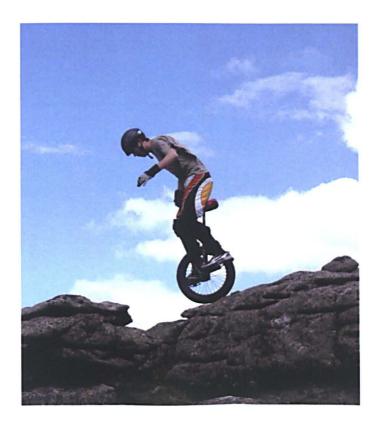# Unicycling and Identity:

Narratives of motivation and achievement in young riders

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

Wendy Bignold

June 2009

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VOLUME ONE

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Abstract

This ethnographic study explores the unusual, lifestyle sport of unicycling with a particular focus on young riders. It arises from the author's own immersion in a unicycling culture over some 8 years, and from answers to the 3, primarily educational, questions which this involvement prompted; these concern concepts of *motivation*; *identity*; and *achievement*. The questions themselves provide the basis for the design of the study and the consequent analysis of data.

The empirical study derives from phenomenological principles which foreground the subjectivity of the participants (including the author) and use these experiences to illuminate the identified concepts; these in turn describe clearly educational implications of the study.

Conclusions point to unicycling as having a remarkable and positive influence on the identity of young riders, both individual and group; as creating considerable motivation in riders, often over a prolonged period of time; and in turn leading to achievement behaviour which has the potential positively to influence achievement in other areas or activities.

Whilst unicycling has some unique features as a sport, some broader curricular lessons can be learned from this study, primarily that those working with young people should seek opportunities to value youth selected activities (such as unicycling) as a means of generalising the achievement behaviours they promote.

The thesis, whilst principally exploring narratives of young riders, also presents a number of narratives capturing the journey of its author as a PhD student. In doing so it creates the metaphor that undertaking a PhD is like learning to unicycle, (a slow, often lonely journey which demands much perseverance) and offers a useful guide to future students and their supervisors.

Contents

The titles chosen for each chapter illustrate the metaphor which is developed throughout this thesis: undertaking a PhD is like learning to ride a unicycle. The narratives are presented in blue to ensure that the voices of the writer and the unicyclists stand out; illustrations of the metaphor are presented in green.

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Getting the Bug – Preface

My son is 10; he rides 6 miles to and from school each day, 3 miles there and 3 miles home. In our street there are 17 children, 15 of them unicycle. He likes to ride with his friends, they all encourage each other. It's important to have friends to unicycle with. At UNICON, two years ago, he was only 8 but he won three bronze medals. The school is not interested. He has three bronze medals for sport, at international level, but the school is not interested. This year he will win gold. It's difficult for him; his classmates are all into football and it's difficult to like something different when you are a child. You really want to be the same as everyone else. His teachers don't encourage his unicycling; they're not interested. His friends don't want to learn but they think what he does is really cool – he can ride along a narrow wall, a metre high; he can jump down steps; he can slide down a railing; that's cool. His friends think it's cool so they accept him. (Father A, 2008)

*Our son is 14 – **what you describe is exactly the position he is in at school!** He's not doing as well as he should be, as we would like. He's really into unicycling but his school promotes football. All the time they are admonishing him for not trying out for the football team – he comes home really upset. "Dad, I don't like football, I don't want to play in the team." he tells me. The school says he is not motivated in sport, that he should play a sport as it will "be good for him". No-one else in the school can do a 5 ft drop on one wheel – he's the only one who has this skill but the school's not interested because it's not football. They take no interest in his unicycling so he doesn't talk to his friends or teachers about it – it makes me sad for him and it makes him angry and lazy at school.* (Father B, 2008)

The two extracts above are from conversations with fathers of young unicyclists at an international unicycle convention and world championships. *"What you describe is exactly the position he is in at school!"* the second one begins. What was it that I had described? What was it that he had found such resonance with? That unicycling is a sport which motivates and inspires young riders, that makes them feel good about themselves and what they can do and so which has the potential to impact positively on them, even in their schooling; a sport which influences identity. However it is an activity which is often popularly dismissed as being something for clowns, and which teachers

appear not to be valuing in their pupils who do ride. As such, the potential of unicycling is going unnoticed and this is at a time when policy makers, educationalists, social workers, parents and the media are desperately seeking ways to motivate and engage youth, to support young people in developing strong, positive identities as individuals and group members.

I have spent the last eight years watching people unicycle, people who have caught the bug for this amazing, exhilarating, unusual sport and in doing so I caught the bug too; not to learn to ride - I don't have the patience for that - but to bring some academic attention to unicycling so that those working with young people might come to recognize it as a valuable tool in developing self-identity, raising self-esteem and possibly supporting individuals to fulfill their academic potential. This thesis, then, presents unicycling as a lifestyle sport; it explores young people's lived experiences of it, tells their stories through narratives, and in doing so seeks to identify the potential benefits of it and to understand it. It does this so that practitioners might see its worth and find ways to value it in the curriculum and that academics might devote some research time to further understanding it, those who pursue it and the contribution it can make to individuals and groups.

While unicycling is at the heart of this study it is explored here as an example of an activity which motivates some young people, which may be the one thing that they really enthuse about in their current lives. Of course there are many other activities which young people are excited by; I do not suggest that unicycling is better than these in any way or that the potential of it to positively impact on youth is greater. Instead I make the case for educationalists to know their pupils better, to know what it is that motivates each student in a class and to make the time and space to value those youth-selected activities, whatever they might be.

Deciding to Start - The Beginning of the Story

... to Start Riding

"You must be mad!" she exclaimed; "What on earth d'you want to do that for? You'll never do; it'll take for ever!"

"I want the challenge!" he replied defensively.

"Well I think you're mad!!"

"Think of the sense of achievement I'll get."

"What's the point of it, all that hard work?"

"Think how cool it'll be!"

"Well, I still think you're **mad!**"

He had to admit she was right; it would take a long time, ages perhaps, but he thought it'd be worth it and if he wanted to do it why shouldn't he give it a go? What a sense of achievement, of accomplishment, it'd be; not many people could say they'd done that and he did love a challenge, it really spurred him on.

It was a long, lonely task though, requiring a huge amount of perseverance. You had to be diligent, resolute; you needed the sheer determination to stick at it, have another go, pick yourself up and go at it again. You had to be self-reliant; you were on your own, you were the only one who could make it happen. Yes, others could support you, offer advice and guidance, suggest strategies that had worked for them, but at the end of the day it was up to you and you alone. You had to find your own path to the goal; you own style, your own identity, your own way of doing it. He knew it was a big undertaking - learning to ride a unicycle - but he was determined to do it and do it he would; after all she had often said he was bloody minded.

"You are mad; you're crazy, idiotic, insane! It's ridiculous ... but I have to admit that, knowing you, you'll do it" and she threw her arms around him and encouraged him with a kiss. "Good luck!" she laughed, squeezing him tight.

...to Start Researching

"You must be mad!" he exclaimed. "What on earth d'you want to do that for? You'll never do; it'll take for ever!"

"I want the challenge!" she replied defensively.

"Well I think you're mad!!"

"Think of the sense of achievement I'll get."

"What's the point of it, all that hard work?"

"Think how cool it'll be!"

"Well, I still think you're mad!"

She had to admit he was right; it would take a long time, ages perhaps, but she thought it'd be worth it and if she wanted to do it why shouldn't she give it a go. What a sense of achievement, of accomplishment, it'd be; not many people could say they'd done that and she did love a challenge, it really spurred her on.

It was a long, lonely task though that required a huge amount of perseverance. You had to be diligent, resolute; you needed the sheer determination to stick at it, have another go, pick yourself up and go at it again. You had to be self-reliant; you were on your own, you were the only one who could make it happen. Yes, others could support you, offer advice and guidance, suggest strategies that had worked for them, but at the end of the day it was up to you and you alone. You had to find your own path to the goal; you own style, your own identity, your own way of doing it. She knew it

was a big undertaking - doing a PhD - but she was determined to do it and do it she would; after all he had often said she was bloody minded.

"You are mad; you're crazy, idiotic, insane! It's ridiculous ... but I have to admit that, knowing you, you'll do it." and he threw his arms around and encouraged her with a kiss. "Good luck!" he laughed, squeezing her tight.

In this thesis I explore the motivation for mastering the difficult and lonely task of learning to ride a unicycle; in doing so I also explore the difficult and lonely journey undertaken on a PhD study. I discuss the processes involved in becoming a rider and becoming a researcher. Unicycling is unlike many other activities in that it is not something in which an individual can enjoy any immediate and ready competence; it requires significant practice and perseverance to ride at even the most basic level. Undertaking PhD research also, I suggest, requires significant practice, writing practice for example, perhaps in the form of drafting and redrafting ideas or an interview schedule. Both learning to unicycle and undertaking PhD study are driven by passion and commitment to an end goal and so they have something in common, yet at the same time each is unique to the individual as she travels on her story. I present some of those stories here.

Getting onto the Saddle - Introduction

This is not a circus, this is an intense competition where each participant will compete in several difficult disciplines ... This is not just a world championship, it is a huge gathering - over 1,000 people from 29 different countries - where it is about being together, meeting old friends and making new friends for life... Unicycling is for all who dare to challenge their ability to balance. I can tell you that the youngest is 6 years old and the eldest is 72 years old, so it is never too early or too late to get started and it is wonderful to see that all ages can come together in one event. Unicycling is a fantastic way to create a good basis for an individual; concentration and perseverance give rise to skills that can be used for much more than just sport. I hope that all participants will push their own limits, feel the excitement and have a good convention. I now declare the 14th Unicycling World Championships open! (Henriksen, 2008)

"This is not a circus, this is an intense competition..." Unicycling is an activity which many people associate with the circus; however, to those who ride regularly it is a serious sport. This was made clear in the opening address, above, from the chairperson of the Danish Gymnastics and Sports Association, a major national sporting association in Denmark, at the 14th Unicycling World Championships and Convention. To those who unicycle it is a sport which is highly motivating, demanding and challenging, but fun and exciting, social and creative. It requires significant commitment to develop higher level skills. Imagine the perseverance needed to be able to do a 360 degree spin with your feet, not on the pedals, but on the cranks or frame. Imagine the drive needed to walk up Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales, carrying a unicycle over your shoulder so that you can ride back down it, bouncing over rocks and flailing onto rough ground. In this thesis I rehearse the case for the acknowledgement of unicycling as a sport - and in particular a lifestyle sport - although this is not a main aim of the thesis. Sport England recognises the rapid increase in lifestyle or alternative sports over the last two decades and acknowledges the role that they have to play in engaging young people in physical activity. Despite this there has been little research into them or the people who participate in them. In order to understand them and their potential there is a need for research into participation rates and patterns, and

socio-demographic characteristics of participants (Tomlinson et al., 2005, p.2). Indeed Tomlinson et al., advising Sport England, state that:

> *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 own identities and lifestyles rather than existing as institutional forms in their own rights.* (Tomlinson et al., 2005, p.4)

This study on unicycling is the first piece of academic research to be undertaken on the sport from a social science or educational perspective in the UK and, searches indicate, in the world. At the very heart of it are the stories of young riders, narratives of their experiences, and as such it seeks "to focus on the participants", exploring it as "an expression of their own identities and lifestyles", to use the words of Tomlinson et al. They go on to advise on the research methods which might best be employed:

> *Thus, rather than conventional sports organized around governing bodies and formally constituted clubs, the new sports have no structure nor continuity. Instead they comprise the collective activity of the participants, expressed in a myriad 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.* (Tomlinson et al., 2005, p.4)

In this thesis I present data gathered using all of these tools, particularly biographies, photographic records and observations, in the form of narrative accounts. Travlou, on completing a literature review of teenagers and public space for OPENspace, the research centre for inclusive access to outdoor environments, concludes, in part, that:

> *the older teenage group (15-18 years old) is particularly underrepresented in the literature, even though this is the crucial age of 'teenage experience' for many young people ... In order to formulate friendlier policies and more beneficial initiatives for young people, decision makers have to get a more in-depth view on daily*

experiences and life expectations and aspirations of teenagers. (Travlou, 2003, p.30-31)

The focus group of this study is 11 to 19 year olds, a broad categorization of youth, and in presenting their narratives I intended to explore the "daily experiences and life expectations and aspirations of teenagers", something which Travlou calls for.

My motivation in undertaking this research was not, originally, to contribute to the body of literature on lifestyle sports and its teenage participants, but simply to seek to gain some academic and practitioner recognition of the potential of unicycling to influence identity, motivation and achievement positively. However, as my own literature review developed it became clear that there is demand for research such as mine amongst a wider audience. As well as academic calls for such studies, as identified by Tomlinson et al. and Travlou (op.cit), there has been much support for and interest in this particular project amongst the community of unicyclists, in the UK and internationally, as it strives to gain the recognition for the sport which many riders and supporters feel it warrants:

> *Your research is really important for us – people will be able to use your research to gain teaching projects in schools or with youth groups. They can use it to apply for grants for clubs and events. It will help promote the sport and bring more people into it – that is a good thing for unicycling and the individuals.* (Australian, non-riding mother of two unicycling teenagers, 2008).

What has been particularly gratifying is the number of occasions on which unicyclists and teachers of unicycling have confirmed my observations from their own experiences and have welcomed it as means of validating these experiences, as the example below illustrates:

> *I read about you and your research on the UNICON website; I am really interested in it. It is what we have going on in our club. The young people, they come to us bored. Then they have this new interest and become different people. I have seen it again and*

again. It is good that you are documenting it. (German unicyclist and teacher of unicycling, 2008)

This study is not a scientific measurement of the impact of unicycling on motivation or achievement. Rather, it is an exploration of its influence on young riders and their identity, and of the significance placed on unicycling by them and those close to them. Whilst based around four narratives of UK riders it also draws on a large number of anecdotes from riders in the UK and other countries. A fifth narrative is constructed around the experiences of a rider in another country as a means of illustrating cross-cultural elements of unicycling, and the universality of it across countries.

Research Interests

There were a number of potential focuses within unicycling which I could have taken for my research project. For example, the Chair of the International Unicycling Federation suggested I might explore the participation of men in their 30s and 40s "playing out a second childhood" through their riding. However, my professional background and interest in education provided me with a more obviously significant focus. As a former teacher and now senior lecturer in a university education department I was only too aware of the growing concern over disengagement of pupils, particularly secondary school pupils, in education, nationally.

> *At 76%, UK participation (in education) at age 17 is the fifth lowest among 28 OECD countries. Too many young people are turned off learning and fail to achieve between 14 and 19.* (Tomlinson, 2004, p.91)

If the education system is to be successful in engaging young people, re-engaging disaffected youth and maintaining engagement with younger children then it must consider what motivates these individuals. Motivation is not a new theme in education and its importance has been previously acknowledged.

There are only three things of importance to successful learning; motivation, motivation, motivation... (Ball, 1995, p.5)

This is a rather simplified view of learning but it does recognise the huge importance of motivation. It is a factor which affects all pupils and which all educationalists must take account of if they are to be effective. It is particularly important for teachers of disaffected children who may be more difficult to motivate than those who are not. However, sustained pedagogic attention to the importance of motivation as a key influence on learning has waned in recent years as the National Curriculum has dominated schools with its focus on tangible outputs through standardised assessment regimes (Preedy, 2001).

The above quote from Ball is as significant today as it was when it was made in 1995: the Government regularly renews its commitment to education and especially to raising standards in today's schools and increasing pupil success, and the Tomlinson Report is but one expression of this. If the Government is to achieve its goal then motivation levels will have to be considered, now as in the past:

Evaluation of children's successes and failures at school almost invariably includes reference to motivation. (Galloway et al, 1998, p.19)

Physical activity is acknowledged as one means of motivating children and youth. The Government identified five key outcomes which "really matter for children's and young people's well-being" as part of its Every Child Matters policy (DfES, 2003, p.14). Interestingly, of these five, one is directly linked to physical activity and one to achievement:

- *Being healthy: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle.*
- *Enjoying and achieving: getting the most out of life and developing broad skills for adulthood.* (DfES, 2003, p.11)

Physical activity provides a mechanism for these two outcomes to be achieved. Regular participation in physical activity or sport is key to healthy

active lifestyles among children and youth. If teachers and other educators can understand children's motivation for participating regularly in such activity then the identified motivational drivers can be used in any learning context to build self-esteem and enhance enjoyment and achievement in the learning process (Xiang et al., 2003).

High self-esteem is recognised as being crucial to early motivation, learning and achievement in the Foundation Stage (DfEE/QCA, 2000). It is acknowledged by a number of early years practitioners and writers, (e.g. Dowling, 2005; Nutbrown, 2006a), that young children develop an understanding of who they are and what their strengths and weaknesses are by exploring their environment. This happens from a very early age as babies interact with adults and other children around them. It is developed further as they begin to explore the world in which they live. Play is of huge significance here as a vehicle for learning; through play babies and young children do repeat an action or activity or revisit something at another time to develop a particular skill or understand a particular concept. Play is acknowledged as being of vital importance, not as a relaxation or distraction but as a fundamental building-block of cognition, affect and hence identity (Nutbrown, 2006a, 2006b). But while this process is seen as deeply significant to young children's learning, as they grow older less attention is given to it. This is despite the fact that in adolescents, self-identify and self-esteem become hugely important as peer pressure and acceptance become increasingly significant to individuals (Geldard and Geldard, 2004). Failure at school can have a negative impact on self-esteem. It is at this age that children and youth start to develop stronger, sometimes new, self-identities often based around activities outside of school; a key text for youth practitioners emphasises this: "It is in the realm of leisure that young people truly become themselves" (Hendry et al, 1993, p.2). It is an informed assumption of this thesis that physical activity and sport is, or can be, a form of play, and as such it is about having fun. Therefore it may have the potential, like early play, to have a positive impact on self-identity and self-esteem. These in turn influence levels of motivation which can be taken back into the classroom; the potential of unicycling to have a positive influence on self-esteem and self-identity will be

explored as a second key theme.

According to Furlong and Cartmel (2007), traditional means of young people's socialisation such as school, family and community, are becoming weaker. They may be marginalised by family or peers or they may choose to marginalise themselves. To such individuals an alternative group can provide an appealing identity. This research will explore the development of group identity and its impact on self-identity and self-esteem by investigating the culture of unicycling and the sub-cultures of the different disciplines within it, particularly those which are popular with young riders.

Research Design

In this ethnographic study I use a multi-methods approach. I undertook qualitative research to build up a detailed picture of the lived experiences of young unicyclists, whose stories provide interesting examples relating to the themes of this study. I have compared these data with more general data from quantitative enquiry which has gathered a number of common themes based on larger numbers of unicyclists.

I present the data primarily in narrative form, the stories of the young riders at the heart of the study. There are five narratives, constructed around the lived experiences of five young riders:

- Scott, a 14 year old, who plays unicycle hockey with his dad and brother.
- Max, a 23 year old who has been unicycling since he was 12 and who enjoys endurance racing, off-road.
- Pete, a 22 year old who learnt to unicycle when he was 15 and who took part in an international marathon distance ride recently.
- Sangay, a 19 year old who runs a unicycle club for pupils at the school where he is a teaching assistant and who rides himself.

- Jon, an 11 year old who has just had his first unicycle lesson, with his peers at school.

Significantly all those whose stories are told are boys or young men; this is because the vast majority of unicyclists in the UK are male and a fuller rationale for this selection is given in Chapter 3.

Through the narratives, I have attempted to re-create and sustain the very movement at the heart of unicycling, which creates the bodily experience that triggers high levels of excitement, adrenalin, enthusiasm and enjoyment. In attempting to capture the movement, the camaraderie, the adrenalin, here for the reader in the form of stories, I hope that he or she might begin to understand, and perhaps appreciate, the excitement and enthusiasm that the young unicyclists experience. In taking a narrative approach I intend the voices of the young riders to come through loudly, so that the stories and subsequent analysis can create something which is authentic and true. I tell my own story alongside the others as a means to identify any researcher bias and justify my ethnographic approach.

This notion of movement is of course hugely important in unicycling; whilst I have seen riders remain perfectly stationary and upright on their unicycles for what appears to be minutes, a unicycle can only be kept upright for seconds unless it is moving. You cannot free-wheel downhill, for example: if you stop propelling the unicycle in some way it will simply fall over. It is important, therefore, in trying to recreate something of the excitement of unicycling, to create a sense of movement through this thesis, to keep momentum going, to keep it moving. Rather than adopt a conventional structure for a thesis, therefore, I have sought what I consider to be a more flowing form. This begins with an examination of the sport of unicycling to give the reader an early understanding of what it involves and how it has developed. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology, the research plan and the approach taken to data analysis which culminates with my story as a researcher. The main body of the thesis, and the research project on which it is based, takes each of the key questions in turn:

1. How are young people motivated to engage and persevere in unicycling?

2. How does unicycling influence the development of identity in young riders?

3. Do achievements in unicycling transfer to other contexts of learning?

In considering these questions I am exploring what Rinehart and Sydnor (2003), in a seminal text on alternative sports, identify as "classic questions". They, with a wide range of academics and athletes, consider these questions in relation to a broad variety of alternative sports, including rollerblading, windsurfing, sky diving, BMX, eco-challenge, kayaking and skateboarding. I consider them with regard to unicycling and so continue the tradition of studying sports and in particular what are today termed alternative or lifestyle sports, among other terms.

