern of responses to the second and third groups was varied, the pattern of responses to the first was highly positive, almost every snowboarder identified all of the elements in the context group as being significant for their riding.

The context dimension of spirituality

The central argument of this thesis is that for an element of experience or identity to be perceived as being spiritual, requires that element to first be constructed as spiritual. Spirituality, by this argument is an *a priori*, not an *a posteriori* aspect of those elements. Thus the context chapter included a number of elements which were demonstrably giving context to the other elements of snowboarding studied. Some of these elements, nature and escape, appeared superficially to be objective contexts, but can be shown to be subjective. The other two elements, play and risk, might be conceived as experiences, but will be shown to be approaches to experience, in other words mental contexts. It was notable that these four elements were highly significant for almost all of the interviewees.

In order to establish this it was necessary to show how context is constructed rather than objective. This is most clearly shown in the case of nature. MacFarlane's (2003) research shows the changes in the way that nature is perceived and thus of the construction of nature. For almost all of the subjects, nature was a significant and positive part of their snowboarding. The perceptions attached to this were repeated frequently through the interviews, and this suggested that a particular social frame was being rehearsed by the interviewees. I have termed this the ‘nature frame’. It is not unambiguous but is a

clear reflection of a societal discourse, and of the positive values attached to 'nature'. There were some snowboarders who viewed the resort environment not as part of the natural environment but rather as an incursion on the natural environment, however, this is still to evoke the 'nature frame'.

One element was used to express a pair of related ideas, those of freedom and escape. Freedom referred to the opportunities created by snowboarding, escape referred to the move away from the urban environment. The concepts were hard to distinguish within the interviews as interviewees would move from one to the other. The two are connected theoretically in conceptions of places that are "set-apart" where different rules apply. Again these elements were almost universally felt to be significant, and again, they seemed to tap into a particular frame which I termed the 'escape frame'.

The element of risk was one the interviewees felt more ambivalent towards. It was part of the snowboarding experience that the snowboarders had from the day they started, but it was not a positive part for most snowboarders, at least not at a conscious level. Most snowboarders were dealing with the risk element by suggesting that they were managing it effectively. This reflects part of the nature of risk as a social construct. Some welcomed risk as part of their experience, others expressed reservations about it. Giddens' conception of risk as a colonisation of the future is significant in seeing that even negative conceptions of risk may well be welcomed. They may enable snowboarders to feel that they are not victims of random events, but are active in deciding where and how they face risk.

Play was the final context element, and was conceived as a very positive factor in their riding. Again, this connected with the escape frame. Snowboarding enabled the interviewees to do something they were "not allowed" to do in the normal world, and this opportunity was significant to them. Play was theorised first through examining a variety of definitions, and then particularly as an educational activity and as a central feature of humanity in Huizinga's conception.

The experience dimension of spirituality

Spirituality experiences are those which have the most obvious connections to religion. In particular those experiences which can be termed transcendent. It was discussion about this type of experience on an email group which had been a prompt to this research. However, it was not expected that many interviewees would respond positively to this element as being significant for them in their riding. Thus transcendence was one of the last elements to be discussed in order that the interview might build to that point. It was surprising that a significant proportion of snowboarders described transcendence as significant, and for at least one snowboarder, these experiences were a main reason why they snowboard.

A less intense and more common experience was of having a sense of peace whilst snowboarding. This came in four distinct forms. For some there was a sense of peace simply because they were in the mountains. Although this was clearly an experience it also fitted into the analysis of nature as a frame. The sense of peace with nature explicitly combined these two. Again it was suggested, this time as part of the pilot study, that the connection with nature and the mountains was the reason that some people were involved in snowboarding. The other senses of peace were more connected with the escape frame. The sense of peace individuals had with themselves seemed to be based particularly on getting away, both physically and mentally, from the pressures of their everyday lives, whether the life was in the city or in the mountain resort. This escape could be transformative and therapeutic for some.

The flow experience was the most commonly valued element in this section. This was described in the interview question as being about rhythm and flow, but the responses of the interviewees clearly evoked the flow experience as expounded by Csikszentmihalyi. Each of Csikszentmihalyi's elements could be identified in the interviewees responses. This then provided the most directly experiential of the three experience elements. Of course this is not to say that the experience is unmediated. Elements such as feeling 'in control' again suggest a contrast which fits with the escape frame.

