

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE AND SOCIAL THEORY

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CONCLUSIONS ON OUTDOOR ADVENTURE AND SOCIAL THEORY

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In the introduction to this book, we indicated that we would not cover every single social theory or discuss every issue that is pertinent to understanding the social world of outdoor adventure. Other editors also may have organized this book differently. We have attempted, through this series of essays, to illustrate how social theory may help us to better understand outdoor adventure, and have drawn on the theories and the scholars whom we believed were best placed to illuminate these issues.

We have learned that social theory offers a way of describing, analysing and understanding outdoor adventure. We now know that we can use this knowledge to make sense of these activities and the experiences of people who take part in them, because social theories help us to ask questions that we may not have otherwise considered. In the course of this book we have learned that many people believe that outdoor adventure offers meaningful, educational, life-changing activity. On the other hand, we have also learned that outdoor adventure can contribute to social problems. As a result, our beliefs about engaging in adventurous activities in the outdoors are less simple, and more complex and 'messy', than we might have previously believed. Furthermore, we have learned that we do not always have sufficient evidence to support the claims that we might make about these activities. In order to make sense of the role of outdoor adventure in people's lives, we need to collate more evidence about what is actually going on in the world of outdoor adventure, and why certain activities are organized and performed in particular ways. We can draw on social theory to help us analyse and understand this information, and then use this knowledge to consider how outdoor adventure might be changed and improved.

The authors of the chapters presented in this book have drawn on several theoretical frameworks as a means of raising key questions about outdoor adventure. We will not repeat all of these here but instead identify some of the themes that

have recurred throughout the book. These are: the relationship of structure and agency; how historical trends can inform our understanding of contemporary practice; the influence of capitalism and global economics on outdoor adventure; and social inequalities. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The relationship of structure and agency

Some social theories (interactionism, post-structuralism and some feminist theories) tend to focus on agency, or the ways in which people are believed to act freely and make their own rational choices about their lifestyles and behaviour. Other theories (functionalism, Marxism and some figurational sociology) favour structure as a means of understanding human behaviour, by suggesting that our choices are controlled by social structures such as the economy, law and education. For example, in Chapter 3, Brown draws on the work of Durkheim to explain how outdoor adventure may serve as a way of inculcating in us social norms and values that then influence individual behaviour. These norms and values may range from learning to obey instructions and supporting team-mates to wearing particular designer kit. Similarly, Zink's review of the work of Foucault (Chapter 10) helps us to consider the relationships of individuals and broader structures that create environments in which activities become meaningful.

In each chapter, the authors have highlighted a need to understand outdoor adventure through considering structure and agency, while recognizing the weaknesses in both paradigms. In Chapter 8, Beames and Telford draw on the work of Bourdieu to examine the experiences of two fictional climbers, who are exposed to different climbing cultures that influence their own lifestyle choices and behaviour. While they have autonomy, or agency, to make these choices, they are also affected by the social structures to which they have been exposed throughout their lives.

In order to fully understand outdoor adventure, we need to learn more of the activities themselves, how they evolved, the various ways in which people experience them, and the underlying factors that control and facilitate them. In order to understand outdoor adventure in contemporary societies, it is helpful to take a historical perspective in order to learn about the lives of the people who created and developed these activities, and the influence of power, money and other resources on the ways in which these activities have progressed over the years.

Historical trends

When we consider the history of outdoor adventure, it is important to recognize that there is never 'one history' of any event. There will always be different histories, as people who experience events will have their own interpretation and lived experiences of what happened. Furthermore, there is much to be learned from the

result of actions taken by different people at various times. We can understand these developments by drawing on social theories to ask key questions and reflect on the main trends. For example, in Chapter 14, Rawles comments on some of the unintended consequences of outdoor adventure which have ironically damaged the very environment that participants enjoy while doing their activities. Rawles shows us how social theory helps us to question some of our actions, and suggests ways in which we might transform future practice in order to protect the very planet that enables our outdoor adventurous activities.