And the classic questions about sport are confronted again: What is sport? What is its origin? What is its use, value, function? (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003, p.2)

For this study I interpret identity as both personal, self-identity and self-esteem, and social, group identity, both of which are influenced by cultural constructions of identities. In this thesis I draw variously on literatures which illuminate the phenomena of unicycling: the potential benefits of sports; motivation; self-identity and self-esteem; group-identity in the form of culture and subculture; and the alternative curriculum. Immediately following each literature review is one narrative from each of the five studies. These are carefully juxtaposed so that they illustrate the literature discussed. A short introduction precedes each narrative identifying its context and rationalising its authenticity. The narratives are accompanied by illustrative photographs in recognition of the importance of visual images to the sport and to help capture something of the essence of unicycling. The photographs are not of the actual riders but others who have given their permission, in an attempt to ensure anonymity for those at the centre of the stories. After presenting all five

narratives analysis takes place incorporating quantitative data to help identify any common themes.

Unicycling is a sport which emphasises individuality and creativity. Whilst there are emerging conventions, it is as yet essentially unconventional in terms of traditional sports in that it is often spontaneous and informal, occurring as, when and where participants choose to come together, rather than being dictated by formal leagues in designated places. As this study is about unicycling and seeks to capture something of the soul, rhythm and unconventionality of it, I hope that the reader will recognise that the non-traditional structure of this thesis is important, and will engage with it and even appreciate it in this context. The form, structure and content are continuous and inseparable; each element seeks to express, illuminate and enhance the other. I have structured this PhD thesis in such a way as to maintain and develop the underlying metaphor then, that undertaking a PhD is like learning to ride a unicycle, that it is an ongoing journey which gains momentum from its rhythm.

Chapter 1

Watching Others Ride - The Sport of Unicycling

Beginning learners of unicycling, as well as spending much time practising, trying to stay upright and on the saddle for that first full revolution of the wheel, spend a considerable amount of time watching others ride. In watching others, beginners might learn some tips, but certainly will learn more about the sport, what is involved in unicycling and what the potential for riding is. At the beginning of a PhD, while trying to find your own way as a new researcher, you also spend much time looking around to see what others are doing, what their research topics are and what methodologies and methods they adopt. The title of this chapter then, "Watching Others", could be applied to unicycling or PhD study and so develops the metaphor of becoming a rider, becoming a researcher.

In this thesis I examine the influence of unicycling on young people and their identity, their motivation and achievement. In order to do this it is first necessary to have some understanding of the phenomena of unicycling and thus this chapter is largely descriptive. It explores the sport, its history, current status and the different disciplines within it. As an activity which is often associated with the circus it then explores this relationship. In contrast to its identity as a circus act a rationale for unicycling to be officially recognised as a sport is presented, and in particular a lifestyle sport, as defined by Wheaton (2004). The criteria for sport and lifestyles sports will be examined and unicycling will be assessed against these criteria.

Very little has been written on unicycling, with no academic texts being published as yet. Interestingly there has been academic attention given to unicycles from a technical and scientific perspective over the last ten years, for example in relation to closed loop steering and stable tracking controls (Aicardi et al. 1995, Lee et al., 2000) There is a small number of unicycling guides available with advice on how to ride but which give little in the way of information on unicycling generally, its development, culture and so on. These

do not describe for the beginner the different disciplines within the sport, nor do the related magazines. An international unicycle magazine began publication in Summer 2006, with a second magazine being introduced in 2008. These are written by riders for riders and content includes articles on unicycle events around the world, technical reviews and guidance on new skills or tricks. The majority of written material on unicycling has to be accessed on the internet. Much of it has been researched and written by unicyclists themselves, often for other unicyclists. Given the lack of academic references it has been necessary to use such sources, grey literature, at times. The paper sources, as well as those on the internet, are very useful to this study as they go a long way towards capturing the essence of the sport, the excitement felt by riders and the subtleties of the different disciplines within it.

The History of Unicycling

The unicycle was invented in the late 1800s; a one-wheeled French machine, a Pedocaetre, was made around 1853 (www.bbc.co.uk/dna.h2g2/A630514). This was for two riders sitting either side of a massive wheel and was hand-driven. In 1870 an Englishman built a large, but more conventional looking, unicycle. However it is the penny-farthing which has been credited with being the precursor to the unicycle (Dancey, 1998). This early bicycle sat the rider up high, pushing pedals attached directly to a front wheel. When riders tried to slow down or stop the small back wheel lifted off the ground often resulting in a serious, sometimes fatal, accident. Some riders then tried to ride with the back wheel off the ground, seeing how long they could keep it in the air. Eventually they removed it altogether. One of the first written references to unicycling was in 1884 and described how two young men, frustrated by breaking the small wheels off their penny farthings, practised riding on the remaining big wheel. After three weeks of practice one of them daily rode the three miles to his place of work on the one wheel, "...crossing numerous car tracks and rough block pavement with perfect safety" (Seely, 1884).

The early unicycles of the 1870s had large wheels, similar in size to a penny farthing, and handlebars instead of saddles as this was the part that was left when a penny farthing was chopped in half. In its early days unicycling was about trick cycling with a boom in interest from 1880 to 1900 when they were predominantly used as "artistic bicycles that could be ridden in weird and wonderful ways, including forwards and backwards" (Dancey, p.4). By the end of the nineteenth century two-wheeled bicycles had shown themselves to be far easier to ride than penny-farthings and unicycles and so were quickly considered superior (Hoher, 1994). As the unicycle faded into oblivion some early extreme sportsmen kept the activity alive.

Pioneering unicyclists built their own unicycles out of old bicycle parts and scrap metal throughout most of the 1900s. Indeed, they were still not very common in the early 1980s; they could be obtained with some difficulty from specialist manufacturers but were not yet easy to come by (Anders-Wilkens, 2007). As interest grew unicycles were built on production lines. In more recent years mass production in China and Taiwan brought the price down and as society became more affluent they became accessible to more people and the idea of riding them for fun has caught on. Quality was poor but with recent developments in unicycle manufacture competent riders have been able to push the boundaries and a whole range of unicycling activities are now practised by growing numbers of riders, in the UK and around the world (Monney, 2006).

Unicycling Disciplines

Out of the trick riding of the late 1880s a whole range of unicycling disciplines has evolved with new ones still being developed. At UNICON XIV, in August 2008, a biannual unicycle convention and world championships, a new discipline, Flatland, was introduced; this illustrates the on-going development of the sport brought about by riders themselves. Indeed between UNICON VII in 1994 and UNICON XIV, 2008 three new disciplines were introduced at world championship level; interestingly for this study they are all disciplines

which are particularly popular with young riders, especially boys: Trials, Street and Flatland. An overview of the different disciplines will now be given to help the reader begin to appreciate the complexity of unicycling, the immense variety within it and something of the excitement and energy that unicyclists feel when riding and which will be explored further in this thesis.

There are currently six different riding styles recognised in unicycling; which are summarised as:

- Neighbourhood: basic unicycling in the street
- Freestyle: doing skills, stunts or tricks
- Trials: hopping and riding over obstacles
- Street: using a variety of objects from urban settings, such as stairs or handrails, to do tricks
- Mountain: riding over rough terrain, like mountain biking
- Touring or commuting: mainly meant as distance riding with speeds of 15 to 20 miles per hour reached with ease, depending on the wheel size.

Over the last ten years unicycling has increased in popularity (Monney, 2006) with riders moving away from the traditional performance base of circus and parades and creating new forms of unicycling based on the riding styles, which have resulted in identifiable disciplines, complete with their own clear sets of rules and levels prepared by the International Unicycling Federation (IUF), along with a set of 10 skill levels that unicyclists can pass to mark their achievements as they learn to ride. These new disciplines are broadly referred to within the sport as "extreme unicycling". Unicyclists tend to ride more than one style, pursuing several disciplines at a time. Data gathered from a questionnaire at a British Unicycle Convention (BUC) (BUC, 2006) confirms that riders do indeed take-part in more than one discipline, particularly male riders compared to female riders who are more likely to pursue only one discipline – Freestyle. The most common number of disciplines participated in by males was two at 29%, with 20% of male respondents identifying three; 37% said that they rode four or more disciplines with the maximum number

being seven. In addition to the riding styles listed disciplines also include variations of other sports, the most popular being unicycle hockey and unicycle basketball. Once competent at riding unicyclists often try out new activities, searching for new disciplines which may catch on; examples of these are Harry Potter's favourite game of quiddich played on unicycles instead of broomsticks and scuba unicycling, riding along the seabed. Indeed many riders spoken to over the course of this study do suggest that it is the very variety of opportunities within unicycling which is one of its great appeals. Using extracts from the international magazines as short narrative pieces, each discipline will now be illustrated to try and give a flavour of it and capture some of the essence of the sport.

Freestyle unicycling is the oldest form of extreme unicycling, growing out of traditional performance routines. Tricks and moves are created by riding the unicycle in different ways, for example putting your feet on the wheel and walking the wheel round to move the unicycle rather than pedalling it. Moves are linked together into one flowing routine, often to music, that is aesthetically pleasing; performance is key to this discipline. I have observed at local, national and international events over the last six years, that this is significantly more popular with girls than boys, and is particularly popular in the USA, Germany and Japan. Questionnaire returns from the UK (BUC, 2006) and overseas (UNICON, 2008) provide further evidence of the popularity of Freestyle with female riders, while competition entrance statistics at UNICON XIV and previous world championships confirm these gender and international trends, with Japanese girls being particularly successful at winning medals. It is worth noting here that many Japanese elementary schools teach unicycling as part of their curriculum and this early take-up of the sport clearly enables highly skilled riders to develop (Nishimura, 2008). The extract below is from a young Japanese woman, the world champion freestyler 2006, explaining something of her motivation for this discipline:

> *This time I prepared myself completely for the competition. For two years I concentrated on practising. I thought and practised a lot to perform better. I gave it my all. My name was called at long last. I felt my heart throbbing. I entered the floor with great confidence. My*

four minute routine in front of the large audience started. Without realising until afterwards I truly enjoyed my performance. I felt it finished in the twinkling of an eye. Applause and cheers resounded throughout the gymnasium, which made me very happy. The applause and cheers made me feel that all my efforts paid off. I achieved the goal of giving a great performance. (Sugo, 2006, p.28)

Trials unicycling is based around bicycle trials and motorcycle trials, in that the rider hops or rides over obstacles without putting down a foot or hand. A trials course can be over a natural environment, such as hopping along or over fallen tree trunks in a forest, or in an urban environment, jumping over railings or onto a pile of wooden palettes either stacked for storage or positioned to create a trials course.

Illus. 1: A trials course can be in an urban environment, jumping over railings or onto a pile of wooden palettes, for example.

Street unicycling is defined as a discipline which uses trial obstacles to create freestyle moves; however it does have moves of its own, for example rail grinding, sliding down or along a railing with one pedal resting flat on top of the rail and grinding along it, or stair hopping. Basic street moves include crankflips, unispins and twists which are then combined to make more complex moves, such as a 180 degree twist with a crankflip at the same time.

It is generally considered to have been 'invented' in 1999 by a young American unicyclist Dan Heaton, who is interviewed below about the discipline.

> *Some of the first tricks that we were doing were stair gaps, 360s, foot-plants, no-footers and grinds...I'm actually pretty much over doing drops over about 5 feet, there just isn't any point to it anymore... At this point my motivation for riding is purely for the enjoyment I get out of it. Whether it is landing a new trick or hanging out with other unicyclists. I still have a lot of ideas for new tricks that haven't been done, so I'd like to continue to progress as a rider.*
> (Holm, 2006, p.57-58)

As with other sports, unicycling has its own 'celebrities' who are role models to young riders and Dan can be described as one of these. They are promoted mainly through DVDs but in a far less aggressive marketing style than with many mainstream sports. The DVDs are popular as they show new tricks and the extent to which boundaries can be pushed. They are a significant element in the development of the different disciplines and the related styles, dress and music that become associated with each.

Both Trials and Street are particularly popular with young men in the UK, France and Denmark, again evidenced by participation rates at BUCs and UNICON and my observations at these events. Questionnaire returns from UK riders further support this with Trials being the most popular discipline amongst boys aged 14 to 19; the second most popular disciplines were Street for 14 to 16 year olds and Freestyle for 17 to 19 year olds. The questionnaire was conducted in 2007 before Flatland had really developed and so it was not included in the questionnaire as an option; some may have ticked Freestyle as it was the closest discipline to Flatland.

Flatland is the newest discipline to emerge within unicycling, combining Street and Freestyle. Indeed it has been credited to those Street enthusiasts who struggled to hop onto or over obstacles but enjoyed doing tricks on the flat (Davies, 2008). They persevered at their own strengths and focussed on

trick riding on flat ground but with a distinctly urban flair to it rather than the aesthetic flair of Freestyle.

> *The last part is only difficult because of the mental barrier in place. Remove these worries by wearing shin guards and using plastic pedals. After the first couple of bails you will realise that it doesn't hurt and the barrier will slowly fade. Remember, anyone can physically do a 180 degree uni-spin, it is only a lack of confidence and determination that will get in your way. Keep at it, "if at first you don't succeed..." and all that stuff! Good Luck!* (Auld, 2008, p.33)

Flatland is also credited to Dan Heaton, the Street pioneer, who wanted a low impact style of riding after breaking both ankles in a unicycling accident! This is a good example of how unicyclists can move from one discipline to another given the huge array of possibilities open to them having mastered the basic skills.

Mountain unicycling, occasionally known as off-road unicycling but more commonly nicknamed Muni, has two elements to it. Riders either favour cross country, off-road riding, sometimes over quite long distances, or down-hill, more extreme riding.

> *Coming out of the cloud the end was in sight, but it was still a long way below us and the unrelentingly technical path left us no room for high speed riding. Roger and Tue disappeared down the trail; Sam showed no fear in attempting to ride practically everything, even after nearly loosing his muni over the edge and a brief interlude to reset the tyre after it popped off the rim, and steadily we dropped down to the valley floor...* (Himsworth, 2006, p.21)

North Shore riding is a recent development within this discipline which rides on wooden logs and ladders through a natural environment and is named after North Shore mountain biking in British Columbia. Muni is credited to George Peck, an Alaskan magistrate and windsurfer who was looking for a way of practising his balance one windless summer in the early 1990s (Penton, 2006). A Canadian rider, Kris Holm, is a popular role model for young unicyclists keen on Muni and has made a major contribution to the

sport, pushing the boundaries of what is possible on one wheel. Interestingly he has also developed his own range of products, both technical and clothing.

Illus. 2: "…and steadily we dropped down to the valley floor…" (Himsworth)

In addition to the disciplines presented there is considerable interest in some countries at **long-distance touring and racing**; this may be short distances on track, 100ms, 400ms and so on, or longer distances on road, ten kilometres or marathon for example.

> *The Warwick big wheel race started well, with Roger and Sam both neck and neck up to just before the end of the first lap when Sam came off at over 15 mph. Quite a tumble which allowed Roger to gain an advantage of approximately 300 metres by the time Sam remounted back in fifth place. Just one lap later Sam was back up to second position, but unfortunately still couldn't catch Roger, who is now the current Warwick champion…* (Parnell, 2006, p.48)

Unicycle racing has a long tradition with the first races organised exclusively for unicyclists recorded in 1886 in Germany (Hoher, 1994). Other popular races at UNICON XIV were wheel walking and gliding, both illustrating that unicycling is far more than simply sitting on the saddle and moving by

pedaling. There are, indeed, infinite ways to propel a unicycle and all are valued and valid in their own right.

Basketball and hockey are the other two main disciplines. Hockey is popular in the UK with about 15 regional teams and a national league. Germany has the largest number of local or regional teams of any one country and its players are highly skilled. South Korea, Australia, France, Switzerland, Israel, USA, Denmark and Italy are among other countries who had unicycle hockey teams representing them at UNICON XIV. It is a fast-paced game which is very exciting to watch as both the ball and the players, or riders, travel up and down the pitch at great speed. Unicycle basketball is popular amongst riders in some countries, with Puerto Rico winning the world championships in this discipline on several occasions, including 2008. Another fast-paced, action-packed game, as with hockey not only do the players have to be skilled at that game, they have to be highly competent unicyclists too. Hockey and basketball illustrate the team nature of some unicycling activities as opposed to a more individual emphasis in most other disciplines, although in Freestyle competition both pair and group routines are popular as well as individual ones.

Unicycling as a Circus Skill

Unicycling has generally been regarded as an obscure skill until relatively recently, with numbers of unicyclists in the UK and overseas now increasing in small, but steady, numbers (Davies, 2005; Monney, 2006). It is estimated (based on rough sales figures) that approximately 60,000 people in the UK own a unicycle (Davies, 2008); of course not all of these will ride regularly or, indeed, be able to ride competently, if at all. The Union of UK Unicyclist's membership peaked in 2002 at 148 members; since then it has been declining (www.unicycle.org.uk/archives.html, 2007). However this is not an indication of a decline in the number of unicyclists in the UK, so much as a decline in the desire to be part of a national organisation (Royle, 2006). The development of internet sites and forums dedicated to unicycling has removed much of the

need to belong to a national club as it is easy for riders to communicate with other riders anywhere in the world now, to share new moves and tips by means of DVDs or You-Tube. As an obscure skill with its origins in trick cycling, unicycling has largely been associated with the circus:

> ....*our kid's learning the unicycle, the bike you see at the circus, the bike with one wheel.* (Hoyes, 1998)

Many outsiders continue to identify unicycling as a circus activity, perhaps a form of play; but the physical skill and level of fitness required by competent riders makes it far more than this. However, many do enter the sport through circus workshops or as a development of circus skills, such as juggling, as it is a skill which is regularly included as part of circus skills workshops (Newnham, 2003). Data collected from questionnaires with British unicyclists confirm this, with 25% of participants being introduced to unicycling through circus skills of one kind or another.

Until relatively recently those who wanted to ride with others joined circus schools and clubs as dedicated unicycle groups were very rare (Rodet, 2006). Circus performers who ride a unicycle as part of their act generally do so to enhance another skill; for example they may juggle while riding a unicycle to make the juggling look more impressive. Such a trick requires a relatively low skill level of unicycling. Those who pursue it further than the necessary skills for an entertainment act and increase their physical and technical skills move on to regard it as a sport. Interviews with unicyclists clearly show that many who ride proficiently consider it as such (Bignold, 2006). This is true even for those who pursue the Freestyle discipline where the emphasis is on the performance, creating an aesthetically pleasing, as well as technically and physically challenging sequence of movements. Indeed some Freestyle routines, including the world champion pairs 2008, combine comedy as part of the routine to enhance the performance. While this could be seen as modern-day clowning the physical skill, strength and agility which the two Swiss men demonstrated to gain their gold medal was of a high athletic standard. That unicycling is a circus skill cannot and should not be denied, (indeed at

UNICON XIII there was a 50 m juggling on a unicycle race) but it is much more than that.

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Unicycling as a Sport

The link between art and sport, which unicycling could be said to demonstrate, is recognised by Maguire et al (2002). They suggest that art can be used to provide insights into sport and to aid understanding the world of sport. For them there is a commonality in that in both art in the broadest sense and sport the focus is on the individual's performance, even within a sporting team or a troupe of performers:

> *Emphasis is thus placed on the quality of the performance, which is explained in terms of biomedical properties or uniquely individual creativity.* (Maguire et al, 2002, p.xiii)

They ask us not to dismiss the creativity of the individual athlete but to consider the sporting achievement as a form of performance. Such an approach may help us to recognise unicycling as both a circus art and a sport.

But quite what constitutes a sport is an on-going debate (Chandler et al, 2002). The General Secretary of the Central Council for Physical Recreation in England has described it as 'organised play' (CCPR, 1998). It has long been considered such, but in more recent times this emphasis on play and fun is diminishing as sport becomes big business; "its historical association with frivolity, recreation, and play is virtually over" (Cashmore, 2000, p383). Unicycling is a serious sport to many who participate in it and who compete at world champion level but observations at UNICON XIV show that to many of them, and to many non-competitive riders, unicycling is largely about recreation and play, about frivolity and a sense of fun. Even semi-professional riders, such as Dan Heaton and Kris Holms, do not make a living from the sport and so the emphasis has remained on recreation.

Taking the Council of Europe's definition of sport as:

all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels. (Council of Europe, 2001, p.3)

unicycling meets the identified criteria:

- It is a physical activity which individuals can do on their own at a time and place of their own choosing, or they can attend an organised meeting of other unicyclists but still engage in the activity as an individual. Increasingly though, people are participating in team events, playing unicycle hockey or basketball or riding as a relay team in endurance racing.