Associated with the experiences were two native terms, 'moments', and 'in the zone'. Both of these occurred repeatedly within the interviews, not as terms suggested by the interviewer, but as terms the interviewees used unprompted. The term 'moments' appeared to refer to particular times of perfect stillness, much as suggested by Csikszentmihalyi's suggestion of the transformation of time. Being 'in the zone' seemed to connect with have complete focus on the activity, such that all other thoughts appeared to be absent from one's mind. Both of these were highly attractive states of being for the interviewees.

Three categories of snowboarder did not connect well with the idea of snowboarding as an experience with spiritual elements. Those who were still in the process of developing their skills, and those whose understanding of snowboarding focussed on technical skill and aggression, found connecting with concepts of flow difficult. Those who had a strong conservative Christian faith were more likely to understand their faith as the only valid means of spiritual experience.

The identity dimension of spirituality

Themes of identity from sociology were discussed which suggest that the "reflexive project" of the self is a key issue for contemporary humanity in a greater sense than it has been in the past. The identity is not singular but plural, as Foucault shows, and leisure can be significant in these identities.

Community was discussed initially as a conflicted term within sociology, and then by drawing on Bauman's understanding of "cloakroom communities". This was contrasted with Maffessoli's model of neo-tribalisation. Both of these models emphasise the variety of communities in which urban living sites the individual, and with which the individual connects. The snowboarding communities are of three types. For many a significant element in their snowboarding is the opportunity to be part of a friendship group of like-minded individuals on holiday for a period, echoing Bauman's cloakroom communities. For others the wider snowboarding community provides a tribal identity in Maffessoli's understanding. This can be extended to the third type which is the culture, the shared values and ideologies. This was related both to Maffessoli, and to Thornton's work on subculture.

Lifestyle was distinguished from community by being concerned much more clearly with behaviour and patterns of life, even though the cultural aspects of community and the norms inherent in groups will obviously affect lifestyles. Snowboard lifestyle in the commercial understanding is the extension of the sport into a variety of products which consumers, even those who are not practitioners of the sport, can be invited to purchase. These products and the associated branding can often command significant profits because of their association with the sport. Two types of lifestyle were described as having particular associations for UK snowboarders. One is the seasonaires lifestyle of living through the winter in a ski resort, and thus compromising career and other life opportunities. The other is the weekend warrior, using available resources to snowboard as much as possible whilst maintaining a home-life and a career. Some Canadian snowboarders had taken the further step of moving to the mountains permanently. For many of these snowboarders snowboarding provided another important facet of their life, an alternative to the 'normal' rest of their lives. In this snowboarding was most clearly an identity element for them.

Although all of the snowboarders were highly committed to their sport there was for some a significant reluctance to describe the sport as giving meaning and purpose. In this there seemed to be an element of denial, as if it was not acceptable to themselves or to others for their lives to be structured around snowboarding. These would often describe snowboarding as 'just a hobby' and thus suggested the possibility of a 'hobby' frame.

A significant finding of this research was that the interviewees did not generally recognise the identity elements to be spiritual. This is in major contrast to the theoretical frames from education, which identified the identity dimension as either a or the primary understanding of spirituality. As has been

noted, many of the interviewees recognised the significance of snowboarding for them and for their identity. The elements within the identity dimension were accepted by many as important. However, they were not framing this significance as spiritual.

Spirituality and soulriding

The majority, around 75%, of the snowboarders interviewed felt that in some way snowboarding was spiritual for them. However, the qualitative patterns of response to the questions about the elements of snowboarding did not correlate to the response about whether snowboarding was spiritual. Individuals with the same patterns of response to the “elements” questions would be on each side of the “Spiritual” question. One quote seemed to sum this up - “It’s Special, but is it Spiritual? No” The question that the above quote raised was ‘what was it that made the experience Spiritual rather than Special?’. The research was not premised on any particular understanding of the term “spiritual”, and interviewees who asked for some definition were invited to use the term as they saw fit.

In the analysis of the interviews a narrative approach was taken which condensed the interviews down to look for the main themes of the interview and the connection between these and spirituality. Consideration of this in the UK snowboarders showed particularly well how the escape frame was significant in creating a sense of spirituality within the riding. The Canadian snowboarders had a wider set of understandings, but the escape and nature frame were again significant.

