
Contemporary Sports Subculture As An Alternative To The Sporting Mainstream

The culture of expressive individualism was sparked in the 1950's as a contrast to the collective conformity of that era. Highly regulated and individually constraining individual sports forms were weakened for some people by the individualized nature of contemporary society. The 1960's and 70's produced an enormous amount of youth based alternative sport cultures that wanted to provide alternatives to traditional, highly regulated achievement based sports forms. In 1978 Bourdieu described "Californian sports" as being creative, athlete-centered, noncompetitive unregulated and an expression of youthful alternative physicality (Bourdieu 1978). These eras helped advance the creative, individual contemporary sporting subculture.

In today's society, some norms are expressed and followed by the majority of the population. However, not everyone follows these mainstream cultural norms; there are subcultures where groups of people have their distinct culture that distinguishes them from the dominant culture. Different subcultures exist like sporting subcultures. Many modern day sports are an alternative to the discipline of traditional sporting activities, whose function is to discipline the mind and body, according to the rules and requirements of modern capitalist society. Alternative sporting subcultures allow for individualism and risk to occur, some of these subcultures include risk-based activities, windsurfing, and work-place sport subcultures.

One of the subculture to the mainstream sports, culture, can be achieved through risk subcultures that pursue excitement and adventure. The most prevalent focal points for sport-based alternative lifestyles cultures are the pursuit of risk-based activities. According to Morrissey, risk-taking activities are more frequent in societies of caution where the youth feel controlled and heavily supervised (Morrissey 2008). Their needs to be a balance between control and excitement the more organized a society is, the more need there becomes for higher levels of excitement and freedom. Typically pre-modern societies where the ones that had low levels of control and regulation over most aspects of life since they experienced high levels of freedom, autonomy, and high level of conformity, safety, and security. Modern societies have high levels of control and regulation and low levels of freedom, autonomy, and high level of conformity, safety and security, producing a life that is more predictable and less exciting (Elias & Dunning 1986). This in-turn produces a postmodern society of risk where individuals seek out excitement-based activities.

These thrills seeking individuals find opportunities for risk to experience freedom, control, individual expression, self-actualization, personal fulfillment, and transcendence. A risk sports sub-culture can be found in rock climbing. An experiment performed by West & Allin wanted to examine what means are attached to risk and analyze the relationship between risk-taking and risk management, and why people would risk their lives to participate in the sport. The experiment identified that the subcultural insiders focused on managing and controlling risk, "Now there is a degree of risk that you take with any particular climb. Depends on the route, depends on the conditions on the day, depends on yourself, depends on how competent or retarded you are at the climbing", said one of the subjects being interviewed (West & Allin 2010, pg. 1242). Risk management is connected to the individuals climbing identity and helped define them as being a "good" or "safe climber, depending on how well they managed risk. The

climbers also showed the contrast between control and management related to climbing and the uncontrolled risk that happens daily in society.

People are more likely to be involved in sporting activities that have a lot of excitement when they are raised in a risk society. Participation in risk sports, then, can be seen as an attempt to strike a balance between the social constraints of everyday life and the cultural imperatives in late modernity (Langseth, 2011). Elias and Dunning also said that the more rationally and bureaucratically organized a society is the more there is a need for high levels of excitement (Elias & Dunning 1986). This was also proved by West and Allin's 2010 experiment, which proved that a primary reason for participating in risk sport is to have control over something.

Another subculture where individualism is involved is windsurfing. Windsurfing is considered to be a lifestyle alternative sports subculture. It offers a "way of life" centered on the pursuit of "hedonism", "freedom", and "self-expression". Wheaton examines, "The windsurfers' identity is marked by a range of symbolic markers, extending from clothing and the specialist equipment used to vehicles driven, as well as the less 'visible' aspects of style like argot" (Wheaton 258). Their cultural identity is illustrated through their commitment and skill not from the amount of money spent on the sport. Individuals involved in the sport are extremely committed and truly enjoy participating in the sport. The culture that is created from this is one of skill and dedication not competitiveness or a person's efficiency within the sport. Not all subcultures place such a high importance on skill but most have some form of individualism shown (Wheaton 2000). The windsurfing culture along with the previously discussed "California Sports Culture" do not put an emphasis on competition or money, but on individualism, which helps provide a practical and useful alternative to the mainstream sports culture.

Most modern day sporting subcultures are based around activities that are done during leisure time. Individuals are now being identified by what they do in their leisure time. The work/ leisure time binary is seen to be the strongest in today's society. Even though some of sport subcultures happen outside of the workplace, some sporting subcultures are interconnected between work and help oppose the traditional views of the separation between work and leisure disconnect (Strangleman, 2007).

A subculture that transcends differences between work and leisure time is cycling messengers. In Ben Fishman's study bicycle messengers identified strongly with their professional and sub cultural identity. Cycling messengers identify their job as having physical demands, danger, and exhilaration of being a bicycle messenger were all identified by the cycling messengers (Fishman 2008). Their subculture involves freedom, unity, risk, expression, exhilaration, and subversion. They are able to show their individualism from other subcultures through their messengers style. Their style is away to show their coherence, most of them have piercings, tattoos, wild hairstyles, wrapped up in chains, and full weather gear. They often wear practical cycling gear that is meant to get dirty, and are less meant to be a fashion statement even though they are known as having a "courier style" (Fishman 2008).

Jobs like bicycle messengers are examples of work and leisure mixing together to create a subcultural group. This subculture is a way to provide the courier with a sense of belonging to a greater social group, "[there] was something of a community. That wherever I worked I jumped into a place and there was a unit that you felt was part of you. You were part of it," stated cycling messenger Simon in an interview (Fincham 2008, pg. 622). The courier also gets to experience the danger and excitement of the job. A cycle messenger is defined by his work,

which also happens to be an alternative to the sporting mainstream. Unfortunately, there are some negatives that come from having this lifestyle. The carriers do not get paid well so to sustain a living some have to result to having mainstream working lifestyles', however, these new work-place sporting subcultures are not old enough yet to make an accurate long-term affiliation (Fincham 2008). There are also some rules associated with being a messenger since it is a job, however, the exhilaration and individualism that is involved in their subculture makes up for it.

In conclusion, a contemporary sports subculture provide an alternative to the sporting mainstream by putting an importance on the aspects of risk, individuals, and by transcending the differences separating work and leisure. Sporting subcultures can provide an alternative to the highly competitive and organized nature of mainstream sports, through their individualistic nature. Even though some subcultures are created out of work, we can see that sports subcultures offer experiences and risks that mainstream sports can only hope to build.

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