- It is a skill which challenges the rider physically, requiring agility, fitness, balance and coordination. It provides mental well-being by challenging the rider intellectually to work out how a trick is done and then how to teach themselves to do it. It also provides a psychological challenge, firstly letting go of the support rail as a learner and then to performing a possible, but scary, move. (Pavarno, 2005)

- Participating either as an individual alongside others or as a team member enables social relationships to be formed and developed.

- The International Unicycling Federation (IUF) organises international competitions, while national and local groups organise competitions at various levels for those who wish to compete. These range from international hockey leagues to speed and distance racing.

The establishment of the IUF is, in itself, an indication of the maturity of the sport and the order developed within it. National and international sporting governing bodies have been developing since the late 1800s to regulate and formulate different sports and to bring order and coherence to competitive sports (Smart, 2005). This is true within unicycling as the purpose of the IUF, established in 1985 is:

To foster awareness of and participation in unicycling as a sport and means of recreation among people of all nations through the

organization of international conventions and the development of national unicycling organizations, to promote voluntary international standards for competition toward the achievement of Olympic status for the sport of unicycling; also, to disseminate knowledge and information on all phases of the sport to all interested parties via an information service. (IUF,2008, www.unicycling. org/iuf/)

This statement clearly indicates the aspirations of the sport of unicycling. Many countries, including the UK have a national unicycle association. As the national body in the UK recognised by the IUF, the Union of UK Unicyclists (UUU) is able to test unicyclists and issue skill level certificates (UUU, 2008).

Pete, one of the young riders whose story is told in this thesis, made a clear point when asked at interview if he thought unicycling was a sport or a circus skill;

Well, it is a sport. I've never seen a unicycle in a circus and I don't do freestyle. All the unicycling I do is very similar to other sports, off road cycling, mountain-bike riding, basketball, even polo I played on it once. Now we have a unicycle hockey team here. I couldn't do a performance on it. It's a sport. I do do a lot of circus skills incidentally, by the way; juggle, clubs, diablo. In fact I can do most circus skills but I took it (unicycling) somewhere else entirely.

Illus. 3: "All the unicycling I do is very similar to other sports, off road cycling, mountain-bike riding, basketball..." (Pete)

Pete clearly sees it as a sport, despite doing a wide range of circus skills himself. This attitude is common to many riders I have talked with formally or informally. Discussions amongst unicyclists on the main internet unicycle forum, Unicyclist.com, provides further evidence in support for Pete's view.

While meeting the Council of Europe's definition of sport, unicycling has more in common with newer, extreme or lifestyle sports than with many of the traditional sporting activities, as defined by Wheaton (2004). Similarities can be seen between several of the disciplines, such as Trials, Street and Muni, with other lifestyle sports, including BMX biking, skateboarding and mountain biking. Pete went on in his interview to confirm this link:

> *"Can you draw any parallels with skateboarding or BMX biking?"*
> *"Yes, absolutely, I mean BMXing and Trials; I used to ride trials courses with trials bikers – absolutely... I've found if I take it to a skateboard park those who are in to skateboarding or BMXing recognise the difficulty of it and respect it for what it is. Those who are really good at skateboarding say 'Wow, that's amazing, it's really interesting.' I definitely think there is something between those different sports."*

As with these there is an emphasis on location, equipment, endurance and sometimes danger involved in unicycling, being very different to traditional, mainstream sports (Chandler et al, 2002). Like other lifestyle sports unicycling and its various disciplines, such as Mountain Unicycling or Muni, have undergone dramatic growth in participation rates recently (Hoover, 2006). The introduction of new disciplines, Street and Flatland for example, into UNICON is evidence of this growth.

Unicycling as a Lifestyle Sport

Lifestyle sports, also known as extreme sports or adventure sports, among other things, have been credited with largely developing out of the Californian surfing scene of the 1960s. The interest in surfing inspired the transformation of this sea sport into land-based activities, such as skateboarding and BMX

biking (Chandler et al, 2002). As these new activities were practised more widely new variations were developed. A developmental link can be seen here between skateboarding and Street unicycling, both of which take place in an urban street environment, indeed Trials, Street and Flatland are all disciplines within biking as well as unicycling. Lifestyle sports consist of an increasing range of activities outside of traditional mainstream sports. They differ from traditional sporting and physical activities in that their emphasis is on location, equipment, endurance and sometimes the danger involved. In addition to these practical differences they also provide other approaches to thinking about sport:

> ....*either ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and to mainstream sport values.* (Rinehart, 2000, p.506)

Despite being acknowledged as alternatives to mainstream sport they are being taken up by increasing numbers of people, and particularly, although not exclusively, young people (Wheaton, 2004). This increase in non-traditional sports has been recognised by Sport England:

> *There has been a proliferation of new sporting forms over the (last) two decades that have challenged traditional ways of conceptualising and practising sport. These new forms, variously labelled 'action', 'new' 'whizz', 'extreme' and 'lifestyle' sports have commercial and competitive dimensions, but are essentially understood by participants as bodily experiences – about 'doing it'.* (Tomlinson et al, 2005, p.2)

The young people interviewed for this thesis would certainly view unicycling as a "bodily experience"; for them the motivation is very much about "doing it", the ride, the drop, the spin. Indeed as Young (2002, p.306) recognises, often these extreme sports "are designed to expose athletes to greater thrills and risks than are found in traditional sporting activities".

The term 'lifestyle sport' is one which I have chosen to adopt in this study, rather than 'alternative' for example, as it is clear to me that unicycling does carry with it a certain lifestyle. Conversations with unicyclists, both formal and

informal, show that this can be attributed to the uniqueness of the activity. It is informal and spontaneous, for example, and frequently recruits riders who have such an attitude to life, such a lifestyle. The term 'lifestyle sport' also implies a long term commitment to the activity; unicycling is rarely taken up as a fad.

> *Though the cultural pop of a term like "extreme", when linked to sports, gives those sport forms a certain faddish panache, many participants are in it for the long haul. They see these activities as lifestyle choices, with style, fashion and aesthetics being just as important markers of participation, for example, as sponsorship and physical prowess.* (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003, p.3)

The perseverance and time usually required to be able to ride a unicycle competently and then to succeed at your chosen trick or discipline requires a significant investment in time. Conversations I have had with a wide range of unicyclists suggest that this time investment secures a long term commitment in many riders. Observations I have made over six years indicate that even when a young rider chooses to stop unicycling, (as Scott does, driven by the desire to interact in a sport with his school peers) many do return to it after a period.

Wheaton (2004) identified nine defining features of lifestyle sports. Many of these are identified by other writers on alternative sports, including perhaps most significantly Rinehart and Sydnor (2003), editors of a seminal text on such sports. What Wheaton does rather helpfully is to articulate these as a set of criteria against which alternative sports can be considered. Each of these can be applied to the sport of unicycling and will be considered in turn. A lifestyle sport is one that:

1. is a historically recent phenomenon, with different disciplines being developed over the past few decades, or the adaptation of older sports - unicycling developed from the penny-farthing in the late 1800s but it has been brought right up-to-date with the development of Street, Trials and Flatland.

2. has the emphasis on 'grass-roots' participation – observations at unicycle meets in the UK, local, regional and national, clearly show that of those who attend only one or two people cannot ride or do not ride and are merely there as spectators (these people will often go on to learn to ride and there are many instances of people being motivated to ride by watching others) (Bignold, 2004, 2006a);

3. is based around the consumption or use of new objects - this is true for many adult riders who have an income and can up-date their unicycles, saddles or pedal protectors to keep up with the latest technological developments (it is also seen in young people who ride, although to a lesser extent);

4. requires a commitment in time or money and a style of life, or attitude to life, and a social identity that develops in, or around, the sport - unicycling is a very difficult skill to master (Hoher, 1994) and so requires a significant time commitment to learn and master increasingly difficult tricks; my observations of unicyclists show that they do generally have a particular attitude to life; that is a positive, activist approach with an emphasis on originality and authenticity of bodily experience;

5. has an ideology that promotes fun, involvement, living for the moment and adrenalin rushes and emphasises creative and artistic expressions of the sport - the nature of unicycling demands this; some disciplines of the sport provide particular opportunities for adrenalin rushes, such as racing, or for artistic expression where a freestyle rider may ride a series of "pirouettes" at speed on the unicycle to music;

6. is predominantly taken up by middle class, white, Western players – or in this case riders – my observations have certainly shown this to be true both nationally and internationally;

7. is largely individualistic in form - increasingly unicyclists ride with others in team events or as pairs in Freestyle competitions but it is still about the individual rider and his or her skill level and technical capability;

8. is a non-aggressive activity but embraces opportunities of risk and danger - unicycling is a non-aggressive sport and disciplines within it promote opportunities to take risks, such as Trials where a rider may try to ride off a six foot drop without dismounting;

9. mainly takes place outdoors in areas without fixed boundaries, such as courts or pitches, or which redefine urban spaces by jumping off buildings or riding along fences - some disciplines of unicycling rely on marked out areas but these are often created by riders themselves, such as Trials and Street courses which redefine the spaces they do use, using buildings as jumping off points or fences for riding along; for many riders part of the enjoyment is being outdoors, just riding in the countryside (Royle, 2006).

The international unicycle magazine, *"Uni"* recently ran a piece based on the above criteria, presenting the case for unicycling to be recognised as a lifestyle sport (Bignold, 2006a). Feedback from readers demonstrated clear agreement that unicycling does indeed meet Wheaton's criteria as this short narrative recalling a conversation at UNICON XIV illustrates:

> *"Hello, I'm Steve's wife, we met yesterday,"* I reminded one of a group of Germans sitting in the front row of the gym, waiting for the pairs artistic freestyle to start. Steve had raced with him in Canada recently and they had got along well. Please would you fill in a questionnaire for me? It won't take long!" I said encouragingly. "I'm doing some PhD research on unicycling and why people do it."
> *"OK!"* the racer replied, nodding his head....
> *"I have seen your picture in the Uni magazine."* one of his friends interrupted. *"You wrote about lifestyle sports. It was correct, each piece you argued. I think unicycling is a lifestyle sport. You showed that it is. I agree with your writing; it was very good."*

An international focus group of unicyclists further supported the claim that it is a lifestyle sport with strong agreement that the case presented here is accurate and gives real examples. Of course, those who are enthusiastic about unicycling are likely to support a case for it to be officially recognised in any capacity. However, what is key here is that they reinforced the examples

given, confirming my observations as a non-rider. Further support for this view appeared in the programme for UNICON XIV in a full-page advert for the Danish arm of Unicycle.com, an international retailer which invests heavily in the development of the sport and in young riders; it is run by unicyclists for unicyclists. The ad proclaimed:

Unicycling is not only competition
It is a lifestyle
Come share your passion with us

While one could argue that they are trying to market a lifestyle to ensure a successful business, I have had both formal interviews and informal conversations with some of its key personnel over several years and as fanatical unicyclists themselves their commitment to this statement appears most genuine.

In some countries unicycling is officially recognised by significant sporting bodies (Rodet, 2006). In Denmark, for example, it is recognised by the Danish Gymnastics and Sports Association, a major national sporting association, and accredited by it. In the UK, while Sport England has given small grants to one or two individual unicyclists and the National Lottery has helped to fund some regional clubs, unicycling is not officially recognised a sport. Indeed, despite the efforts of many clubs and individuals it receives very little attention. When giving a paper on unicycling as a potential motivator of young people to a sporting conference for youth workers, it became clear to me that while many were using 'street sports' to engage young people none of them was aware of unicycling as anything more than a circus act (Bignold, 2006b). This, in part, illustrates something of the rationale behind this thesis, to bring unicycling to the attention of those who work with young people and to a wider audience generally, and for them to recognise it as a sport which has the potential to motivate some individuals. Twenty-seven lifestyle sports have been identified by Mintel (2003). These range from bungee jumping to in-line skating and kite surfing; they include cycling but not unicycling. Interestingly

for this study cycling has then been split into three 'species': Trial riding, Downhill riding and BMX (Bicycle Motorcross); within these 'mutant' forms of Speed biking, Bicycle polo and Bicycle stunt have been identified (Tomlinson et al. 2005).

I have presented a case for unicycling to be recognised as a lifestyle sport and demonstrated how it meets each criterion. Sport generally and individual sports have received increasing academic attention over recent years, as we recognise the role they can play in society and the impact they have on society.

> *It is quite evident that, although sport is pleasurable and entertaining, and many people feel uncomfortable with the idea of taking sport seriously, it is a pervasive and significant part of our lives and is worthy of serious academic attention.* (Donnelly, 1997, p.17)

I have presented unicycling here as an activity which gives pleasure to those who participate in it and which can entertain as a performance of art or sporting prowess. There are those within it who do feel uncomfortable about taking it too seriously, suggesting that formalising it in anyway will stunt its development and lose the true essence of it (Monney, 2006). Others argue that it must be taken seriously in order to develop and receive appropriate recognition from sporting bodies and ultimately funding bodies. Whatever the case, it is a *"pervasive and significant part"* (Donnelly) of the lives of many unicyclists as I set out to show. I now turn attention in the thesis to more critical appraisal within an academic framework; but first a review of my progress as a PhD student.

Choosing a Discipline – Early Progress

... in Unicycling

"That's brilliant, well done!" she exclaimed encouragingly (thinking to herself, "It's taken him a bloody long time just to do that!"). "I'm really proud of you!" she continued. "You've got on really well. You must be pleased."

"I am – it's brilliant," he enthused. "It's a real breakthrough; I was struggling before, to get started I mean, but now I'm off and away. This is gonna be it - now I can do the basics I know what I want to pursue. There won't be any stopping me."

"That's fantastic, Babe, well done!" she responded, trying to be positive but not understanding his excitement. "And what exactly is it that you want to do?" she asked nervously.

"Muni and distance riding – I know it's what I want to do. There's so much potential." And she could see his mind wandering away, already thinking about all the rides he could do. She shook her head and sighed, dreading where this would lead – he was so stubborn and determined!

...in Research

"That's brilliant, well done!" he exclaimed encouragingly (thinking to himself, "It's taken her a bloody long time just to do that!"). "I'm really proud of you!" he continued. "You've got on really well. You must be pleased."

"I am – it's brilliant," she enthused. "It's a real breakthrough; I was struggling before, to get started I mean, but now I'm off and away. This is gonna be it, now I can do the basics I know what I want to pursue. There won't be any stopping me."

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Chapter 2

Being Held Upright - Methodology

When you are learning to unicycle, in the very early stages, it is helpful to be held upright by someone, usually under your elbows from the side so that your supporter does not get in the way of the wheel. The person holding you up could be a friend, a non-rider even, but it is better still if it is a mentor, someone who unicycles already. Then, as well as literally holding you up to stop the wheel slipping out from under you as you naturally lean back, he or she can give you advice and guidance at the same time. (Research Diary, 12/05/08)

"Being Held Upright", the title of this chapter on methodology and methods, continues the metaphor of unicycling and PhD study. As a new researcher, in the early stages of my project, thinking about how I might gather my data I felt the need to be held upright, carried almost, supported by those more experienced and skilled than myself. I couldn't just go out and start talking to people, interviewing them perhaps, without first considering if this would produce useful data. How could I maximise the effectiveness of an interview? What might my alternative methods be? Seeking out this support, of course, meant in part turning to the literature on research methods for guidance.

Research Design Framework

My own experience as a wife and mother of unicyclists and frequent participant in unicycling events, meant that as soon as I decided to embark on this project, I began gathering data, albeit informally. I made notes in a diary as I attended subsequent meets and gatherings. Conversations that I had with key members of the community, usually after an event and over a beer, took on a new significance as I retrospectively made notes of these too. But I was aware of, and somewhat troubled by, the knowledge that I was running before I could walk, or, continuing the metaphor, attempting Street spins before I could ride in a straight line. I was gathering data with no clear plan in mind. I had not yet articulated my methodology and methods. As a new researcher,

lacking in confidence, I felt guilty; this wasn't how it was supposed to be. There was, I thought, a particular structure to follow, a series of steps, which were ordered and should be adhered to. I took comfort, as I began reading, that I was not the only PhD student who felt like this at the start, as the extract below illustrates:

> *It seemed important to me to capture this first, incoherent, unformed stage of the process, although I was not totally sure why, other than having a faint idea that this activity was generally overlooked and was, in some unknown way, a vital part of the overall inquiry. However, I was on the rack, with voices in my head constantly nagging that this wasn't 'real research', this wasn't science. Cixous (1993) writes of the need in original research to 'think the unthinkable' (p.38). The struggle I faced however, with roots securely in scientific subjects (physics and psychology degrees) was much more to unthink the thinkable – to free myself from 'the tyranny of method' (Thomas, 1998, p.151) and open up that 'actual experience in the field (which) is often messy and fraught' (Atkinson, 1994, p.399). (Mellor, 2001, p.466)*

While my research was not science based, it was social science and I wanted and needed it to be rigorous. I was grateful to Mellor though for articulating his anxieties so effectively and for giving me some confidence, to find my own way to *'unthink the thinkable'.*

I started this project with two clear points in mind. Firstly, I wanted to tell the stories of young unicyclists, in whatever form that might take. Secondly, I was a member of the UK unicycling community, despite not being able to ride myself. I spent many hours at unicycling events, watching, supporting, coaching even. It was true that I couldn't 'walk the walk', or 'ride the ride', but I could 'talk the talk'. If I was going to tell the young riders' stories then first I would have to gather the stories. This, it seemed to me, would have to involve talking (and listening) to them and those around them and watching them. There is no better way of gathering first hand accounts of lived experiences than with face-to-face dialogue. This led me towards the methods of interview and observation. Being a part of the community, an insider to some extent, led me towards the methodology of ethnography. And so I was provided with a potential research design framework. In this chapter I will discuss the

methodology and methods adopted through a critical review of literature, my support to stop me falling backwards. In the following chapter I present a research plan as to how I put these into practice for this study.

The Primary Methodology: Ethnography

A simple definition of ethnography is given by Crang and Cook:

> *Ethnography is, after all, defined as participant observation plus any other appropriate methods/techniques etc.... if they are appropriate for the topic. (Crang and Cook, 2007, p.35)*

I expected to do, was already doing, participant observations and so I read on. Ethnography can be interpreted liberally, broadly, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) do:

> *We see the term as referring primarily to a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.1)*

An ethnographic methodology then would give me flexibility and allow for creativity within a recognised, but not rigidly structured, framework. Indeed this was something that was encouraged by Denzin et al. (2006) as an alternative to tightly structured procedures or frameworks:

> *In short, we are advocating an engagement with and promotion of a qualitative research paradigm that imagines creative and critical responses to the fundamentalist regulatory efforts outlined above. (Denzin et al. 2006, p.777)*

Reflecting the nature of unicycling itself, I liked the idea of creativity, flexibility and an emphasis on a naturalistic exploration of a phenomenon rather than a formally pre-structured investigation. It provided me with a methodological framework as a participant researcher and the flexibility to adapt my methods

to situations or individuals as appropriate. Perhaps most crucially, though, it put both the community of unicyclists and individuals within it at the centre of the study, and gave me a dynamically-related role in re-presenting them.

> *This type of ethnography ... [referring to Hammersley and Atkinson's definition] ... I have characterised as conventional, therefore gives centre stage to the human actors, to the sense that people make of the world. The role of the ethnographer is to observe, document, and analyse these practises, to present them in a new light.* (Hine, 2000, p.3)

This was particularly significant to me, given the public perception of unicycling and the lack of knowledge about it generally. I would indeed be hoping to present unicyclists, and particularly young unicyclists, in a "new light".

I was further encouraged in my reading by the call for ethnography to be increasingly used in the context of sports studies. This thesis is based on the premise that unicycling is a lifestyle sport, and as such a sport in its own right, not just a discipline within cycling. Krane and Baird (2005) call for its use in sport psychology, one perspective of this study. Sport psychology, they suggest, suffers from a lack of diversity of research methodology:

> *We offer ethnography as a means for enhancing our understanding of the psychology of athletes' sport experiences and diversifying research tactics in sport psychology. We believe ethnography has the potential to extend our knowledge appreciably. (Krane and Baird, p.87)*

I was confident in my place as a member of the unicycling community, something which had been confirmed by riders themselves. The general consensus amongst unicyclists I talked to was that you could, indeed, be a member of the unicycling community without actually being able to unicycle; this view is taken by the UUU as articulated by its chairperson:

> *The riding is not the be all and end all of unicycling. It's also about hanging out with people and socialising.* (Royle, 2006)

While this legitimised my view of myself as an 'insider', I was fully aware that I could not unicycle and so would not be able to experience what the riders experienced. Further reading of Krane and Baird (2005) calmed this nagging fear of mine as they wrote of ethnography as a means of gaining a "comprehensive awareness" of the sportsman/woman's experience, not the researcher actually experiencing it. They regard the detailed understanding of the culture of the group being studied as key and, as Crang and Cook, Hammersley and Atkinson and Denzin et al. have all indicated, recognise that a number of methods can be employed within ethnography:

> *Altogether, ethnography is an amalgam of research activities, mediated through the researcher, culminating in a textual account of the culture of a social group. Considering that sport has its own culture and within that larger culture, each type of sport (e.g. rugby vs. ice hockey vs. cross-country running), as well as each individual sport team, has a unique culture, ethnography is well suited for investigating sport settings ... we emphasize the goal of understanding the lived experiences of athletes through greater understanding of sport culture.* (Krane and Baird, 2005, p.88)

I was not seeking to measure levels of motivation or increases in self-esteem of unicyclists, but to understand, and so be able to present, the lived experience of the riders. This acknowledges that each one is an individual and will have different experiences and to some degrees different motivators. I did not expect to find one experience, one version of "truth". Ethnography, according to Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000) is based on the belief that there are multiple truths, different and equally valid ways of seeing things or interpreting things, thus furthering my commitment to it as my chosen methodology. This study tells the story of a number of unicyclists; each story is different, each story is individual, each story is the truth as experienced by the rider who told it. While there may be similarities or commonalties, there are differences; an ethnographic methodology allows for this. Of course, I acknowledge that for each young rider who told me his story there may be

more than one version of the truth, of his experience, as he may tell it with a different perspective, a different emphasis depending on who is listening.