Consideration of the interview data suggested competing frames which inclined individuals to be less likely to find snowboarding spiritual. First were those whose riding focussed on technical competence of some kind, maybe riding fast or learning tricks. Second were those who had strong religious views, including strongly anti-religious views. These did not account for all those who did not see snowboarding as spiritual, nor were all of those in these categories opposed to snowboarding being spiritual, but the groupings were significant and suggestive. The individuals concerned did not necessarily dismiss the spiritual within snowboarding explicitly on particular grounds, although some did. What was clear was that their perception of the activity excluded the possibility that snowboarding might be spiritual. They suggest that perception of spirituality may be related to the assumptions which snowboarders have about their snowboarding.

It was interesting to note that gender and nationality (and, on the basis of one sample, race) did not seem to be a significant factor in the interviews except in the significance of community. Women and men held positive and negative perspectives on each element.

Attitudes towards ‘Soulriding’ reflect both understandings of the term ‘spiritual’ and attitudes towards snowboarding in general. Those who were dismissive of the ‘spiritual’ within snowboarding were also dismissive of the term ‘soulriding’, or understood it in a pejorative sense. Even for those who had positive associations with the term understood it in a wide variety of ways. Thus, probably because it is such an unused term, it is not clearly defined.

Does the model work?

The thesis started with the question "What is spiritual about snowboarding?" In order to answer the question, and for the reasons given above, I developed a two part model of spirituality, the three dimensions of context, experience and identity, and the concept of spirituality as a frame. This has been described in the first half of the thesis. The second half of the thesis applied the model in the culture of snowboarding, both to understand what is spiritual about snowboarding and to test the effectiveness of the model.

The results of the analysis show that a clear understanding has been gained of what is spiritual about snowboarding. Snowboarding has been demonstrated to be an activity with a number of elements which enable it to be framed as spiritual. These elements were from the context and experience

dimensions. No single element was uniquely significant. Particular among the elements from the context dimension are the societal frames of nature and escape. The flow element from the experience dimension was particularly significant, and the analysis demonstrated how this is framed rather than unmediated.

The use of the frame model uncovered competing and complementary frames. Particular complementing frames were the societal frames of nature and of escape. Particular competing frames were those of the techrider and of conservative Christianity. The tripartite division of spirituality into three dimensions uncovered the significance of the context elements in framing spirituality as spiritual. This is notable as it might have been expected that the experience dimension would have been most significant in any such framing. It also demonstrated the lack of framing of identity as spiritual, in spite of the significance of the identity elements for snowboarders. Again this is significant given the prominence some disciplines have given to the identity dimension of spirituality.

Thus the model has been demonstrated to be effective in gaining understanding of spirituality within a particular culture. The model is not intended to be predictive, but interpretive. It helps the researcher to structure research into a field of inquiry and to analyse the data from that research. It sensitizes the researcher to the particularities or situated nature of spirituality in different instances. Examples of applying the model will be given later

Original Contributions to knowledge

This thesis makes four contributions to the sociology of religion. Firstly, it identifies the existence of different understandings of spirituality in various disciplines and suggests that sociology of religion needs its own model. Secondly, it distinguishes between the main existent models of spirituality in the academies, and suggests that experience and identity form two dimensions of spirituality. Thirdly, it revisits the work of classic social scientists, and Durkheim in particular, to show the significance of context in religion. Context enables *a priori* the mystical experience at the root of religion. Through this it creates a particularly sociological model of spirituality, frame, and suggests context as a third dimension of spirituality. Finally, it suggests ways in which frames work as complements and competitors, and identifies two frames which contribute to that frame spirituality in this case, nature and escape. At the end of this section I will show how the model might be applied in three areas where the term spirituality has been applied. These will be in Christian spirituality, in the spirituality of yoga, and in the spirituality of wine.

Various definitions of spirituality

I have shown that the academies of education and religious studies have a different definition of spirituality. This would not be an issue in itself, if those definitions were self-consciously stipulative, and if there was a recognition that the definition was not universal and exhaustive. However, each of the academies has particular professional reasons for their definition which require that their definition is regarded as comprehensive. The definitions effectively create work both inside and outside academia for the practitioners of the discipline. This is not to decry the existence of these different definitions, but to recognise the situatedness of the definitions.

Sociology of religion has no such clear understanding. This perhaps reflects the contested nature of spirituality and the secularisation thesis within sociology of religion. The lack of a clear understanding of spirituality is resulting in further confusion, because protagonists within the debate can misunderstand and misrepresent one another. This is unfortunate at a time when both the terms spirituality and religion are changing in significance and meaning.