In Beedie's contribution (Chapter 9), we are introduced to the work of Giddens, who also considered the relationship between individuals and institutions, or structure and agency. He argues that outdoor adventure practices have been influenced by participation trends and practice over time. For example, the risks we learn to take and the equipment we are trained to use in outdoor adventurous activities become routine and are eventually established as 'rules' of conduct that subsequently control how we behave in specific environments. These are not formal laws but nevertheless become understood as desirable ways to experience outdoor adventure during this particular historical period, and within certain societies and social groups.

Atkinson's chapter on Parkour (Chapter 6) challenges us to consider participants in outdoor adventurous activities as historically developing networks of actors. In other words, these activities and their participants have not appeared out of thin air; their engagement has emerged over time and in particular geographical places through interactions with other people.

Each of the activities discussed in this book has been modified and developed during different historical periods, as people have adapted them to suit their own needs and broader social changes. Arguably, some of the most significant influences on the development of outdoor adventurous activities in modern societies in recent years have been economic factors, and these were discussed in several chapters as highlighted in the next section.

The influence of capitalism and global economics

Varley and Loynes (Chapters 4 and 13) develop the historical and economic analysis of outdoor adventure by introducing us to the concepts of rationalization, globalization and McDonaldization. These explain how outdoor adventurous activities have become systematically organized over time in order to demonstrate how they offer benefits to participants. The benefits are not only related to the intrinsic worth or pleasure in the activity, but also influenced by the extrinsic value or how much money can be made from the activity. Consequently, our activities become controlled and predictable in order to guarantee a particular experience.

As Tracey explains in Chapter 5, the work of Gramsci helps us to analyse the ways in which these new forms of established activities are carefully marketed by those who can make money from them, and how participants gradually adopt these

forms of outdoor adventure. So, we learn that we can buy membership of clubs, purchase artificially constructed indoor 'outdoor' adventure or safe tourist 'adventure', and pay for coaching qualifications that then enable us to earn a salary as a coach. In Chapter 2, Cater and Dash draw on a Marxist perspective to argue that we become alienated from the authentic experience as we seek the instant gratification of a thrill rather than building the skills and knowledge needed to participate independently in the activity. Social theory helps us to understand how these changes have altered the ways in which many of us now experience outdoor adventure, and raises questions about the ways in which we may wish to develop and participate in these activities in the future.

Social inequalities

Many of us who participate and work in outdoor adventure would like to think that it offers an alternative to traditional sporting activities, not least by being inclusive of all who wish to participate regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or disability. We have learned in this book that social inequalities still exist in many areas of outdoor adventure, and that more work needs to be done to make these activities more inclusive.

Beedie and Loynes (Chapters 9 and 13) both refer to the classed nature of numerous outdoor adventurous activities that have excluded many from lower social classes, while privileging those who already have significant economic and social capital. Similarly, in Chapter 12 Pike and Weinstock consider the ways in which those perceived to have 'frail' bodies, whether through age or disability, may be discouraged from participation in outdoor adventure despite the benefits experienced by those who are able to take part. Allin and West (Chapter 11) have explained how feminist theories help us to understand the discriminatory practices that mean many women and girls are still not offered the same opportunities to experience outdoor adventurous activities as men and boys and, as a result, do not enter leadership positions to the same extent as their male peers. They draw on a variety of different feminist theories to question whether women need help to reach the same level as their male counterparts or whether the basis of outdoor adventure itself needs challenging.

The adventure starts here!

It was the intention of this book to serve as a starting point for your journey into the critical analysis of outdoor adventure. In the opening chapter, we defined adventure as a challenge with an uncertain outcome and inescapable consequences. We hope that, from here, you will rise to the challenge, and that on your journey you will continue to study in more depth the theories and themes that have been

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but the consequences for yourselves and the people with whom you engage in outdoor adventure could be incredibly positive. Ultimately, we encourage you to use what you have learned to harness the power of outdoor adventure in order to contribute to social change and make the world a safer, more humane and better place. Now that's an adventure!