Krane and Baird (2005) reported on a number of sport-based research projects that had successfully and effectively adopted ethnography. I was particularly interested to see this approach favoured in some studies of lifestyle sports, such as windsurfing (Wheaton, 2003) and skateboarding (Beal, 1996). One study of particular interest was by someone who, like me, was new to this level of research. Elliot had completed a Master's degree successfully and was, at the time of writing, researching at the next level. He had undertaken an ethnographic study of snowboarding, specifically the spirituality of it (Elliot, 2003). What interested me was that he was a snowboarder long before he came to the research project and so, like me, started it as an insider. There were obvious similarities between the group he was researching and mine and he seemed to be going about it in the way that I had already planned informally, long before I had started reading Denzin and Lincoln (2006), Silverman (2005) and others:

> *As the research is intended to discover what the riders think they are doing, the best way of doing this is by interview, thus allowing the riders to speak for themselves. In order to allow this, the interviews should be semi-structured. They will cover areas such as: the personal history of the snowboarder, focusing on their snowboarding and their religious and social contexts; snowboarding experiences which have been particularly significant for them; their understanding of 'spirituality' and of 'soul riding' and the connections between snowboarding and spirituality.*

> *The participants in these interviews will be identified through a number of contact points including the Internet, British snowboard groups and professional snowboarders. Initial research suggests that the great majority of snowboarders are young white males and the study will reflect this. However, there will also be interviews with non-white and female snowboarders. The interviews will be backed up by some observation of 'soul riding' to establish whether the self-perception of riders is matched by more objective judgement.*

> *Further triangulation of the research will be obtained by the survey of snowboard media of various kinds. The evidence may be from magazines, books, Internet web pages or discussion groups, snowboard videos' or even from computer games. These sources*

> *may also provide links to those in the snowboard industry who may provide useful data. This documentary evidence will provide its own insights.... (Elliot, 2003, p.1)*

I could almost substitute 'unicycle' or 'unicyclists' for 'snowboard' or 'snowboarder'. Of course, this was not to use someone else's framework for my own benefit, but it gave me great confidence in my original thinking, particularly given that Elliot's research was about another lifestyle sport, one too that is, perhaps, misrepresented in the media, in its case as being 'macho' and aggressive, so with a negative connotation too.

As well as finding support for an ethnographic approach in sports studies I was also encouraged to find it valued in Youth Studies. Delgado favours an ethnographic approach as an effective methodology for youth-based research, "demystifying knowledge and modes of enquiry" and so empowering young people (2006, p.146). A type of ethnography I came across which seemed of relevance was virtual ethnography. Hine (2000) described this as the researcher being part of an on-line, or virtual, community. Much discussion, sharing of experiences, opinions on new equipment and advice on the latest trick took place via the internet, in part because the community of unicyclists is quite widely dispersed, both within the UK and internationally. Given the adoption of the internet by many young, and older, people as a favoured means of communication I envisaged some of my research taking place on the internet and this would involve being a virtual member of the on-line unicycling community.

As my research was to focus on lived experience, narrative inquiry and representation became increasingly important. (The rationale for this is discussed in Chapter 4, Data Presentation and Analysis.) As I read of the experience of narrative researchers, it became clear that their position as active members of the communities they were studying was significant, as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). This made a clear link to ethnography as their data were gathered by observing and talking with people in whose community the researchers had established themselves:

It was being in the field day after day, year after year, that brought forth a compelling sense of the long term landscape narratives at work. This too is one of the things that narrative inquirers do in the field: they settle in, live and work alongside participants, and come to experience not only what can be seen and talked about directly but also the things not said and not done that shape the narrative structure of their observations and their talking. (Clandinin and Connelly, p.65)

I had already been a part of the community for several years. With my family I attended residential "meets" and events, living alongside participants and experiencing much of what took place as well as observing it and talking to people about it. Three of the individuals at the centre of this study were already known to me, although to varying degrees, and not necessarily known by me; but my involvement with them was not a one-off occurrence. Of course, this might have an effect on what and how they told their stories to me, but I recognised this and hoped that it would make them more open and honest.

Without finalising my research plan I began to write, as a necessary practice in gaining confidence as a writer as well as a researcher. While not drawing hasty, subjective conclusions from what I had already seen or heard, it quickly became apparent that the process of writing was in itself a method of enquiry for me. Writing enabled me to engage with relevant literature and early data, thus developing my thinking as I critically analysed what I wrote as well as what I read. Richardson recognises the value of writing as a process of enquiry:

By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable. (Richardson, 2005, p.959)

As a process of enquiry she goes on to write about "creative analytic practices", indeed "creative analytic practice ethnography" (CAP):

CAP ethnography displays the writing process and the writing product as deeply intertwined; both are privileged. The product cannot be separated from the producer or the mode of production or the method of knowing. (p.930)

Data collection has been on-going throughout this research project. Writing has been on-going too, first as a means to understand relevant theory and then to tell the narratives. As each narrative has been reconstructed into story form it has influenced data gathering for subsequent stories; knowing what has been effective and what has not, for example. As such, the writing process and product have become inseparable for me.

It has already been acknowledged that ethnography allows for, indeed encourages, flexibility of methods. That was one of its attractions to me, the other being that no other methodology would have been appropriate given the community within which I wanted to research and the fact that I was already a part of it. However the creativity and flexibility does not discourage the study or use of theory, indeed it is indispensably underpinned by it. As Frow and Morris (2000) acknowledge, and as I found in my experience, a theoretical knowledge and understanding is important as it helps to focus initial observations, identify which data are essential and then guide continued observations and interviews. This sense of continual movement and flexibility, is, of course, a key part of unicycling. If, while riding a unicycle, you stop pedalling, stop moving, you quite simply fall off. There is no possibility of free-wheeling as on a bike. This study and the methods within it have similarly been constantly moving, flexing. I do not mean that I have stopped using one method and introduced another, but that I have adapted, with each subject, the form of the interview or the length of the observations, for example; creating an ethnographic approach both permits and requires this flexibility.

Adopting an ethnographic methodology has enabled me to capture the culture of unicycling in the UK and specifically the experiences of a number of young people who were part of this. The stories of a range of young riders were key to my project, as already stated, but I was interested to know if their experiences reflected those of the larger community of unicyclists. I decided early on to plan a questionnaire to be distributed within the community, confident that as a member of it I would attract a high response rate. This

would enable me to identify common trends within unicycling, which might be illustrated by the individual stories. While ethnography was my dominant methodology, survey, incorporating a questionnaire, became a secondary methodology.

The Secondary Methodology: Survey

A survey of the British and international unicycling community was undertaken as part of this research project to provide a larger context in which to consider the qualitative data, something I considered helpful in identifying possible trends in unicyclists' experience. As Lewin puts it when describing the use of statistics in data analysis,

> *Descriptive statistics have an important role to play, enabling data to be explored before any further analysis is undertaken but are also a primary means of describing how things are rather than seeking to explain why phenomena occur.* (Lewin, 2004, p.215)

The questionnaire was a social survey, and as such sat comfortably within a broader ethnographic approach. Aldridge and Devine define a social survey as a strategic research strategy to "collect the same information about all the cases in a sample" (2001, p.5). They classify the information, or "variables", collected into three broad categories; attributes, behaviour and opinions or attitudes. De Vaus identifies three defining characteristics of a social survey (2006). First, the content is social; it is concerned with human behaviour and the other variables classified by Aldridge and Devine above. Secondly, the form of the data is systematic and structured around variables. Thirdly, the "method of analysis relies on comparisons across groups" (p.284). In this study I did use a questionnaire but it is not essential in survey research. I wanted to use a questionnaire so that I had a wider sample than the few young riders, to identify motivators of unicycling, behaviour and attitudes of riders, for example. I saw this as a way to add breadth to the data gathered.

The advantage of surveys is that they are a relatively efficient way of gathering data from a large number of cases to describe objective characteristics of a population (De Vaus) as was my rationale for adopting them. However they are criticised (McLean, 2006) for imposing on the sample external explanations for behaviour, ignoring the intentional and subjective component. As a means of overcoming this criticism the questionnaires in this study were devised using variables identified or defined by members of the community being sampled, unicyclists. The survey, in this case the questionnaire, was undertaken as a "field experiment ... conducted in a naturalistic environment(s) where it is often easier to recruit participants" (Lewin, 2004, p.216). Lewin's recognition of the field and the naturalistic environment clearly link to ethnography.

Drawing on his own research with young people on their self-identities, Rassool (2004) recognises the need for deep, as opposed to broad, research around such topics. He concludes that research of an exploratory nature into the lives and identities of young people requires in-depth study which, for most independent researchers, is likely to be of a small scale due to limited resources of time and/or money. This, he argues, is more appropriate than a broad overview involving lots of participants. My thesis is concerned with young people's identities and their motivational drivers; a small in-depth study and an ethnographic methodology lends itself to this in line with Rassool's thinking. A secondary, survey, approach has allowed a broad base to underpin the in-depth narratives, thus maximising the research project's effectiveness.

Research Methods

In characterising ethnography as a variety of appropriate methods, Crang and Cook (2007) do not view it as a regulated set of methods but a range of tools or techniques to draw on as required:

So what we would strongly suggest is that the dynamics and benefits of each method be kept in mind as the possibilities for research unfold, so that appropriate methods cannot only be formally proposed but also flexibly adopted when the need or opportunity arises. (p.35)

Having discussed methodology generally, and with some reference to youth-based research and the field of sport, the dynamics and benefits of each likely method will now be considered in the light of Crang and Cook's recommendation.

1. Interviews

Interviews were a key research method for this thesis, as it was through dialogues that I gathered much of the data used; the personal and social interaction facilitated a detailed gathering of information (Davies, 2006). When considering the most effective types of interviews for me I considered a number of variables. These included the research context, the purpose of the interview, its structure and where and how it would be conducted – in what setting. While recent years have seen an increase in internet and telephone interviews as a method of cost-effective, fast data collection it was important to me to conduct face-to-face interviews to maximise the cues given by body language and facial expressions. I dutifully read of the range of dialogue possible, from an informal, unstructured, in-depth discussion, described by Davies as "naturalistic", to a highly structured conversation conforming to a standardised interview schedule. I was drawn towards interviewing in the form of "purposeful conversations" which have been a key method in ethnographic research (Burgess, 1984).

Interviews as a main method would enable me to follow up and probe more deeply responses given by the interviewee and explore motives and feelings behind what he said (Davies). The verbal data were enriched by non-verbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions. Unstructured interviews allowing for "free talk", providing rich, grounded data, were appealing but would have been be very time consuming to analyse and increased the potential for interviewer bias. Guided interviews, a more

technical term for my purposeful conversations, with some structure to them would be less time-consuming and less problematic to analyse as the responses would be more standardised, in that they would address the same themes, thus overcoming some of the disadvantages of unstructured interviews. Details of how I went about the interviews is given in the following chapter as part of my research plan.

I really had no choice but to undertake interviews, for how else would I have gathered the stories in such detail? But a major concern was the potential for interviewer bias seen as significant to any interview by Rapley (2004). Rapley suggests that is impossible for an interviewer to be neutral, to ask non-leading questions, without offering his/her own thoughts, ideas or experiences; the interviewer is always active in the interview. The interviewer has total control, guiding the talk by deciding which responses to follow up and using questions and silences to encourage or discourage certain lines of dialogue. Although this is true to a large extent, the interviewee does have the power to refuse to answer certain questions and stop the interview when he/she wishes to and so has some control of the dialogue. Whether or not the interviewee exercises this control will depend much on his/her self-confidence and understanding of such protocol and the relationship with the interviewer. It is acknowledged though that these three factors are themselves strongly influenced by the interviewer's attitude and behaviour. These, therefore, became key areas of consideration for me in engaging young people.

Oral history has "steadily emerged" as an acknowledged method in qualitative research (Delgado, 2006) and interested me greatly because of its obvious link with personal narratives. The context of the interview is significant to its structure and type. Recent social and research trends focusing interest on individuals has lead to increased use of biographical interviewing (Rustin, 2000). This has taken one of two approaches, either chronological or narrative. A chronological focus explores a series of events and experiences in chronological order. However Harding (2006) warns

against the assumption that interviewees can best retell their experiences in the correct sequence of time. She suggests that "the present is a crucial reference point for attempts to remember the past" (p.2). Her own research, on which she bases this argument, was conducted with young people and so was of particular interest to me. A narrative approach invites interviewees to select key experiences and link these together where they feel appropriate, not necessarily in any chronological order. This was true for this study as the young unicyclists were not required to recount events in any particular order. A loose structure of present, past and future was offered, but did not need to be adhered to, based on Harding's experiences. Her own method of interviewing young people developed a

> *hybrid approach tending towards the spirit of narrative interviewing, acknowledging the value of some chronology (but not being driven by it).* (Harding, 2006, p.13).

Her interviews began with an exploration of the present, to enable the young people to give a reference point for the benefit of themselves and the interviewer, and then explored aspects of the past. It seemed to me that this provided an effective structure for this research project, which could then move on to explore future aspirations.

Positive experiences of other researchers in gathering children's and young people's stories through interviews was encouraging to me. The importance of interviews, both structured and unstructured, in youth research has been acknowledged by key groups involved in youth studies, such as Save the Children (2000):

> *One of the best ways to build up an understanding of children's lives, their interests and needs is to interview them ... If done sensitively, they can elicit a great deal of qualitative information ... These interviews can cover life stories, testimonies of events or specific topics.* (Save the Children, 2000, p.23-24)

Delgado (2006) supports this view, recognising the potential of interviews as a means for young people to tell their stories. He sees this as particularly significant in today's society where youth are often the focus of news stories

but are seldom encouraged to share their own stories. He suggests that interviews can provide a forum for young people to share stories, personal information and insights into a range of subjects. The advantage of them is the "humanising and personalising" of the research process, something I found particularly encouraging. However he sees a disadvantage as their potential to be intrusive to the interviewee, something I would have to minimise.

As well as individual interviews a number of focus groups took place in this study. These were in keeping with Vaughan et al.'s definition (1996) of having two key components. First, there was a trained moderator (me) with prepared questions who set the context for the participants. Secondly, the goal was to elicit the participants' feelings, attitudes and so on in relation to unicycling and various aspects of it. Delgado is a strong advocate of focus groups in youth-based research, as is Krueger who describes them as having "considerable potential for discovering how young people think about issues, programs and opportunities" (1994). My intention was to use a small number of focus groups of young people. Although I did this, I also used two focus groups of adults of varying ages, teachers and mentors of unicycling. (Details of how and why the research groups were set up are to be found in Chapter 3 as part of my research plan.)

I read of an emphasis on opinions rather than personal studies being elicited in focus groups, in keeping with Vaughan et al.'s definition above.

> Although focus group members do not necessarily think about what is required of them, they nevertheless tend to provide more in the way of opinions, views, attitudes and beliefs, and fewer stories or personal narratives. With rare exceptions opinions and views are treated as good contributions to focus groups, and stories or personal narratives are not. (Puchta and Potter, 2004)

I intended to use focus groups to elicit the opinions and views of young riders and teachers of unicycling so I was not put off by Puchta and Potter. The personal stories would be collected primarily through the interviews already discussed. In fact, the focus groups with the adults did yield stories, but they

tended to be of others, of young people the teachers/mentors had been working with. These were all useful as supporting data, some of which have provided the cultural background to the individual stories.

2. Observations

I knew from the beginning of this project that observations would be a key research method; when studying or researching any sport, movement is a key aspect. This was particularly so for me in this study of unicycling as it is a little-known sport. I had to capture the movement and the excitement in it in order to help the reader understand the very nature and essence of unicycling. The observations would support the interviews and provide further qualitative data of social investigations around the significant individuals. I was interested that the combination of interviews and observations is a common one in qualitative studies (Silverman, 2005).

Jones and Somekh regard observation as a significant method of data collection, particularly in the social sciences, and endorsed my commitment to this technique:

> *One of the most important methods of data collection, it entails being present in a situation and making a record of one's impression of what takes place.* (Jones and Somekh, 2005, p.138)

I was wrong, naïve perhaps, in imagining that they would be easy and straightforward to carry out. Despite being one of the most important methods, I read of the difficulties involved due to the "enormous complexity" of human behaviour. Jones and Somekh acknowledge this and recognise the impossibility of the observer making a complete record of all that is going on. I accepted therefore that my observations would be subjective. Any observations I recorded would be a product of my choices about what to observe and what to record, made either at the time of observation as a response to impressions, or in advance of it in an attempt to order the data in some way.

What is observed is ontologically determined, that is it depends to a great extent on how the observer conceptualises the world and his or her place within it. (Jones & Somekh, p.138)

How I managed to reduce this subjectivity, or at least ensure I was fully aware of it, is discussed in my Research Plan, Chapter 3.

Jones and Somekh discuss three methodologies, as they see them, in relation to observations: positivist, symbolic interactionist and ethnographic. With a positivist framework the world is external to the observer and facts can be recorded unproblematically in a systematic and structured process. The main methodological issue is how to make accurate observations, reducing observer subjectivity. A symbolic interactionist framework is concerned with the patterns in behaviour constructed by social interaction. The observer will look for, and therefore is likely to see, patterns of behaviour. In an ethnographic framework the process of observation will be highly participatory, conducted in an open-ended way with nothing screened out. The observer will aim to note as many details as possible guided by overarching categories, such as culture, which will then provide data to analyse cultural meanings in verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Within this framework Jones and Somekh argue that it is possible to draw large conclusions from small, but detailed facts. Coffey (2006) regards observations as beneficial to ethnography or other field-based work as they provide a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Support by Jones and Somekh and Coffey for observations in an ethnographic approach was encouraging to me and I had a strong sense that my methodology and methods were coming together, as well as a sense of relief! I began to feel empowered without feeling constrained.

As I had adopted an ethnographic approach it seemed obvious that the type of observations I should undertake would be participant observations. Thus I discounted structured, unstructured and shadow observations, not wanting to be restricted by any form of advanced schedule or tracking. Participant observations would enable me to record my experiences and observations in everyday unicycling activities (Coffey). This would provide an opportunity to

gain a unique insight into the behaviour and activities of those observed as I became absorbed into the activity. I was aware, however, that this absorption might create distractions as I might find myself given tasks to do by the group under observation and therefore not have the opportunity to make notes. This was a particular concern for me as I would often have requested such tasks in the past in a desire to be fully involved. In such an instance notes should be made afterwards and these records rely to a large extent on memory. I overcame this by making it explicit to those around me when I was undertaking observations and not available for tasks.

Of course, whatever method of observation I had chosen, the very act of observing has some level of impact on those being observed (Simpson and Tuson, 1995); this is a recurrent concern to researchers, and was to me. A tense, unnatural atmosphere or situation may be created, for example, which may alter social realities. Coffey argues, however, that the impact of the researcher's presence is not of major significance. Specific encounters may not have occurred without the researcher being there but the general processes with which the researcher is primarily concerned would have continued, with or without the researcher's presence.

Given that I would have some level of impact on those observed, I took O'Leary's advice (2004) and constantly reflected on my presence and acted in a responsible manner, as detailed in the next chapter. I also took the advice of Jones and Somekh and of Coffey. Jones and Somekh recommend that the observer gives those observed information about the research project in advance in order to lessen the effects of negative impact. Another strategy is to try and merge with the context, by wearing similar clothes to those observed for example, and so signals equality of the observer and the observed. This is likely to be of significant importance when observing young people as dress is commonly linked to culture and subculture. Coffey warns that it is disadvantageous to the collection of accurate and reliable data if the boundary between the researcher and those observed blur as over-familiarity may affect objective recording. I was constantly aware of this too, particularly as three of the focus riders were already known to me, to varying degrees.