It is the contention of this thesis that a *sociological* understanding of spirituality would aid sociology of religion's engagement with the issue. Frame spirituality provides such an understanding. It is based on

sociological theory, that of the social construction of reality. It concerns two sociological themes, that of culture and of the balance between the individual and society. It allows a move beyond the vagueness of spirituality as defined in the object by locating it in the subject.

Experience and identity spirituality

The research above into the four academies showed two main understandings of spirituality within the academies surveyed. The experience definitions were concerned with spirituality as connection with the 'other' in some form and generally with a divinity. They involve some kind of experience or practice through which the connection is made. The identity definitions involved the human spirit and related human development. These were therefore often defined as universal to humanity, but may not be recognised by individuals outside of the academy as 'spiritualities'. Definitions were not necessarily confined to one of these, but might include elements of both. Neither of these understandings is inherently sociological in that they do not directly connect with sociological concerns. However, these have been the poles around which the sociology of religion has debated spirituality.

Context spirituality

Durkheim's work (along with James') has been shown in this thesis to include descriptions of spiritual experience which note, and then ignore, the context of that experience. These contexts are both directly and indirectly constructed, directly in that they were artifacts, indirectly in that humans were using natural phenomena to create an effect. This leads to the first theory of this thesis, that context forms a third dimension of spirituality. Certain contexts may be constructed as intrinsically spiritual. For example a Church building is for some a 'holy place', both in the sense that it is dedicated to religious activity and also that it is an environment in which adherents believe they encounter the divine. I have suggested that other physical contexts, such as 'nature', are also culturally constructed as spiritual. I have also identified non-physical contexts, such as escape, which have spiritual associations.

Frame spirituality and cultural frames

The second theory of this thesis is that spirituality is a frame of reality. It is mental framing of context that determines reality, and which enables or creates the spiritual experience. Spirituality emerges from this analysis as the frame, or perspective we have on reality. The frame model provides a simple yet effective way of considering spirituality and its relationship to other aspects of the individual's construction of reality. Through this thesis a number of other frames have been referred to which interact with the spirituality frame. Some of these frames have promoted, or complemented, the application of the spirituality frame, others have excluded, or competed with, the spirituality frame. I have identified two "frames" which particularly contribute to the frame that snowboarding is spiritual, these are the nature frame and the escape frame. Frames which have excluded the spirituality frame have been the hobby frame and, for some snowboarders, the play frame. I have noted that some of these frames appear to be more tightly constructed within society (for example the nature frame) than others (for example the play frame). I am also arguing that such pre-existent frames have been significant for the construction of a frame of 'spirituality' in this context. Other frames might be appropriate in other forms of spirituality, and a religious context in itself would form a frame, but the appropriation by the individual of such a frame is a necessity for the construction of a spiritual frame.

Frame spirituality in contemporary Sociology of Religion

This thesis examined understandings of spirituality within contemporary Sociology of Religion. At that stage of the thesis the main conclusion was to note the variety of understandings of spirituality which are current within the discipline. These were on both the experience and identity dimensions of spirituality. Particular attention was given to Wuthnow, Roof, the Kendal project of Woodhead and Heelas and Savage et al. It is now appropriate to revisit these understanding with the results of this research.

Wuthnow and Roof, writing from a US perspective identified a shift from a spirituality of Habitation to one of seeking or of questing. For both of these writers the focus remains in the identity dimension. Indeed Roof suggests a quadrant based on religious and spiritual identity. Given the ambivalence with which identity spirituality is received outside of particular contexts, I would suggest that the questing or seeking spirituality may be characteristic of a shift from the identity dimension to the experience dimension. Roof's discussion offers evidence for this. However, Roof finding that there is a large group of those who see themselves as "spiritual but not religious" raises further questions about this self identification of a spiritual identity. This may be a facet of a growing post-christianity within the US. Again this is a feature of which Roof finds evidence.

The work of both Woodhead and Heelas, and of Savage et al, raises questions of whom is framing an activity, or world view, as spiritual. I have already identified that Woodhead and Heelas are content to allow the provider to define the nature of the activity for the participants. I have also identified Savage et al's use of a stimulative definition of spirituality which allows the researcher to define the spiritual, rather than the subject. Savage et al's findings would seem to echo my own finding that outside of particular contexts, identity spirituality is not recognised by the subjects. This raises the question of whether it is appropriate to describe that aspect of identity as spiritual. I would suggest that the imposition of the spiritual as a frame of reality is itself an appropriate field of sociological enquiry, raising issues of power and of actor/structure balance.