Jones and Somekh regard the relationship with the participants as key to collecting effective data and urge the researcher to consider how an appropriate relationship may be formed. Observations construct meaning from the experience of participating in the activities of others, to various degrees depending on the method of observation. Interviews construct meaning from the accounts of others about their participation in those activities. Jones and Somekh suggest, therefore, that observations can be far more threatening than interviews for participants as in an observation the construction of meaning is less likely to match the participants' construction of meaning than in an interview. This leads to ethical issues with the need for informed consent being of utmost importance. The ownership of the data produced by observation also requires ethical consideration. Coffey is concerned by relationships developed by the researcher in the field with those observed as to their genuineness; a particular concern for participatory observation which relies on the development of relationships in order to be absorbed into the culture. With two of the focus riders I already had social relationships; one, Max, was very well known to me, the other, Scott, far less so. Both, however, were used to seeing me watching events and taking photos for my husband when he was participating. The only difference now was that I was taking notes; I did this as unobtrusively as possible, but with their full knowledge.

In considering participatory observations in ethnographic research further, with regard to this research project, I found it helpful to look at Jupp's (2006) continuum of research positions. At one end is full participation; at the other end is detached observation, non-participatory. Along this continuum are the preferred point of the researcher (based on the extent to which he/she sees him/herself as a full participant in the culture or activity) and the point where the individual or group observed sees the researcher (based on their view of him/her as a participant). These two points may not be the same but will both affect the relationship between the researcher and those observed; this is the relationship which Jones and Somekh (2005) regard as being of critical importance. Jupp acknowledges that it may not be possible, or desirable, to

be a fully participant observer due to demographic factors, such as age, or to a particular skill, in this case being able to ride a unicycle. To this end Jupp recommends that participant observers also keep a field-work diary to record their own personal feelings and experiences as researchers, as these may have some significance for the data collected by this method of observations. This I did and have subsequently referred to when writing.

Of course, using observations as a research method in sports can be difficult because of the complex nature of sporting activities and the range of technical skills employed in any one event. Gratton and Jones (2004) recommend the use of an observation checklist if the researcher is aiming to observe a range of physical actions or variables. This may have been necessary in this study in order to explore the skill level of the young riders - are they what they perceive them to be? An alternative, acknowledged by Gratton and Jones, is to video the activity or event. I opted not to use a checklist or to video observations. Having observed much unicycling over the past seven years I felt confident in my ability to recognise and record the various moves or activities which took place.

3. Questionnaires

Survey can be described as a methodology, according to Gillham (2000b), and indeed I have adopted it as a secondary methodology in my study. Questionnaires, then, can be seen as one method employed within my methodology. This gives them a similar structure and linked relationship as ethnography gives to interviews and observation in my research project. Gillham goes on to link ethnography and surveys, stating that the two methodologies are not incompatible with each other. Indeed, as he reports, ethnography often involves some survey work, particularly in the area of sociology of education, which is partly my subject area here.

The use of questionnaires, a set of carefully designed questions given to a group of people, is a popular method of survey research, and one that I was keen to adopt from early on. Some researchers define questionnaires as being self-administered or postal, while others would also include in this

category face-to-face interview schedules (McLean, 2006). Gillham suggests a "verbal data dimension" with a continuum from unstructured to structured questions. At the unstructured end of this he puts listening to other people's conversations, "a kind of verbal observation" and at the other end he places structured questionnaires with simple, specific, closed questions. With regard to methods used in this research project, "open-ended" interviews are placed approximately one third of the way along, being nearer to the unstructured than structured end. This is an interesting continuum for this study as part of my immersion or participation in the culture has been to listen to riders' conversations and note interesting comments, observations or ideas in a research diary later.

I was enthusiastic about distributing questionnaires because I anticipated a high return rate, given my place in the unicycling community. I was confident, compelled by an unscientific hunch, that I would not suffer from a poor response rate, on average a return of approximately 25% according to McLean or 40% estimated by Lewin (2005). My research was generally welcomed by riders who were keen to see their sport promoted positively and so I expected them to participate willingly. Questionnaires also appealed to me on a practical level as I read of their advantages. Gillham describes these as being low cost in time and money, providing anonymity for the respondent, lacking in interviewer bias, providing standardised questions which would make my analysis of answers straightforward if I used closed questions and providing suggestive data for testing a hypothesis. Their disadvantages, among them problems of data quality in relation to accuracy and completeness, the need for brevity and relatively simple questions, problems of motivating respondents and possible misunderstandings were, in my view, possible to overcome. I did not intend to use them to capture complex social phenomena, something Mclean suggests they are incapable of doing, but to identify general trends or similarities in experiences within the community. I planned and piloted them carefully to ensure effectiveness as discussed in the following chapter.

4. Archival Statistics

The characteristics of surveys are not limited to questionnaires or scheduled interviews. They can also apply to the gathering of archival statistics, a secondary method in this study. Bryman and Cramer (1994) give the examples of government generated statistics or those collected by organisations about their members. As well as using questionnaires I examined archival statistics of the UK Union of Unicyclists (UUU) of its membership and the archival statistics of the International Unicycling Federation (IUF).

A Mixed-method Approach

In adopting an ethnographic methodology, to gather qualitative data, supported by survey, to gather quantitative data, I would be mixing qualitative and quantitative methods. Lacking in confidence, as a new researcher, I was unsure how this would be received so once again turned to published researchers for support, to be held upright again.

As a new researcher I needed to be able to distinguish between the two. A simple explanation given by Thomas helped as a starting point:

> *Qualitative methods involve a researcher describing kinds of characteristics of people and events without comparing events in terms of measurement and amounts. Quantitive methods, on the other hand, focus attention on measurements and amounts ... of the characteristics displayed by the people and events that the researcher studies.* (Thomas, 2003, p.1)

A mixed-method approach, I was relieved to read, is not a recent phenomenon but can be traced back to the early twentieth century (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). There has been growing interest in recent years among researchers in such approaches (Gorard & Taylor) although 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' are still regarded as dichotomies. This may be due to the fact that these two approaches developed out of significantly different disciplines. Swann and Pratt (2003) base their support for a mixed-methods approach on

the philosophy of Karl Popper a mid-twentieth century German philosopher and researcher. This provides further evidence of a long interest in mixed-method approaches. The idea that the two approaches are a dichotomy is still common today though, as O'Leary acknowledges, seeing them as such is unhelpful to researchers, and was unhelpful to me:

> *'Quantitative' and 'Qualitative' however have come to represent a whole set of assumptions that dichotomize the world of methods and limits the potential of researchers to build their methodological designs from their questions ... Researchers should see these terms as simply adjectives for types of data and their corresponding modes of analysis.* (O'Leary, 2004, p. 99)

I was encouraged, though, by Swann and Pratt (2003), who agree that there is an unnecessary division between the two terms, that there are no exclusively quantitative or qualitative methodologies. They suggest that it is more helpful to talk about quantitative and qualitative procedures and techniques. O'Leary encourages researchers to consider systematically the assumptions made in the terms "quantitative" and "qualitative" in relation to methodology, methods, data type and analysis and to develop a methodological design most appropriate to the particular research project rather than feel compelled "down a narrow and predetermined methodological path". The need for creativity and flexibility, something I felt was essential for me, has already been voiced in this chapter drawing on Denzin et al (2006). Gorard and Taylor support such an approach. They view quantitative and qualitative methods as mere tools to be used by researchers as appropriate, going on to state that they are nearly always more powerful when combined than when used in isolation; this study combines them for maximum effect. With a mixed-method approach "different forms of data are put together to make a more coherent, rational and rigorous whole" (Gorard & Taylor, p.4). Greene (2005) supports such a philosophy for combined methodologies, particularly with regard to social enquiry, which this thesis partly is. She commends such as an approach as being able to generate "better understanding" than a single methodology.

Greene (2005) poses three key questions for researchers, to consider their practice carefully. First, will methods be integrated throughout the study or will they be kept separate until the end? She encourages integration as this enables data from one method to inform the design of another method or instrument. Secondly, are different methods considered of equal importance or is one regarded as dominant over another? She suggests that a dominant method will result in a fairly traditionally structured approach in keeping with the methodology which the dominant method comes from. Thirdly, will the methods be implemented concurrently or sequentially? This may be dictated by conceptual or practical reasons, she suggests. I duly considered these questions with regard to this study and decided that I would integrate quantitative and qualitative methods throughout the research project so that they can inform each other and the analysis of the subsequent data can be on-going, further informing later data collection. While the narratives constructed from the ethnographic qualitative data are at the centre of this study, the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires is important too as it enables general trends to be identified. Both approaches would thus be implemented concurrently.

The literature on research methodology and methods has been reviewed with reference to those employed in this study. Each method will be discussed further in the following chapter, as it relates specifically to the research carried out here, by way of presenting the research plan and the rationale for it. Janesick (2000) likens qualitative researchers to choreographers as both rely on

> *the use of a set of procedures that are simultaneously open-ended and rigorous and that do justice to the complexity of the social setting under study.* (Janesick, 2000, p.379)

She goes on to explain this metaphor drawing on two kinds of dances, "a precisely set piece, a minuet, and a piece that has structure and form yet is totally free, the approach known as improvisation" (p.379). This comparison is fascinating as it could hold just as well if "dance" was replaced by "unicycling". As I have sought to show earlier in this thesis, unicycling, through its various

disciplines, can be both open-ended with its emphasis on individual creativity and experimentation and rigorous with some structure from the IUF to guide its development; it creates a complex social setting. Freestyle is a precisely set discipline with riders scoring points on each specific trick expected within a routine. Trials have structure and form yet are totally free, with each rider choosing his own route through the course. The research methods I have selected, when put together, form a combination which provides structure but which also allows creativity and flexibility, a freedom to explore the social complexities within unicycling. Janesick goes on to explain this further:

> The qualitative researcher is remarkably like a choreographer at various stages in the design process, in terms of situating and recontextualizing the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study. When choreographers are asked what they do, they typically speak of each individual piece, case by case, within the social context of the given choreographic study. (p.380)

Having considered different methodologies and methods at the start of this PhD I have revisited them and their application as the study has evolved. I have recontextualised, as part of the journey of doing a PhD, and in doing so arrived at a research plan.

Chapter 3

Letting Go of the Wall - Research Plan

In the early stages of learning to unicycle some form of support, to help the rider stay upright, is essential. A teacher or mentor may provide support, holding the beginner tightly under the upper arms, but more commonly a wall is used by the learner. Once two or three revolutions of the wheel can be regularly achieved with this support, the next stage is to let go and try to ride unaided. This chapter, the Research Plan, is titled "Letting Go of the Wall" as part of the on-going metaphor that doing a PhD is like learning to unicycle. In considering your methodology and methods you are supported by a body of research, giving support, guidance and direction. Having considered this and selected your methods, from a theoretical perspective, the next step is to consider how you will apply these to your project, your research plan. It is at this point that you let go of the wall, or supporting theory, and try to succeed yourself, focusing entirely on your own context.

The research plan for my thesis falls into two parts. One part is the collection of individual data through observations and interviews with the young riders in the narratives. The second part is the collection of more generalised data by way of questionnaires, focus groups and archival statistics engaging the larger unicycling community. As already acknowledged, such a mixed-method approach aims to create more detailed understanding of the research area than a single method (Gorard and Taylor, 2004), in this case young people's motivation for unicycling and its influence on their identity.

I regard the first part, individual data collection, as the dominant component of the research, with the second part, generalised data gathering, providing a supporting context. Therefore I do not consider the methods of equal

importance, although both are significant as one would not be sufficient without the other.

Five detailed studies provided data on individuals, whose stories are told. My original intention was to study young riders who were disaffected at school or work, because of the high level of interest in this group by the media, academics and practitioners. I had heard much anecdotal evidence from teachers of unicycling that some young people identified as disaffected by their schools showed high levels of motivation for learning to unicycle. However, if my focus was on youth who were disaffected I would miss out a large group of individuals who have interesting stories to tell about the significance of unicycling to their lives, but who were not close to virtual or actual exclusion from school. In trying to identify a broad group from which to draw the subjects I moved to the concept of engagement rather than disaffection. I found it helpful to consider engagement as a continuum, at one end of which an individual may be highly engaged in mainstream education while at the opposite end a pupil may be completely disengaged and so disaffected.

Along the continuum are a wide range of individuals engaged at differing degrees. For example, a pupil who engages with written tasks in most subjects but who is shy and does not contribute to class debates or discussions my be regarded as unresponsive but is clearly not disaffected. Another pupil who has a low concentration span and so is often criticised by teachers for being sidetracked and loses interest easily is not disaffected and may engage at a high level with his/her work for short periods of time. A third, equally notional, pupil may be fully disengaged from mainstream education to the extent of being excluded from school and as such disaffected. All three examples are of young people who are unlikely to be fulfilling their full potential at school, to very different degrees, and who could be supported in developing their self-esteem further. I suggest that if all three were unicyclists they might each have an interesting story to tell about themselves and their riding.

Selection of Individuals

Having identified engagement as a continuum along which different individuals occupy a place I needed to identify my subjects, several young people at various degrees of engagement in academic work. Therefore, I sought five young unicyclists who were located along the breadth of the engagement continuum. In the event, the following were identified from a larger group of potential participants:

- Max - highly engaged
- Pete - engaged for some of the time but with low self-esteem preventing maximum engagement
- Scott - engaged with written tasks but seemingly unengaged in class activities
- Sangay - engaged for short periods of time
- Jon - low level of engagement due to learning difficulties or social or emotional difficulties

The above levels of engagement then were the first criterion as I wanted each participant to demonstrate a different level as far as possible. A second criterion planned for selection of individuals was that they had been unicycling for at least one year as this would allow them sufficient time to become familiar with the sport and to ride at an independent level, Skill Level One. Skill Level One of the International Unicycle Federation is to be able to mount and dismount unaided and to ride a distance of at least 50 metres. Once an individual can do this he or she is deemed to be "a unicyclist"; until this time he or she would be categorised as "learning to ride a unicycle". However, in one of the five cases this criterion was not adhered to, the rider being completely new to unicycling, indeed being observed in his first ever lesson. I selected him as his story gave a very interesting insight into early motivation and positive impact on self-esteem with very limited success. The third criterion was that they should pursue different unicycling disciplines as this would give a broader profile of the sport as a whole. The fourth criterion for the participants was that they were between the ages of 11 and 19, or had

begun riding during this age and still be in their early 20s. Tomlinson (2004) identifies concerns about the failure of 14 to 19 year olds to achieve. I am interested in 11 to 19 year olds as I regard it as necessary to look at their experiences prior to age 14 as well as during their adolescent years. Unicycling in the UK is a male dominated sport and given that this is a small scale study I decided to focus on males. I plan to undertake future research to look at girls' experiences of unicycling.

The criteria adopted required me to undertake *"purposive sampling"* (Silverman, 2005). I have chosen the cases as ones which are likely to contribute to the understanding of how unicycling can have a positive influence on the identities of young people.

Interviews

Semi-structured, recorded interviews took place with each rider. In the context of young people and sport, Gratton and Jones (2004) report that unstructured interviews are most effective. My interviews were loosely structured to ensure that the talk remained relatively focused and to ensure a degree of standardisation. Rather than developing a tight interview schedule I devised a list of questions which I would use as a prompt, based on my three research questions, to ensure that the "conversation" covered all my required themes. I also created a number of prompt sheets. For example, rather than expect him to describe his motivation levels I drew a continuum and asked him to point to where he thought he stood. (These interview questions and prompts are in Appendix 1.) I planned to undertake a series of three, in-depth interviews with each person. My intention was for each interview to focus on a different period of their riding, but not necessarily in a biographical format; as Harding (2006) advises, young people cannot always select key experiences in any chronological order.

The three interviews were designed to elicit experiences at different stages of unicycling and address my three research questions. However, I rearranged

this logical order so as to start from the present, reflect on the past and anticipate a future. Thus:

- Interview One: current unicycling ability, interest, context and current motivators

- Interview Two: learning to ride, initial and early motivators and interests

- Interview Three: future ambitions and aspirations with their motives

The Interview Process

I encouraged interviewees to talk about personal stories or critical incidents as a means of providing a context for their identity or motivation. These are termed *"experience narratives"* by Thomas (2003), as they are an account of an event as described by the person who experienced it.

I invited the participants to select the setting for the interview, so it would be on their ground, rather than mine and this would hopefully make them feel more at ease. However, care had to be taken to avoid "response contamination" which Scott (2000) suggests is more likely to occur at home or school. In contrast Greig and Taylor recognise the use of these familiar settings as "valuable in assisting motivation and reducing anxiety." (1999, p.131). Given these differing view points what was of significance to me was that the context was chosen by each young person. Scott, Max and Pete all chose to be interviewed at home. Jon and Sangay were interviewed at school.

I planned to create as an informal an atmosphere as possible; Scott warns that "By adolescence, young people are wary of revealing their secrets to an

adult" (2000, p.102). I acknowledge this, hence the importance of creating a sense of equality between myself and the interviewee:

> *How might I create an informal atmosphere? Need to consider dress. Don't wear Unicycle.com t-shirt as interviewees might think I'm linked to them and their sales in some way. May think I am not 'neutral' and answer with reference to specific merchandise.* (Research Diary, 14/03/07)

Scott goes on to suggest that young adults in their early 20s might be less "wary of revealing their secrets to an adult" (p.102), another rationale for me to include them in the sample.

I gave detailed thought as to how stimulate a dialogue. I decided to invite each to start the first interview by talking about a photograph he had chosen of himself with a unicycle. Scott recommends the use of visual stimuli with children as it provides something concrete to talk about and reduce anxiety (Greig and Taylor, 1999). My decision to use photographs was based, in part also, on the importance of images, in unicycling and its surrounding culture:

> *How might I encourage the interviewees to relax and talk? Can I use photos as a way in? Could these be taken by* them *– them and their uni (position, location etc.) Not much variation. Would be more to talk about if asked them to choose a photo of them riding, taken by someone else. This could be a prompt to get them talking. Might also identify one of Thomas' "experience narratives" (2003).* (Research diary, 27/05/06)

There is a long tradition of photography in ethnographic research as documented by Walker and Wiedel (1985). Pink (2001) identifies the potential of visual research methods as providing new opportunities for furthering understanding of different subjects, in ethnographic study in particular:

> *Therefore by paying attention to images in ethnographic research and representation it is possible that new ways of understanding individuals, cultures and research materials may emerge.* (Pink, 2001, p.13)

The meanings given to the images may vary between the researcher, the subject, others in the community and the audience; Pink cautions researchers to be aware of this. Delgado (2006) particularly warns of adults misinterpreting images, including photographs, taken by, or at the request of, youth. Asking them to choose their own photographs and describe them to me would avoid my misinterpretation of them.

I undertook a variety of other interviews, in addition to those with the young riders. These included teachers of unicycling, unicycling mentors, key figures in local, national and international clubs or organisations and those who have a business in unicycling. I used the data gathered from these interviews to help me build the broader context within which each of the five narratives is set and to provide supporting data relating to the key questions of my study. I will discuss some of these other interviews within the final analysis. In some cases significant others were also interviewed,

> Have tried to interview significant others for each young rider (informally, no recording, just detailed notes). Have done Scott + Mum, Max + Beth (girlfriend), Sangay + School director via email. Hope to do Jon's teacher; she has agreed. Only Pete's significant other outstanding; hope to do one of the 'Guys'. Name is Big Bear ! Actually, hard making contact with him. Only had email contact and no response. ** Need to try again! (Research diary, 04/08/08)

Observations

I observed each of the five young riders unicycling to provide a context for each narrative and to illustrate and enhance the experiences recounted at interview. These observations took place in the rider's usual context for unicycling, at a local unicycling club or a regional meet for example. I gave much consideration to the extent to which I was a participant observer:

> Am I a participant observer? What does this mean? Like Jupp's continuum of research positions – interesting. Where would I sit? Attend many events and paid member of UUU so yes, participant

observer! Can't ride, nor learning to ride so no, not participant observer! Bick (Greig & Taylor, 1999) suggest participant observer is someone "participating in meaningful group life" (p.89). Interesting! Definitely feel like one of the group. Can talk the talk now! (Research diary, 12/07/06)

I chose not to use an observation schedule as I did not want to be constricted by preceding categories. Having spent several years watching unicyclists take part in the full range of disciplines I felt confident that this experience would enable me to record accurately what was taking place.

As well as undertaking an observation of each interviewee I made additional observations, these took place at a wide range of events, from the group Freestyle competition at UNICON XIV to a weekly club meet. I have used these additional observations to add detail of the unicycling culture and community to the narratives as something of a background to the stories, a broader context within which the lived experience of the individuals takes place.

Focus Groups

I held five focus groups at five different events. Holding them at orgainsed events was for convenience as these were occasions when riders met routinely and so there was not an additional requirement on them. The disadvantage of this was that in order to take part in the focus group the riders were possibly giving up riding time. I carefully considered timing so as to reduce its impact on unicycling opportunities. The participants of the focus groups were self-selecting; I gave those attending the larger event an open invitation to attend. The exception to this was a focus group I held with young unicyclists at the Himalayan Unicycle Club in Kathmandu, Nepal, to identify cultural similarities in young people's unicycling there, as compared to the UK. This focus group was made up of members with a suitable level of English. I held one focus group for young riders at a local club meet in Manchester and one at UNICON XIV. I held two others at UNICON XIV, both

for teachers of unicycling and supporters of unicyclists (non-riding friends or family). Greenbaum (1998) suggests that recruitment to focus groups is commonly more random than planned, in that participants may be required to meet certain criteria but individuals are rarely selected further than this. This was true for my project, as the only criterion was attendance at the various events, plus the level of English for the Kathmandu group. (Sample notes from the focus groups are in Appendix 2.)

My purpose for the focus groups was to gather additional data about young people's motivational drivers for riding and the influence of unicycling on their identities. I then analysed the focus group data and compared it to that from the interviews and questionnaire responses. By extending the sample in this way I hoped that any unusual patterns or experiences in the data from the individual studies would be identified and that the data gathered from the five young people could be validated by a larger group of their peers and others in the community. Interestingly, all focus groups, with the exception of the local club, were attended by girls or women, ensuring that the female voice is heard in my study.

Questionnaires

I drew up a questionnaire using language used by unicyclists around the key themes of my study. I then undertook a pilot study with 20 unicyclists of different ages which resulted in the rewording of some questions. I designed one questionnaire for all respondents regardless of their age or nationality. Scott (2000, p.102) advises that questionnaires designed for use with adults require little adaptation for use with adolescents as "most children over 11 are fully able to articulate their perceptions, opinions and beliefs...". (A copy of the questionnaire and guidance for respondents is in Appendix 3.)

I distributed the questionnaires at a national unicycle meet in the UK, the British Unicycle Convention (BUC) and at an international convention, UNICON XIV. This second questionnaire did include one additional question on nationality. I compared the international data to that I gathered in the UK to identify whether or not any of the UK trends are unusual or can be regarded as the 'norm' in unicycling. The samples were self-selecting; I invited individuals at the BUC to complete a questionnaire on the spot to minimize respondents' time and to maximise the response rate. I invited participants at UNICON XIV, the international meet, to take a questionnaire away, complete it at their convenience and return it to a collection point before leaving the convention. This was to allow those for whom English was not their first language to have more time to complete it. This may create biased samples as one might assume that in order to attend such events the respondent must be significantly engaged in the sport, at whatever skill level. 112 unicyclists attended the BUC and 82 of them completed my questionnaire, 70%. I suggest that this high response rate was because I was known to many of them by sight at least and to a large level of interest in my research within the community. Approximately 500 unicyclists attended UNICON XIV and I collected 66 completed questionnaires there, 13%.

Ethical Considerations

In considering ethical issues within my research project the key factor for me to take into account was that my focus was on young people aged 11 to 19. The inclusion of children in my research demanded a particularly careful contemplation of research ethics and as Greig and Taylor acknowledge, the consideration of ethical research as it relates to children is relatively new:

> ... *the study of ethics in research involving children has only recently (in relative terms) been the subject of debate and discussion in the literature, leaving us to draw on more general theory which can be applied to children.* (Greig and Taylor, 1999, p.145)

However the last ten years has seen an increase in consideration of ethical issues as there has been a trend to involve children and young people in research projects as a means of empowering them.

Scott (2000) stresses the need for researchers to be more stringent in their consideration of ethical issues when interviewing children than with adults. This is necessary because:

> *Children are relatively powerless in society and, despite the attention given to children's rights, have relatively little recourse to official channels of complaint. It is therefore very important that researchers are particularly conscious of their ethical responsibilities when interviewing children.* (Scott, 2000, p.114)

Two key areas for my research project then were first to ensure that the research was explained in an accessible manner to all those involved, particularly the young riders and secondly to gain informed consent. I made clear written information available to all potential participants; (a copy of this information is in Appendix 4, along with the consent form). I agreed it with my supervisor before hand and it made clear the following points as recommended by Greig and Taylor:

- The aims of the research and its areas of interest.

- That they have a choice whether to participate or not.

- That they can withdraw at any time.

- Exactly what their role is in the research and what is expected of them in terms of time commitment.

I gave this information to participants and, for those under 18, to their parents or guardians. Greig and Taylor refer colloquially to these adults as "the gatekeepers". Other gatekeepers I approached were teachers of unicycling or club leaders as they provided initial access routes to young riders, for focus groups for example. In addition to information at the outset of the project the data analysis and findings were also made available for the

participants. They all saw copies of their own narratives and were asked to identify any concerns with what I had written, disagree with my representation of them if they wanted to and also ask any questions about what I had written.

I wanted to explore young people's motivational drivers for unicycling, their self-esteem, self-identity, relationships with peers and family, plus engagement in education in the interviews. I recognised that some of the dialogue might be of a very personal nature. Rassool (2004) when conducting research with 14 and 15 year olds on their identity formation, recognised this too and stressed the need for sensitivity on the part of the researcher:

> *...I was concerned that the issues to be explored were of a very personal nature, that the pupils were in a critical phase of their development when the world can be quite a confusing place, and when great uncertainty often surrounds identity, relationships and belonging. I was aware that these issues had to be handled in a sensitive manner.* (Rassool, 2004, p.250)

Given the personal and sensitive nature of some likely topics for questioning I had to consider whether or not my research project was ethical. When I started my university did not have an ethics committee to consider ethical approval. Instead I was required to consider any ethical issues with my supervisors and gain their approval to proceed which I did. My argument was that in giving young people an opportunity to talk about a difficult activity which they had mastered and to consider how it has impacted on their identity gave then an opportunity to reflect on positive elements of their life. Given the need to be very sensitive when interviewing the young riders I piloted the interviews with a slightly older rider, in his early 20s, Max, who had been highly engaged in school and had always, according to himself, had a strong self-identity and high self-esteem. This enabled me to develop my interview techniques and sensitivity as a researcher in a slightly less sensitive situation than one with a younger rider. As Max was my first interviewee the transcript from Interview 1 is in Appendix 5 as a sample of those gathered during my research.

I stored the data electronically on a USB mass storage device and a personal computer, neither of which is accessed by other people to keep my data private and confidential. When presenting the data I changed the names of those involved and many of the places to maximise anonymity. However the unicycling community in the UK is relatively small and many individuals are known to each other. There was the potential, therefore, for an individual to be identified by such attributes as age, gender and skill level which will be presented as part of the data in the narratives. This was another reason not to have a girl as a focus of one of the narratives as it would be harder to ensure her anonymity given that there are relatively few young female riders in the UK.

Sampling

I adopted purposive sampling influenced by my methodology and key themes. Lewin (2005) identifies the popularity of non-probability sampling for qualitative research methods when a particular group is targeted for a specific reason, as in my case. Lewin states that it is important to acknowledge that biases will occur in any findings using such sampling. Silverman asks researchers to think critically about the "parameters of the population being studied" so that an appropriate sample can be chosen to illustrate the features of interest to the researcher, which is what I did.

I selected the five individuals at the centre of my study in discussion with the key "gatekeeper" of unicycling in the UK. As the director of Unicycle.Com UK, the UK-based branch of an international unicycle company, Davies has an overview of the vast majority of riders in the UK as he has sold unicycles to many of them and taught or mentored many of them at meets around the country. I explained my criteria for the selection of individuals to him and he suggested several young riders who met the criteria. I contacted each one

with detailed information as outlined above and gave them time to consider whether or not they wished to participate. Two unicyclists suggested by Davies agreed, Scott and Max, both of whom already knew me interestingly - perhaps this made them more willing to participate. In addition to this I posted a request for participants on a unicycle internet forum; I recruited one interviewee in this way, Pete. One participant, Jon, was approached after I observed him in a beginners' lesson and another, Sangay, became known to me through an email dialogue with my husband.

With regard to the field of sports studies, although it can be applied to most contexts, Gratton and Jones caution against voluntary, or self-selecting, samples as they suggest they are unlikely to be representative:

> ...*your sample is likely to be more highly educated, more socially orientated, more interested or more knowledgeable of the subject matter than the population as a whole* (Gratton and Jones, 2004, p.110)

While I acknowledged this possibility it was necessary for me to select individuals who were knowledgeable about unicycling as part of my research is concerned with the culture and sub-cultures of unicycling.

In this chapter I have presented my research framework structured around the methodology and methods I selected and discussed in the previous chapter. I have discussed these with particular reference to sport studies and research with young people. In my research plan I have explained, with particular reference to sampling, the selection of the five central studies. I have explored my ethical considerations, particularly in relation to young people and their identity. Now that I have discussed the steps I took to prepare my research plan, I will present my approach to data analysis; but first a consideration of my progress so far as a PhD student:

Setting your Goals – Further Progress

... in Unicycling

"Riding is great; I find it so empowering out in the woods," he told her. "I do love it!"

"Great; I am really pleased you've found something you enjoy so much!" she responded.

"It gives me such a sense of purpose. I feel like I'm getting on really well now. I know exactly what I need to do now and how to attempt each obstacle I come across. Some are much harder than others, of course," he went on, rapt in his riding and oblivious to losing her attention. "Some you can see coming and prepare for them; others just appear out of nowhere and you fall down a hole!" he laughed.

"Oh!" she mumbled, nodding her head, not sure how to respond as she had stopped listening to him go on and on about his bloody unicycling.

"Yeh, it's great," he continued. "It's just right for me. I like the challenge and it is a little alternative; I didn't want something mainstream. I wanted my own identity. I'm gonna set my goals high. I want to make a major ride; do something no-one else has done before on unicycles." And he was away in his thoughts.

... in Research

"Researching is great; I find it so empowering out in the field," she told him. "I do love it!"

"Great; I am really pleased you've found something you enjoy so much!" he responded.

"It gives me such a sense of purpose. I feel like I'm getting on really well now. I know exactly what I need to do now and how to attempt each obstacle I come across. Some are much harder than others, of course," she went on, rapt in her writing and oblivious to losing his attention. "Some you can see coming and prepare for them; others just appear out of nowhere and you fall down a hole!" she laughed.

"Oh!" he mumbled, nodding his head, not sure how to respond as he had stopped listening to her go on and on about her bloody research.

"Yeh, it's great," she continued. "It's just right for me. I like the challenge and it is a little alternative; I didn't want something mainstream. I wanted my own identity. I'm gonna set my goals high. I want to make a major study; do something no-one else has done before, on unicycles." And she was away in her thoughts.

Chapter 4

Launching into the Abyss –
Data Presentation and Analysis

Having mastered the skill of staying upright on a unicycle for a few revolutions, unsupported after letting go of the wall, the novice rider literally has to launch himself into the abyss, to simply go for it! This requires him to consider everything he has learnt so far and to put it to use as he becomes an independent rider. In exploring how I might present and analyse the data gathered I had to consider what I had learnt so far about the research process and my role as a researcher and find a way to present my research in a rigorous but creative and independent or original form. The elation at having successfully gathered some meaningful data quickly turned to trepidation at deciding what to do with it; as such presenting and analysing the data did feel much like launching into an abyss for me.

In this chapter I present a rationale for my selected form of data presentation and the accompanying analysis of the data sets. Robson (2002) suggests that those new to research and data analysis could find Miles and Huberman's (1994) components of data analysis helpful when planning this stage of their projects. Miles and Huberman describe them as three concurrent "flows of activity", which are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification; all three are part of the data analysis process concurrently. The first is the reduction of the so-called data mountain by producing summaries and abstracts, sorting it by coding and writing related memos to jog one's memory about a particular idea at a later date. Decisions are made by the researcher as to what in the data should be selected and is significant to summarise and how to organise it. Miles and Huberman argue that these decisions are analytical ones and, as such, are part of the data analysis process and not separate from it. The second activity, that of data presentation or display, is also based on analytical decisions by the researcher, this time with regard to the appropriate amount of data to present and what form it is best displayed in. The third activity is drawing conclusions

and verifying them. Miles and Huberman consider this to be a process which starts when data is first collected, as patterns appear and are firmed up or dismissed. They suggest that verification of the conclusions should also be on-going. If, as Robson suggests, these three components of data analysis are recognised, the process of analysis is on-going and is tightly linked to the form of data presentation selected. As such, these two major considerations are discussed in this one chapter as they are directly related.

Robson links the three components of data analysis identified above as being a "continuous iterative process" with the data collection itself, as "data analysis feeds into subsequent data collection with this then stimulating further analysis" (p.487). This is certainly true for my study which developed out of several years of casual observations and conversations which encouraged very early, informal data analysis or exploration due to my interest as an ex-teacher in the motivation and self-esteem of children and young people. Robson identifies this iterative process as generally being a feature of ethnographic studies, which my study is. Walsh (1998) too suggests that in ethnography analysis begins in the pre-fieldwork stage "with the formulation and clarification of research problems" (p.229) which, in this instance, was based on the casual observations and conversations which took place long before the research project was considered. Although I have already in Chapter 2 given my rationale for adopting an ethnographic approach I was interested to note, while considering Robson's approach to data analysis, that he regards an ethnographic approach as "a method of discovery, well suited to the study of the unfamiliar, the new and the different." (p. 487). This can easily be seen to apply to my study of unicycling.

Data Presentation: Narrative Accounts

My thesis is concerned with the experiences of young people who unicycle, and with the wider unicycling community. My focus is on the themes of motivation, individual and group identity and achievement as each relates to the lifestyle sport of unicycling and, more specifically, to the youth at the

centre of my study. I identified these themes at the beginning my research project, based on hours of informal observations and conversations, as ones that were of interest to me given my professional background. It is the young people's experience of unicycling which will shed light on the key themes. Having started to gather data on these themes through an ethnographic approach I then had to decide how to present that data in a way that made it accessible to the reader.

I decided to use a narrative approach to tell the stories of the young riders' experiences. I based this on the definition of "narrative" as used by Shacklock and Thorp (2005):

> *Narrative inquiry is concerned with the production, interpretation*
> *and representation of storied accounts of lived experience.*
> (Shacklock and Thorp 2005, p.156)

This method of data presentation allows me, the researcher, as Shacklock and Thorp go on to explain, to locate life experience, identity and cultural formation within a narrative frame. In doing so these stories allow me to "introduce additional anchor points for understanding the subjective and structural as mutual informants in understanding our own and other people's lives" (p.156). I was seeking to understand the lives of young riders with particular reference to identity and culture and therefore a narrative approach quickly seemed to be an effective way of doing this.

It is through narrative and dialogue that experiences and stories are constructed, perhaps in a formal interview or in a passing conversation. Interview responses whether formal or informal, Silverman (2005) suggests, can be regarded as giving direct access to an "experience" or as actively constructing a story, reinforcing Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) view. My primary source of data for the life stories was the interviews, a two-way process which enables stories to be assembled by the interviewees in response to the interviewer's questions (Silverman).

Heikkinen et al. (2007, p.13) regard the dialogue as key to the construction of narratives; "...social reality is constructed as a dialectic process in interpersonal discussion". They refer to this as "the principle of dialectics". Credible narrative research is based on how well the informants' or interviewees' voices are heard, which is why it is important to acknowledge the dialogue as a two-way process in which the researcher and interviewer hold equal status.

The trend in using narratives to present individual or group experiences has received increasing attention over the last twenty years (Sparkes, 2002 and Heikkinen et al. 2007); however, this form of data presentation still receives mixed responses, some authors regarding it as invalid due to the creative element within it; it challenges traditional, more scientific approaches:

> *The criteria for judging research narratives are still diffuse ... Blurring the line between fact and fiction, narrative research has challenged the traditional terms of validity.* (Heikkinen et al., 2007, p.6)

Sparkes (2002), like Heikkinen at al, disputes the dismissal of narrative research and identifies different levels of creativity within the narrative process which, he suggests, will affect the credence that the reader gives to the story. He describes one form of narrative as "ethnographic fiction", based on the researcher "being there" at the time of the incident. In this form the researcher is keen to point out that he/she was there and so the story is constructed from an actual observed event, in settings or within a community that he/she has studied ethnographically. Sparkes regards these claims of "being there" as an important element of ethnographic fiction as it strengthens its validity and credibility. Such stories, he explains, are creative in their use of fictional techniques but are non-fictional in nature being based on real characters and real events; he gives them the term "literary non-fiction" or "creative non-fiction". A contrast to this form of writing is "creative fiction" which can be based on things that never happened and may use entirely fictional characters; such form is less likely to be regarded as a credible research approach. However, Sparkes suggests that individual researchers have to

decide on the balance between reality and fiction. He presents a continuum at one end of which is "creative non-fiction" and at the other end of which is "creative fiction". Individual writers must place themselves and their narrative accounts on this continuum and acknowledge that where they sit may affect their credibility and validity.

Writers of creative non-fiction, according to Barone:

> *... seek to penetrate personalities of real characters, unveil aspects of their experience (and) explicate the social meaning underlying important events."* (Barone, 2000. p.28)

This is what I aimed to do: my narrative accounts would seek to capture the identity of and influences on the individual unicyclists, exploring their personalities through their experiences of the sport and suggesting social meaning in their actions linked to identity. Barone's description of the purpose of creative non-fiction gives further credence to the adoption of this form of writing in this thesis. Bruner (1996) suggests that no stories are new, but that all stories are "borrowed" from surrounding culture. This direct link between culture and story will be explored in this study to see if the stories told by the riders do have common elements which might suggest borrowing.

Heikkinen et al. examined attitudes towards narrative reports of action research. They concluded that with such reports the reader should not consider validity in the traditional terms of correspondence but should instead see the narrative construct as a process of validation, "raising new possibilities, opening up horizons, generating new interpretations and stimulating dialogue between the researcher and the participant and the academy and the rest of the world" (p.18) While I did not undertake action research, my study lends itself to such an approach.

The narratives I have constructed can be categorized as "creative non-fiction" in that they are directly based on the individuals interviewed, their stories and experiences and observations of them at actual events. My intention, encouraged by Heikkinen et al., is that they should stimulate dialogue based

around new considerations of unicycling and new interpretations of individual and group motivation related to that.

Returning to the issue of legitimacy of narrative inquiry and the principle of dialectics, Conle (2001) focuses on the importance of truth and rationality to both. She regards narrative inquiry, the gathering and presentation of data, as being based on "communicative action" as defined by Habermas (1984). Habermas described communicative action as interaction aimed at mutual understanding between two or more people as opposed to "strategic action" where one party is trying to influence the other and win them over to his or her position. Everyday conversation, Habermas and Conle both argue, is aimed at developing mutual understanding and so we can assume, Habermas claims, that each party is acting rationally, making claims of truth and sincerity that are socially appropriate, or else we would not bother talking, and so we are reliant on "rational interaction". Conle proposes that rational interaction characterizes narrative inquiry, as well as, everyday discourse. If one accepts that data is gathered through rational interaction then, Conle claims, narrative inquiry is a rational exercise, based on truth and therefore is valid as a research approach:

> I suggest that it is worthwhile to consider narrative inquiry as communicative action and therefore as subject to the same challenges that Habermas perceives in communicative action. I should be able to challenge a narrative researcher about the truth of the things she tells; about her capacity to truthfully represent the state of her own mind, feelings and motives about the social appropriateness of the narrative and norms expressed though it; and about the comprehensibility or well-formedness of the narratives she constructs. If I can issue these challenges, if I can assume that she makes these claims, then we are engaged in a rational enterprise that can be differentiated from fiction, irrational babble and power games. (Conle, 2001, p.24)

Conle's view relates to Sparkes' description of ethnographic fiction discussed earlier as he recognizes that it is, in fact, not fiction but creative non-fiction and, as such, is based on truth, in my case as the young riders perceive it.

Reflexivity

Heikkinen at al do caution the researcher to give careful consideration to the construction of the narrative account and to his/her relationship to it. They warn that reflexivity is crucial for validity and credibility. Beginning with Somekh's acknowledgement of the self as a research instrument (2006), they stress the importance of the researcher analysing his/her relationship with the object of research. The question here is the perspective of the researcher: what is the researcher interested in within the object of his/her research? Coffey (1999) advises, similarly, that undertaking fieldwork is a personal, emotional and identity-orientated process for the researcher and presenting the data involves self-presentation and identity construction. What is crucial then is acknowledging and recognising this, understanding the location of self within the narrative; this is the "principle of reflexivity" (Heikkinen et al). As well as the principle of reflexivity, the principle of dialectics, referred to earlier, is seen as important to the credibility of the narrative account as it relates directly to the notion of authenticity of content. "The concept of voice is closely related to the authenticity of thought" (Heikkinen et al).

It is not sufficient for the researcher to recognise his/her bias and identity; a credible researcher will remind readers of this and that the narrative account has been created by him/her and is not a direct observation. Heikkinen et al. regard this as the starting point in constructing a narrative account:

> *The starting point of narrative thinking is that the research report is a narrative story, produced by the researcher, not an image like replica. It is a researcher's virtue to be aware of how he/she produces reality – and to explicate his/her personal process of knowing the text.* (Heikkinen et al., 2007, p.11)

It is for this reason that I am going to tell my own story first, to present my identity as a researcher in relation to unicyclists and my perspective as an educationalist interested in the motivation of young people and the development of their self-identity and self-esteem, before telling the stories of the young riders themselves.