It is worth re-emphasising at this point that this model of spirituality makes explicit some of the implicit direction that sociology of religion has been taking. In particular spirituality as frame fits with the social constructionist approach which Beckford (2003) applies to religion, which Woodhead and Heelas (2005) approach and which Guest (2007) suggests. Thus this approach to a core issue within sociology of religion merits further theoretical analysis and research. I will suggest some avenues for that research, however the next section will show the usefulness of the frame spirituality model through applying it to other areas of enquiry.

Applying the frame model in other areas

In order to demonstrate the value of the frame model of spirituality, I will briefly show how it might be applied in three fields of spirituality. I have chosen fields which are significantly different from snowboarding, these being Christian spirituality, Yoga, and the spirituality of wine. In each case I will identify elements within each of the three dimensions of spirituality and suggest how the elements are framed as spiritual.

Christian spirituality has many facets, and it is an area with which I am professionally familiar. Christian spirituality may be experienced in church services, in personal prayer, in study and in acts which might be termed charity. Even in these uncontroversial elements it is worth noting that if spirituality is primarily located in the individual, then each of the elements may not be spiritual for some. Context spirituality may be seen in the Church buildings, in the history and traditions in which the adherent is located, and in theological understandings. Again buildings may be seen as simply buildings, traditions may be conceived as purely human, and theology is often studied as an abstract intellectual exercise. The identity elements of Christian spirituality may include membership of the Christian community, certain lifestyle choices, and a sense of meaning and purpose. Two features of this are significant. Firstly these identity elements are explicitly linked with the individual spirituality in many churches. This is in contrast to soulriding and the other examples in this section where identity elements are not explicitly recognised as part of a spirituality. Secondly, and ironically given what I had just identified, the identity elements of Christian spirituality are present but often unrecognised within western society. For example approximately two thirds of the population of England are nominally Christian, and "Christian" norms and values continue to significantly inform U.K institutions and culture, whilst less than 9% of the population are church members.

I identified yoga as a second example area because it formed the largest single form of the "Holistic mileau" in Heelas and Woodhead's Kendal project, yet it is frequently understood as simply an exercise activity. Again this emphasises the framing of the activity as spiritual. Heelas and Woodhead chose to consider an activity as spiritual when it is so framed by the facilitator. As I am not an expert on, or practitioner of, Yoga, I have used an introductory book (Tomlinson, 2000) as a source for the following. Tomlinson states that "Yoga is fundamentally a spiritual path" in which the main emphasis of the spiritual was in the practice of Yoga, both the postures and the breathing techniques. Tomlinson includes the contextual element of spirituality in descriptions of the history and philosophy of Yoga. Tomlinson also includes experiences of flow and relaxation which go beyond the immediate practice of yoga. Thus Yoga becomes a way of life, and changes the state of being of the practitioner. This is framed as an extension of the experience beyond the immediate, rather than understanding that the spirituality of Yoga extends into the identity dimension. Tomlinson's book showed no evidence of the identity dimension being framed as spiritual.

For my third example I chose a marginal example of spirituality, in fact a deliberate attempt to re-frame a common activity as in some sense spiritual. Tom Harpur is a well-known and reputable religious journalist and author in Canada. He has written a book on "The Spirituality of Wine". Again, Harpur's focus is on the experience dimension. He includes the taste of wine, the social communication which he claims wine facilitates, the "ecstasy" which wine can produce, and the transformation from juice to wine. Harpur is keen to emphasise the context of wine. He includes the places of wine production and wine consumption, and notes the exotic nature of wines. He places wine in a historical and cultural context, including religious context. Harpur also notes the identity dimension of wine. He starts his account with his own inclusion in the community of wine connoisseurs, he talks of the appreciation of wine and the love of wine, and of how wine becomes an element in one's lifestyle. Significantly, these are mentioned but not explicitly connected with the spiritual. Again, identity elements are significant, but are not framed as spiritual. This opens one of the areas for further research I would suggest.

Further research

Whilst the evolution of a new approach to understanding spirituality does of course suggest a large number of avenues for further research, there are four specific areas of research which I believe this thesis opens. The first avenue is the study of faith-affiliate sports clubs; the second is the significance of frames for the construction of spirituality as frame; the third is the lack of popular recognition of identity as spiritual; finally the term 'soul sports' merits further investigation to establish what light it might shed on the understandings of spirituality.