Construction

Having argued that a narrative approach lends itself to my study and is fit for purpose, I will now discuss the process involved in constructing the narratives. I have already made clear that the form of narrative I used was creative non-fiction; within this, however, there are a variety of different approaches. I favour a participatory, ethnographic approach, influenced by the methodology I adopted. Hansen presents what he describes as "the ethnonarrative approach that seeks to combine ethnographic methods and narrative methods"; this is an appropriate description of my study. Goodley et al. (2004) discuss the influence that methodologies have on the style of narrative selected by the researcher in that they provide the persuasions from which the stories actually emerge. Different methodologies facilitate different levels of participation by the researcher, the participants and the reader and they affect the authority of the researcher. Taking an ethnographic approach in my research has allowed for participatory interviews and observations. The semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewees to tell their stories at their individual paces, unrestricted by time schedules and closed questions. I have analysed the dialogue created thematically and the observations, based on themes I identified linked to my underpinning research questions. Alongside this individual data I have collated other information from a range of sources, such as the questionnaire. The following list identifies the range of sources I have used:

- individual interviews with the riders;
- conversations with significant relatives/friends of the interviewees;
- formal observations of each of the interviewees;
- completed questionnaires;
- interviews of key individuals within the unicycling community;
- research field notes from unicycling meets/events;
- notes from my research diaries while undertaking this PhD;
- direct quotes from secondary sources, such as the international Uni magazine;

- anecdotes recalled by me as the researcher;
- extracts from my own life story;
- conversations with unicyclist and supporters.

In keeping with Miles and Huberman's (1994) concept of three concurrent "flows of activity" discussed at the beginning of this chapter, before I actually wrote the narrative accounts I reduced the data. The interview recordings were largely transcribed in full as they would provide the main content of the reconstructed story, and I wanted to ensure authenticity. The decisions on what to transcribe and what to leave out, if anything, were based on my existing knowledge of unicycling generally, the different disciplines within it and any prior knowledge I had of the interviewees and therefore what I already understood to be important to them in their riding. This interpretation of mine was moderated by what seemed to be significant to the subjects in the interviews based on their body language, tone of voice, time spent on a particular topic and so on. I acknowledge here that my decisions and interpretations are influenced by my own identity. (Samples of interview transcripts are in Appendix 5.)

Miller (2000) describes narrative analysis as having a "triangular structure":

> One apex of the triangle is the respondent with their pre-existing subjective and negotiated view of social reality. A second apex of the triangle is the interviewer with an agenda of research interests and goals. The responses to the interviewer's questioning producing the third apex of the triangle. (Miller, 2000, p.130)

This triangle recognises the interpretational bias of both the interviewee and interviewer as they impact on the dialogue and both are acknowledged in the analysis of data in this study. The triangle model is key, it seems to me, in any research which draws significantly on dialogue. This model is promoted by Frank (2005), who sees the analysis of dialogical research being based around "how the researcher and participant came together in some shared time and space and had diverse effects on each other", the dialogue (or data) being the outcome of this. The subsequent analysis then is my representation

of the young riders and, as Frank points out, I cannot claim any last word about what they represent, only my interpretation of that.

Having taken the decision to present the data as narrative stories I felt it was not necessary to transcribe the interviews in full, as might be required for a discourse analysis, as the narrative approach lends itself more to thematic analysis and it is really key themes, as identified by me in advance, which my study is seeking to explore. The justification for a thematic analysis will be presented in the second half of this chapter. By selectively transcribing the interviews, data summary took place automatically. Once the transcripts were complete, coding was done using my key themes for each interview within a set of three. (An example of this process with Max's interviews is in Appendix 5.) Then I considered the supplementary data for each individual alongside the coded transcripts. I used this process of data reduction to provide the basis on which to construct the narrative accounts.

Ethical Considerations Linked to Presentation and Analysis

I gave due consideration to the ethics of a narrative approach to presentation and in particular the style of writing I adopted. Elliott (2005) cautions that the ethics involved in a narrative study are significantly more complicated than those involved in most other forms of research. This is because of the direct link between the personal stories sought by the researcher and the individual identities of the interviewees which are likely to have been constructed, in part, by their personal stories:

> *The recognition that personal narrative is firmly bound up with individual identities raises important questions about the analysis of this narrative materials and the impact of the analysis on the research participants.* (Elliott, 2005, p.140)

The interviewees were not simply giving their opinions and information as simple data; they were giving away their self-construction, to be reconstructed by me. Therefore, informed consent based on detailed information about the

research process, method of analysis and audience was particularly important.

An additional issue in the use of narrative which I had to consider was how to preserve the individual's anonymity and confidentiality. It is a key ethical principle that the researcher will do all within his/her capability to uphold the anonymity and confidentiality of the participant. Once a combination of personal attributes and experiences are woven into a particular case within a research report it can, as Elliott suggests, "be very difficult to ensure that the case does not become recognizable" (p.142). This, as discussed in the previous chapter, was likely to be particularly so for me within the relatively small community of unicyclists. I gave very careful thought to each narrative account to disguise as many of the components as possible which may be attributed to a known individual, but at the same time ensure that authenticity remains intact and the voice of the rider is still heard suitably clearly. Goodley et al. suggest that the incorporation of fictional devices are one way of ensuring that "the stories remain confidential to the original tellers."

The production of a personal narrative may be seen as central to the construction of self-identity and a sense of self, and to the process by which an individual makes sense of his/her own life in relation to others, such as peers or family members. In adopting a narrative approach the researcher deconstructs those personal stories and interprets them. If this is not done and presented sensitively it may be damaging to that self-identity (Elliott, 2005). Given that my study was particularly concerned with teenagers, who may be at a turbulent time in their lives when self-identity can be vulnerable, I took my responsibility as a researcher very seriously.

While I have taken ethical considerations very seriously Penn and Soothill do question the "accelerating tendency to introduce 'ethical' issues into all areas of social science" (2007, p.4). While my thesis is located primarily within the paradigm of education it has strong elements of social sciences; it is difficult to separate the fields of education and social science research completely and so their views are worth consideration here. They suggest that a move by the

natural science paradigm to assert its exclusivity has sought to undermine social science research by demanding evidence, in the form of detailed scrutiny, of underlying ethical issues:

> *We consider this to be misguided and misplaced development. Indeed, we believe this 'ethical' agenda is a deliberate attempt to neuter proper social scientific inquiry and is part of a process of wider deprofessionalisation in the UK.* (Penn and Soothill, 2007, p.4)

They attribute this to "American hegemony and New Labour authoritarianism". They do not argue that social science research has no ethical dimension, but that it is *"inherently* ethical" and had previously been based on a "high trust model of professional autonomy" which has been replaced by external bureaucratic controls in the form of numerous university-based research ethics committees. Their views are worthy of note here as studies such as mine which take a narrative form are, by their very nature, reliant on professional judgement about what should, or shouldn't, be in the final narrative accounts.

Introduction to Data Analysis

Robson (2002) refers extensively to Wolcott's (1994) outline for analysing and transforming data in ethnographic studies and in doing so renews Wolcott's validity. Wolcott suggests three steps in the process: first, the description of the culture-sharing group; secondly, an analysis of the themes of the culture; and thirdly, the interpretation of the themes. This outline is helpful to me as I have chosen to adopt a thematic analysis of the data. I started the thesis with a description of the culture-sharing group as Wolcott calls it, in this case unicyclists, by giving an introduction to the sport and an overview of its development. The narrative accounts I present of the young riders in the subsequent chapters provided descriptions of individuals who are members of the culture-sharing group. An analysis of my key themes as they relate to the individuals follows in Chapter 16 and includes some triangulation as I seek to

identify what the individual case under consideration has in common with the wider community of riders. In doing so I acknowledge that each narrative is, indeed, an individual story, a lived the experience of one person, although that young rider may share some experiences with other unicyclists.

In adopting a thematic analysis of the data presented in the narrative accounts I sought to identify patterns in young riders' thoughts, actions and behaviours, when viewed through key events, such as an endurance race or a hockey match, and then to triangulate it with other data gathered from supplementary sources. Silverman (2006) warns against over-reliance on triangulation as a test of validity of interpretation, as he suggests it ignores specific contexts in which data was collected. This criticism of triangulation may be a fair one if data gathered at a micro level only is being analysed. Fincham et al. (2007) recognise the importance of triangulation for "building cross-checks and balances". Where the researcher has used a multimodal set of evidence, as I have done, triangulation, Fincham et al. suggest, becomes a significant part of the analysis process and takes place almost automatically. I have used triangulation to add "rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to the enquiry" as recommended by Denzin et al. (2006), to facilitate an analysis of my key themes across the community at a meso and macro level.

Travers (2001) suggests that the way in which data is analysed will depend on the researcher's view of the context which he or she is researching. He gives the example of critical discourse analysts who are interested in "society as a whole" and who therefore take a macro level of analysis. An interpretative researcher, however, he suggests would not accept that there is a macro level of analysis but instead adopt micro analysis. I seek to explore themes at both a micro and macro level, and to consider a possible meso, or middle, level; micro would be the individual unicyclists and their immediate contexts, meso would be the semi-structured unicycling context of the UK Union of Unicyclist and national meets, with the macro level referring to society as a whole and its attitude towards the riders. Dhunpath (2000) advocates the analysis of the broader macro context within which individual lives are analysed as it can provide a key critical focus in narrative data presentation. Milbourne (2002)

supports this as, in her view, narrative stories of individual's lived experiences have the potential to "tell narratives of wider socio-historical, political and cultural events..." (p.349). Milbourne's own research was concerned with young people who were socially excluded from mainstream society, and as such has some relevance to my study. For her, the macro context was how society continues to shape the inclusion and exclusion of young people. An example of the macro level of analysis, for me, is personified by the sports reporter in Scott's story (Chapter 7) who represents the stereotypical views of society generally towards unicycling and unicyclists.

The growth of narrative approaches to research has already been discussed in this chapter; despite the proliferation of narrative studies in education and social science in particular, Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) suggest that less attention has been given to the actual analysis of narrative data.

Despite this growing literature, some methods involved in conducting narrative analysis are still developing and/or are not well understood. (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, p.330)

They compare two approaches to analysing data in narrative research which have been helpful to my thesis. Firstly, the Problem-Solution approach whereby the researcher analyses transcripts for "five elements of plot structure" which identify four actions undertaken in response to a set problem and a fifth action which brings about the resolution of the problem. Such a process of analysis would not be appropriate for me as the interviews did not follow a chronological series of events around a specific problem or issue. The second approach Ollerenshaw and Creswell discuss is the Three-dimensional Space approach by which the researcher analyses the data in three aspects; interaction, continuity and situation. Interaction is both personal and social, concerned with the personal experience of the storyteller and interaction of him/her with other people. Continuity, or temporality, analysis seeks to identify past, present and future experiences. The situation is analysed to identify specific situations, either physical places or the sequence of relevant places in the story. This approach of analysis does lend itself to my study as I am

concerned with social relationships and identity, within and outside of a particular community across time.

Thematic Analysis

I constructed my research project around a number of key questions I was interested in, based on my background as an educationalist. It seemed then that a thematic analysis of the data was highly appropriate for me, using the themes I identified in relation to my questions. I found Braun and Clarke's (2006) definition of thematic analysis as appropriate to my study: "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.79). They advocate its use as it provides theoretical freedom, not being tied, in their view, to a particular epistemological position, such as grounded theory, and therefore allowing for maximum flexibility in providing "a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the data". This seemed important alongside the narrative presentation I had selected, as if individuals' lived experiences are to be recounted and analysed a flexible research tool should allow for greater individualism than a more rigid formulaic approach.

Braun and Clarke go on to define a "theme" as capturing

> *something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned meaning within the data set.* (Braun and Clarke, p.82).

In allowing maximum flexibility they do not give a particular percentage of data which must relate to the theme in order for it to be a theme but instead acknowledge that a particular theme may be given considerable space in some data but little or none in other data. They encourage the researcher to make the judgement about what a theme is, guiding the researcher to be flexible rather than to adopt a certain set of rules to make such a judgement. It is the relationship of the themes to the research question which is of key relevance to them:

> *Furthermore, the keyness of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures — but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question.* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82)

There are six phases of thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke; these are:

1. familiarising yourself with the data;
2. generating initial codes;
3. searching for themes;
4. reviewing themes;
5. defining and naming themes;
6. producing the report.

Using these phases as a framework I will now discuss my process of thematic analysis for this study.

My transcribing of the interviews enabled me to become familiar with the data, reducing it as transcribed and as Miles and Huberman recommend. This was the first phase of thematic analysis above for me and I progressed onto the second phase. Initially I used broad categories to organise and group the data as it connected to my themes and so I coded data according to which of the following it related to, with the possibility of it relating to more than one category; motivation, self-identity, self-esteem, group identity (culture) and achievement (benefits of unicycling). This was relatively easy to do as the interviews had been loosely structured around the themes, while encouraging individuals to tell their own stories in an uninterrupted way. I had used questions relating to key themes as prompts where necessary. Thematic interviews are a common way to gather data for narrative presentation according to Silverman (2005). Wengraf (2001) warns researchers to be careful when coding data and to "be aware of the broadbrush/finebrush approach to coding" (p.227) which, he suggests, can prevent significant detail from being seen or common themes being missed if the focus is only on the detail. He recommends, therefore, a revisiting of the data on more than one occasion depending on the focus at that particular point of the analysis. Given

Wengraf's warning I coded the data against more than one theme where appropriate.

Once I had done the initial coding I examined the data for sub-categories within each category, for example within "motivation" I further coded data by the motivational theory it linked to, whether it was intrinsic or extrinsic and if it was the initial motivation for learning to unicycle or on-going motivation for learning new skills and disciplines. I analysed the data again for emerging themes within these sub-categories; an example of an emerging theme linked to motivation was that of "challenge". This was Braun and Clarke's third stage and required me to revisit the data several times as the themes became progressively more focused. In doing so I gained a greater knowledge of the data and was able to learn from it, two key purposes of coding emphasized by Richards (2005). I undertook this process with each set of transcripts as these were my main source of data for each individual. Having coded these, I then coded the supplementary data for each young rider, observations and notes of informal conversations with peers or family members, using the same categories to look for similar or different themes in the data and in doing so worked through phase four of thematic analysis, reviewing the themes. Goodley and Clough (2004) refer to the supplementary data sources as "ethnographic vignettes" and add to those sources above field notes, encounters with other community members, interactions in the field, conversations and related documentary evidence. I next analysed data gathered through this second set of supplementary sources, not specifically relating to the five young riders. This became an on-going process to identify common themes and it did, at times, feed into the narratives. As I coded each set of data I annotated it to ensure that key points, such as significance in the tone of voice or facial expression, were not lost, as these could provide key information relating to emotions for the narrative accounts.

Through the coding process I organised the data into sections for the writing of the narrative accounts. I then reviewed the codes to identify the significant elements of each narrative. I noted actual events linked to themes, such as

learning to ride, riding at school and riding in a race, and used them as a structure for the narrative. This process allowed me to build the narrative closely around the data so enhancing its validity as a reconstruction of each individuals' lived experience by ensuring it remained as close to the original data as possible. Indeed, I used transcribed quotations from the interviews extensively in the narrative accounts to ensure authenticity. This is a common approach in life-story research according to Goodson and Sikes (2001). Examples of this can be seen in Chapter 16 where I analyse the data and show extracts from the interviews and the corresponding extracts from the narratives.

Language Analysis

While I mainly took a thematic approach to my data analysis I did analyse language used by the young interviewees and the questionnaire respondents in relation to the subculture. I looked at the language in terms of "membership categorization", an idea developed by Sacks (1992) and discussed at some length by Travers (2001). Sacks believed that people make sense of the world around them through membership categorization of language. Each of us places people, objects, events and locations in collections of categories based on our cultural knowledge of the world; we then use this to interpret language in spoken or written form. An example relevant to this study might be of a "collection", lifestyle sports, and of "categories" within that, such as surfers, skateboarders, BMX riders and unicyclists. We each have an understanding of what a member of each category is like based on our cultural knowledge, this may be individual to us or a shared understanding with others who have the same cultural knowledge as ourselves. Those who have different cultural knowledge may have a different understanding. One area of interest in data analysis for me was how unicyclists use language to demonstrate their cultural knowledge and their interpretation of membership categories within and outside of the sport and so make sense of their world of unicycling. Lawson et al. suggest that "narrative and auto/biographical methodologies can give privileged insights into how people make sense of the world" (2006,

p.57). Combining the examination of language for membership categorization with a narrative approach should enhance my analysis of the data then.

Visual Analysis

The analysis of visual images has become very fashionable in social science (Silverman, 2006), one area of research which informs my thesis. This is particularly the case with commercially produced images, such as advertisements in our image conscious society. I have used photographs produced by individuals, usually for personal rather than commercial use, as one source of data and I have discussed my rationale for this in the previous chapter. I have analysed these images in two different ways: first, to identify key themes or interests within the culture, or subcultures, of unicycling, such as dress or location, and secondly to provide further evidence relating to the key themes as they are represented by individuals, for example a photograph selected by an interviewee as being significant to him may show him riding a particularly technical stretch and so give clues to his/her motivation. Indeed Pete showed me a photo of him and his friends riding down Snowdon, on a particularly demanding section with a steep drop at one side. The challenge this gave them clearly motivated them.

All of the photographs I have used were taken in the field by members of the unicycling community, either riders or supporters. None of them have been taken by me for the purpose of recording observations. The context in which they were taken is relevant and I considered it alongside the actual content of each image. This analytical approach is, according to Pink (2001), a reflexive approach to analysing images; she favours it over a scientific-realist approach as it encourages analysis seeking to explore meanings given to the context by individuals involved in the production of the image.

Where I have analysed images for what they tell us about the subcultures of unicycling I have considered their content in relation to the key research

themes. I have coded and categorised them in a similar way to the written data.

In the second use of photographs I asked interviewees to select photos that were significant to them and then asked them why they had chosen them or to describe the story the image told. In adopting this approach the analysis was undertaken by the interviewee and it was his representation that was given, rather than my representation of why I thought the image was significant to the rider. This was an important distinction for me as asking the subject of the photograph to analyse it provided a further vehicle for his voice. Using photographs in this way is an "effective vehicle" for young people to present their perspective on their situation, according to Delgado (2006). I have included visual images throughout this thesis as evidence to support the narratives but also to help the reader better understand the sport of unicycling and so my thesis too.

Other Approaches to Analysis Which Have Been Considered

There is no academic literature specifically focused on unicycling as yet, as discussed in the literature review, therefore research around other lifestyle or extreme sports has provided a baseline for my study. It was interesting to note that these writers had largely undertaken thematic analysis of the data, for example Wheaton and Tomlinson examining windsurfing subcultures (1998). As Donnelly (2006) points out, research on extreme sports has tended to be ethnographic studies of relatively small groups of core participants often concerned with culture and identity, which lend themselves to thematic analysis.

Research by Li and Seale (2007) suggests that PhD students often have difficulties with "doing data analysis" as they do not know where to begin. While I found many texts offering advice on methodology and methods, guidance on different approaches to data analysis was not as prolific. This supports Li and Seale's general conclusion that doing data analysis is

regarded generally as "in part, at least, a craft skill, best learned through practical engagement" rather than something which can be taught; this was certainly true of my experience. Having undertaken initial thematic coding of my first data set I then considered a number of different approaches to data analysis. Consulting other research projects on lifestyle sports for possible guidance I found research methods clearly articulated, but the approach adopted to data analysis was not always made clear, other than a general statement that it was thematic, for example Skille and Waddington (2006) and Rinehart (2005).

Fraser (2004), when discussing the analysis of personal stories in a social science context, cautions against "over-intellectualising" them by, for example, deconstructing specific discourses. Interestingly linked to this concern, Li and Seale found a general trend amongst some PhD students to over-interpret their data. Over-intellectualising my data was a concern for me and one which I saw deeply entwined with the need to hear the young people's own voices telling about their lived experiences in the final narrative accounts, rather than deconstructing their words. Therefore, I took a general thematic approach rather than a more formulaic method of analysis, such as those considered below.

Wheaton and Beal (2003), in their study of windsurfers and skateboarders and related media, adopted a grounded theory approach to the thematic analysis of their interview data, as did Waerdahl (2005) in his exploration of lifestyle sports (particularly skateboarding) as one means by which children orient themselves towards a youth identity. The grounded theory approach to data analysis pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (Silverman, 2005) analyses the data to find the theory within it rather than assume the theory from the outset. This approach starts by developing categories which illuminate the data, saturating these categories with data cases to demonstrate their relevance and then developing the categories into a more general framework for relevance in a different setting or context. This is a very simplified description of the stages of analysis but identifies the key steps involved. Huberman and Miles (2002) describe the process as gradually accumulating data through

observations and the inductive analysis of this data. It was the inductive nature of the analysis which did not sit comfortably with this study. The approach has been criticised for focusing more on the generation of theories than on the testing of them and for its failure to acknowledge implicit theories which can guide research projects at their early stages. Silverman describes it as, at best, offering some creative theory-building for observational-based studies.