Faith-affiliate sports clubs

One key issue arising from this research is why different people frame the same, or at least a very similar, experience as either spiritual or not spiritual. In particular the tension between the practice and theory of the two snowboarders from "Snowboarders for Christ" was intriguing. At one level they were denying the validity of any spiritual experience associated with snowboarding. At another they were saying that snowboarding was personally very significant for them. This internal tension seemed focussed around the comment that they "pray lots when they ride". The field of 'Christianized' sports and other activities seems to be developing within culture, for example Christian motorcyclists, Christian surfers. These offer an opportunity to study how those with a religious world-view frame an activity as inherently spiritual. The evidence from the current research is that the perspectives will be very mixed, and a rich source of qualitative data.

Competing and complementary frames

The identification of the 'nature' and 'escape' frames which I have suggested as being significant parts

of the spiritual framing of snowboarding, and the connection between these and other frames such as the 'hobby' frame and the 'happy midi-narrative' invites further research. This might be construed as attempting to identify such frames within other spiritual contexts, or connecting frames from wider society with spirituality.

The lack of recognition of identity as spirituality

It was noted in the analysis of the identity elements that few interviewees recognised these as spiritual. This result of the analysis was not one of the main directions of the thesis, but does accord with other anecdotal reports. Furthermore, the result is in contrast to some of the models of spirituality identified in the education academy, and in other areas such as healthcare. This contrast might be put in a question such as "If identity is such a key component of spirituality, why do few outside religions and academics recognise it as such?". Answers might lie in a social focus on experiences rather than identity, or in a culture of a lack of commitment.

Soul sports

The term 'soul sport' appears to be connected to the sports in which soulriding exists, but is also linked in the main source of the term (www.soulsports.co.uk) with other sports. This thesis has focused on 'soulriding' within snowboarding and has deliberately not followed this related term. Two possibilities are suggested by the existence of the term and the discussion on what it might mean. The first is the recognition that the other sports which have 'soulriding' as an existent term within the vocabulary would be candidates for research which developed the theoretical framework created here. The second possibility would be more general research on the wider terms soul sports, examining what associations this term has with spirituality and what the criteria for inclusion as a 'soulsport' might be.

Other issues

There are further questions around the use of the frame spirituality model which have not been a direct part of this research, but which are significant questions. Among these is the place of validating spirituality in the sense of saying that something is a 'true' spirituality. Some of the definitions used in sociology of religion clearly have the potential to be validating, for example Wuthnow (1998, p3ff) and Savage et al (2006, p13). Secondly, I have made general suggestions about the potential relationship between spirituality and religion in the light of changes in understanding of both these terms. A frame model of spirituality further changes this dynamic, locating spirituality both particularly in the individual, and generally in the social frame creation. Both of these tend to dislocate spirituality from the religious communities, thus there is a question of the extent to which spirituality is becoming detached from religion.

Special or spiritual?

This research started with questions about the nature of spirituality and the possibility of spirituality within snowboarding. This was most simply focused in the question "How might soulriding be spiritual?" The research was an opportunity to investigate the validity of the frame model of spirituality. It demonstrated how frames were involved in how individuals understood their snowboarding, and whether they perceived it a spiritual. The frame model and the three dimensions of spirituality were shown to be effective tools in understanding spirituality. In particular the individual's understandings of soulriding revealed the individual's frame of snowboarding. Thus the answer to whether snowboarding is "special or spiritual" is that it depends how you frame it. The research identified three dimensions of spirituality and ten elements of spirituality within snowboarding and discovered that they were all significant to many of the snowboarders, but no single element or combination of elements was fundamental to that spirituality. Soulriding was seen in different ways by

different snowboarders. Soulriding, like spirituality, was a frame of the snowboarders' reality. Whilst there was no simple answer to the questions about the nature of soulriding and spirituality, soulriding seemed to be a mirror for perceptions of the essence, the spirit, of snowboarding.

JK talked of the gathering of snowboarders at the end of the day and of the group effervescence which takes place as stories of the day's adventures. I have often observed groups of snowboarders gather and frame and re-frame their days riding. At the end of a good day's snowboarding they look back over their journey, the runs they did, the places they went, the things they found. For these snowboarders, a good day's snowboarding means growing, discovering and having fun. A good day's snowboarding is both social and personal. A good day's snowboarding involves encounters with both expected and unexpected contexts. A really good day's snowboarding can form a nourishing memory indefinitely. Is that spiritual or special?