Heino (2000), when looking at the alternative status of snowboarding, employed a discourse analysis approach, although this was not clearly articulated; in particular, he analysed interview discourse and texts ranging from media to academic. Discourse analysis, a popular approach in educational and social research (MacLure, 2003), is another analytical approach which was considered. It analyses the meaning and structure, both overt and covert, of different types of communication, such as conversations, documents and published texts, exploring connections between language, power, knowledge and social practices. It was rejected for this study as it was felt that such an approach might encourage Fraser's "over-intellectualizing" of the dialogue through which the stories were told. Although much of the data was gathered from arranged interviews they were semi-structured and as such not formal conversations. It therefore did not seem appropriate to formalise the analysis of them to too great a degree, taking Goodley et al's advice:

> *Discourse analysis deconstructs a narrative's characters, obliterates the plot and does away with the moral of the tale. This form of analysis would seem to be opposite in character to life story research.* (Goodley, 2004, p.151)

I concluded from looking at these different approaches to analysis in other sport studies that particular sports and particular research projects call for certain approaches to data analysis. What was key was that the method of analysis chosen was that which was most appropriate to the particular study undertaken. What influenced me was not just the nature of unicycling, spontaneous, creative, non-conformist, but also the individuals at the centre of

the research, young riders. There is a growing body of literature about children's and young people's voices, for example Madge (2006) and Davie et al. (1996). Many of these are story- or narrative-based, on the understanding that children and youth are able to tell their own stories effectively.

Validity

Validity is a contentious word in qualitative research and many qualitative researchers prefer the word 'quality'. (Validity is more associated with measurement and psychometric testing of quantitative research.) Nevertheless, it is necessary for any piece of research, whether quantitative or qualitative, to be able to demonstrate its quality if it is to be taken seriously by meeting appropriate criteria. As Sparkes points out, this is particularly so for alternative forms of qualitative research which this thesis is;

> *If alternative forms of qualitative inquiry and new writing practices are judged using inappropriate criteria, there is the danger that they will be dismissed as not being proper research and, therefore, not worthy of attention.* (Sparkes, 2002, p.194)

Some, such as Garratt and Hodkinson (1998) adopting a criteriologist's view, call for one set of universal criteria against which any piece of qualitative research can be judged. Others, such as Smith and Deemer, (2000) take a non-realist approach, suggesting that specific criteria should not be pre-determined. I support this second approach as it allows for flexibility and creativity within and across different pieces of research. In my view, it is therefore necessary to use different criteria to judge different forms of writing and different types of research but what criteria should I use to judge my own work?

There seem to be as many lists of criteria for judging alternative forms of qualitative inquiry as there are different forms of writing. I chose to adopt

criterion suggested by Bochner (2002) as he uses these specifically to judge stories, the form of data representation I have selected. His criterion looks for:

1. abundant, concrete details in facts and feelings;
2. structurally complex narratives which move between past and present;
3. the author's emotional credibility, vulnerability and honesty;
4. two tales within the story, showing development of self;
5. a high standard of ethical self-consciousness from the author.

These criteria focuses on the construction of the story thus allowing for creativity within each different story. Carless and Sparkes (2008) would support such an approach as they suggest that a characteristic of a good story *"is a degree of openness that allows different readers to make use of the story in varied ways"* (p.205).

Rather than examine each of the five stories against these criteria I will leave the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about the validity of my work. I am confident that the stories are valid when judged against Bochner's criterion and that this will be clear to the reader, with the exception of Criteria 4. Here Bochner is looking for *"a believable journey from who I was to who I am, a life course reimagined or transformed by crisis."* (p.263). While I think this is there in some of the stories, Pete's for example, it is not there in all of them, Scott's for example; Scott is reflecting on a much shorter period of time. Bochner *"prefers"* stories with this element in them but does not regard stories without it as unvalid.

In conclusion of this chapter, it is important to recognise the need for sensitive analysis of the data given the very nature of narrative presentation, in that it is about individuals' own experiences and their self-identity. This requires a high standard of ethical self-consciousness from the author, as sought by Bochner above. Any analysis should, therefore, be sensitive to the individual whose story it is, acknowledging the impact the analysis may have on him or her.

> *The recognition that personal narrative is firmly bound up with individual identities raises important questions about the analysis of this narrative material and the impact of the analysis on the research participant.* (Goodley et al., 2004, p.137)

In choosing narrative as my form of data presentation I sought to address these questions of validity, ownership and interpretation. Having chosen narrative I felt it appropriate to begin with my own story, which follows next.

Chapter 5

Watching with Amazement – Wendy's Story

Introduction

Watching with amazement is something I have both done myself and observed many new riders doing. Watching a skilled unicyclist ride, whether it is storming down a hockey pitch, hockey stick at the ready, or managing a steep, muddy, downhill section, or spinning a 180 degree rotation, always leaves me with a sense of amazement. Much of the motivation for new and experienced riders comes from watching others unicycle and seeing a particular trick executed or a high speed reached. It is seeing the rider achieve his or her goals that often sets new goals in the mind of the observer. Although I am a non-rider, this was true for me too; watching with amazement set my own goals in relation to this PhD study as this chapter seeks to explain.

Context and Rationale

My research is concerned with the motivation and identity of young people. It explores the lifestyle sport of unicycling and considers its potential to have a positive influence on identity. In exploring this area it is young unicyclists' experience which is of paramount interest to me, *their* stories of *their* unicycling - the satisfaction of the first full turn of the wheel unsupported, the adrenalin rush of the six foot drop on a Trials course or the sheer frustration of not being able to do a 360 degree spin despite hours of practising.

Their stories hold the answers to my research questions; their experiences enable the reader to appreciate the sport, the motivation, the commitment, the excitement, the adrenalin and the friendship that the individuals at the centre

of this study feel through their unicycling. Of course, it isn't all positive, there is disappointment, frustration, a feeling of dissatisfaction too, but what is special about the young people here, and about all other unicyclists, is that they have overcome these negative feelings; they have learnt to deal with them and to see them as temporary setbacks in their goal to master the bizarre cycle. It is their stories that are central to my thesis, as the primary source of data, and so it is most appropriate that they remain in that form, as stories, but I have woven them into new stories drawing together the different experiences of each individual to create a narrative account of his unicycling, of past and present riding and of future aspirations.

Five young people are central to these stories, each providing a focus for one of the narratives. They shared their experiences, told their own stories and I had the privilege of listening to them and of crafting them into narratives which portray each individual, drawing out his identity. Before embarking on this process, expecting them to be open and honest, to share their hopes and frustrations, to talk of their failures as well as their successes, it seemed only fair that I should be willing to go through such a process myself. How could I expect others to do it, especially young people, mostly in their teenage years, a time of internal turbulence for many young people, a time of changing identities for some and of related pressures or anxieties, of expectations from peers to confirm with the group, of expectations of teachers or employers to work harder and be more mature as they approach adulthood and of family expectations – whatever they might be. If I expected young people with all this going on in their lives to make time to talk to me, a middle-aged woman whom they might have seen around but don't know, and who can't ride a unicycle, the very least I could do was share my story first, put myself in their shoes and explore my motives for undertaking this research and my self-identity as a researcher and a non-rider in a community of riders. This would enable me to reflect on what I brought to this study, to employ my researcher reflexivity, which other qualitative researchers and writers have regarded as so important. It is my intention in sharing my story that the reader might begin to understand why I have become an advocate for unicycling, so often dismissed

as an obscure circus act, the riders to be laughed at like clowns; why I am passionate about its potential and excited by the experiences I see and hear.

Researcher Reflexivity

Sharing my story also enabled me to develop the concept of researcher reflexivity discussed in the previous chapter. Heikkinen et al. (2007) regard the process of reflection on your own identity as a researcher, and the bias created by your identity, as crucial to the data analysis process. It is not sufficient in narrative studies, they suggest, just to remind readers of this identity and bias; it is necessary to make explicit how this has influenced the construction of the narratives written. The following thoughts are developed from notes I wrote in a research diary.

From a professional perspective I come to this study as a former teacher and now lecturer in a university department of education; lecturing in a range of subjects, from sociology of education to the psychology of learning. This background has brought together, then, three research perspectives of sociology, psychology and education. In looking for a PhD topic I was not inspired by student drop-out or the latest method for teaching reading. I craved something more original, unusual, alternative perhaps; a subject that would allow me to forge my own way.

My personal time, while I was seeking a topic for research, was increasingly taken up with unicycling events, not as a rider but as a supporter; a mother of unicycling boys and the wife of an obsessive rider. It quickly became obvious as I watched people learn to ride, talked to significant riders and saw the impact unicycling had on my own family, that here was a potential subject. It was something that had yet to receive any real academic attention.

Had long conversation with Simon tonight at our house (eve of Manchester Blackpool Charity ride). He is convinced of positive impact of Unicycling on kids, especially what he called "difficult" kids in school. He talked about lots of experiences he'd had

teaching such kids and how he had seem them grow in confidence, etc. Thinks they like unusual nature of it. Talked of teachers he knew who had started school clubs. He says that no-one has ever tried to document any of this or taken any "academic" interest in it. I'm really excited – this could be it!! (Research diary, 17/08/04)

Unicycling was something that was generally misunderstood by public and press and something that was original, unusual, alternative - an activity that allowed participants to forge their own way and which, perhaps most importantly, appeared to have a very positive impact on those who pursued it.

The difficulty of coming to a research topic from a personal perspective is the need to remain objective to the study, to the data. I accept this and, in doing so, I recognise that I cannot be completely objective, that there will inevitably be some subjectivity in my analysis; however, this must surely be true for any researcher as it is impossible to work in isolation from the world you live in and your place in it, however far removed you are from your subject. I cannot be wholly objective as I come to this study having already observed many positive outcomes of unicycling. It has had a major impact on my husband's social skills and self-confidence, giving him stories to tell and a strong self-identity. Always a motivated man, it gave him renewed motivation as a teacher of unicycling, someone who ran a local club and who inspired and helped young riders; indeed the mentor in Scott's story is based largely on him. Winning a gold medal at the 14th World Championships enabled us all to take pride in his achievements while smiling that it had been won in the veteran's category – the fastest oldie on one wheel.

I have watched my oldest son learn to ride and take great pleasure in this unusual skill he has acquired. His school, I am pleased to say, took a great interest in this ability, and this further improved his self-esteem. His peers too were impressed by his unicycling: it was cool and it made him cool, more readily accepted in new situations. The following dialogue took place after a session at a holiday-sports club that he had just started attending, aged 6. I recorded the conversation in my research diary that evening so while it is an accurate account it is not verbatim. Tio didn't know any of the children there

and strong friendship groups had already been formed before his arrival. This particular morning he had ridden in on his unicycle for the first time.

> *"How did you get on today, Tio?"*
> *"Cool, we did races this afternoon. It was great!"*
> *"How did you feel riding in this morning?"*
> *"Proud, felt proud."*
> *"Why?"*
> *"I dunno.... 'Cause I was riding my unicycle and it's only got one wheel and it's got no handlebars."*
> *"Why does that make you feel proud?"*
> *"I dunno!"*
> *"What did the other children think?"*
> *"They called me 'clever'. They said I was clever".*
> *"Why do they think you're clever?"*
> *"'Cause they can't ride one, none of them can.... I felt proud 'cause I can do something they all can't. Yesterday they were a bit mean to me. The others in my group kept pushing me out of the line. Today everyone wanted to be my best mate! Can I ride it tomorrow?"* (Research diary, 22/09/06)

More recently I have seen the pride on my four year old's face when he rode unsupported for the first time, recognising himself that he was succeeding at an activity which was greatly valued by his family – and perhaps more importantly for him, that he could do something that his mum could not!

With all these experiences how could I possibly be objective about a sport which has had such a significant impact on my family? My intention in this study, however, is not to be coldly objective; I do not seek to measure scientifically the rise in self-esteem or levels of motivation. Nor do I seek to measure mathematically the number of grade points a pupil has moved up in school, since learning to unicycle – indeed these may be future studies of mine! What I do seek to do is to present several stories of young unicyclists which illustrate the potential that this sport has to influence young lives positively, and (with my professional interest in education), to have a positive impact on young lives in school.

Illus. 4: More recently I have seen the pride on my four year old's face when he rode unsupported for the first time.

As a new researcher my journey has been similar to that of a new unicyclist, as the short dialogues at the start of this thesis and either side of the Methodology sections sought to illustrate. I have been frustrated at not knowing how to do certain things, felt inadequate when not making progress but been driven by small goals, the first written paragraph, the first completed interview, motivated to persevere by the end goal. Originally this was to complete a PhD, to change my title on my driving licence, but the journey has made it so much more. I had not anticipated how much I would enjoy it, how much my confidence and self-belief would grow and how much more committed to the sport I would become. As a new researcher I felt obliged to follow a traditional format for the project and the thesis – whatever that was; but like the riders who attempt new tricks, like Pete who wanted to forge his own way, I wanted to find my own style and structure and not follow expectations just because they were there. As such, my thesis, the content, style and structure is as much about becoming a researcher as it is about becoming a unicyclist. What is seen here is the final draft but in reaching this point it has moved, developed, taken on a life of its own; it has been creative

and spontaneous. It has twisted and turned, jumped and flipped, like a unicyclist moving round a Trials course. What follows is something of my story and the story of my thesis.

Watching with Amazement – Wendy's Story

"You don't ride!" exclaimed Tu.

"No!" I replied defiantly.

"But … I just assumed … I thought you did. Why not? … It's so much fun. It's such a great feeling … Everyone should ride!"

"I don't have the patience; I couldn't persevere … I'm too busy to learn." were my lame excuses and then I moved straight to my trump card; I always used it. "Besides, if I did ride then who would provide the support, who would do all this?" I waved my hand at the Van, the large tent with chairs and beers ready and waiting for the riders who had gone to shower after a long, sweaty, muddy, wet day in the saddle.

Tu was one of "the Gang", our gang, a gang that had grown around us over the last seven years, a group of unicyclists who had started out as acquaintances but who had become friends, good friends, to our family. They had started out as Steve's friends, of course - he was the one who rode, not me. I had bought him a unicycle ahead of his fortieth birthday and challenged him to ride it to work on his birthday. It seemed a fitting feat for someone who hated the idea of growing old and who liked physical challenges. We thought of ourselves as "alternative", different to the mainstream, bohemian almost, influenced by our years of travelling. We weren't really, but it pleased us, or certainly me, to think of ourselves in that way, and so we had learnt to juggle – an alternative pastime - dabbled a bit. I could just about manage three balls but Steve could do tricks with five balls - Mills Mess – quite impressive. He always was a quick learner. He had a bike and cycled to work so a unicycle seemed like a good idea.

Steve learnt quickly and rode to work on his fortieth birthday feeling very accomplished at mastering such a difficult task. I thought it would end there, expected him to get it out on family occasions as a party-piece, but I couldn't have been more wrong. An avid internet surfer, he soon came across something neither of us had really expected – a whole community of unicyclists, not just in the UK, but round the world, united by a passion for

riding the one-wheeled bike. Actually it's not a bike at all and I was often reprimanded in the early days for calling it such. Of course, I did it just to wind him up – how could he take unicycling so seriously? It was just a bit of fun, a laugh, a wacky pastime!

Steve started going to meets, regional ones at first, then national gatherings. I stayed at home, uninterested in his new hobby, but as the meets became more frequent I began to resent spending Saturdays or Sundays – sometimes whole weekends – without him, looking after our young son, Tio, and so I turned a corner without imagining what was round it.

If I didn't want to stay at home the other option was to go with him. I had no intention of learning to ride – I couldn't stand the humiliation of forever falling off in public - but at least I would be with him and Tio might enjoy whatever was going on. So I started going to meets, sitting and watching an activity I couldn't do, listening to conversations that I couldn't join in, expecting to be bored, but finding myself amazed and, in time, drawn in. Never content to sit on the edge and just watch, preferring to be involved in whatever is going on, I wasn't going to be just a spectator, just Steve's wife, but I didn't have the motivation to learn to unicycle; it looked too difficult, requiring too much skill and as I had truthfully said to Tu, I don't have much patience or perseverance. Instead I had to carve out my own identity with the skills that I did have and so rather than just watching I became an active supporter of what was developing into far more than an amusing hobby for Steve, a physical obsession with the sport of unicycling.

If I was going to be outdoors a lot and away at weekend events I was going to do it in some degree of comfort or style and so I bought an old Volkswagen camper van – it appealed to my hippy aspirations! The Van, as it became known, was an integral part of my identity as it was in here that I cooked bacon sandwiches for everyone for breakfast and that I kept endless supplies of bananas and flapjack – essential cycling fuel, even for one-wheel riders.

Illus. 5: …so rather than just watching I became an active supporter.

The bright yellow van became a familiar site at unicycle meets and cycling events which "the Gang" were taking part in, accompanied by the huge yellow banners I had made to ensure that the unicyclists were noticed; not that it's easy to be overlooked when you stand out from the crowd which usually consists of conventional cyclists. So my identity developed, I became Wendy with the Van, the one-woman support-team. It seemed so fitting, in keeping with my name-sake from J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan! Steve is the eternal boy, who doesn't want to grow up; leading and organising the Lost Boys, the young lads in our gang who turn up at meets on their own and are happy to be fed and watered by me – but such a fairy tale doesn't do justice to the serious side of unicycling.

As an educationalist I quickly became fascinated by the experiences I was observing and the stories I was hearing as I watched people ride and listened to their conversations. Why did all these people get so excited by riding a one-wheeled bike – that isn't a bike. The first thing that struck me was the positive mood everywhere. People were having real fun, enjoying themselves. It seemed to be infectious; even real beginners laughed as they slipped off the

saddle after two seconds; perhaps that was to do with the enthusiastic encouragement they were given by more-able riders. I watched groups of riders of all ages play unicycle gladiators, bumping into each other on purpose and laughing as they knocked each other off. There were unicycle hockey teams charging round a pitch, individuals shouting instructions at team members and whooping with delight at a goal. But the group that fascinated me most were the Trials riders. Typically young lads in their late teens, they stood around together, somewhat distanced from everyone else, in that male youth pose, shoulders slightly hunched, waist disappearing with trousers round their hips, wearing the ubiquitous hoody, almost blank expressions on their faces. They stood around piles of "old stuff": worn tyres, disused wooden pallets and metal bars arranged in wobbly looking piles and strange formations. Like the stuff piled up, the lads looked as if they had been rejected by society, thrown on a rubbish heap. Then one of them would turn the music on, loud, pumping hip-hop or rave, another would pick up his unicycle and wander over to a pile of the junk and the whole group would instantly come alive, shouting, gesticulating, encouraging, teasing, daring the rider to attempt more and more difficult tricks - a six foot drop, a double crankflip, a 360 degree spin.

These young individuals who had looked so dejected and disaffected were so highly motivated and engaged in the activity whether it was their turn to ride or watch; the energy struck me as so significant and exciting I wanted to know more about them and what they did. Being quite intimidated by their group status and body language, accepting the media stereotype of hooded, male youth and not yet confident of my own place in the unicycling community I started talking to riders I did know and particularly those who taught unicycling. I began to hear stories of children and young people who had been engaged by the sport, really motivated by it, for whom it had become a significant part of their identity, their lives; some who had even been written off by school, dismissed as demotivated, even formally excluded from the classroom, who had persevered and learnt to ride. Used to failing, the individuals in these stories were not put off when they fell off on their first few attempts. They'd been told often enough that they couldn't do it – whatever 'it'

was – that they got up and just did it again and again when they were given so much one-to-one encouragement by the unicycle instructor. The stories recounted how, as they learnt to ride and then developed their skills, these individuals seemed to grow in self-esteem; they became known by their peers as the 'lad who unicycles' and got immense street credibility for being able to do something that their friends or acquaintances couldn't which looked so difficult and sometimes dangerous. Some of the tales finished with the characters achieving well in school, this new motivation carrying over into the classroom - giving them a sense of self-worth at last. It was fascinating and I could relate to it having seen the impact unicycling had had on Steve's self-esteem and self-identity. It had given him far greater confidence, particularly in social situations, and motivated him enormously.

Illus. 6: …as they learnt to ride and then developed their skills,
these individuals seemed to grow in self-esteem.

Here was a sport, ridiculed by many, yet which clearly had the potential to engage, motivate and create self-worth for those who mastered it; it was an educationalist's dream. I was keen to read about it, to see the evidence of what I could so clearly imagine to be happening. But there was no written evidence, it was all anecdotal: someone knew someone who knew someone

who ... There was no data, no evidence and without this unicycling may never be taken seriously by those in education, acknowledged for the benefits it could give individuals, valued by the teachers of those who ride so skilfully, recognised by a society which expects its premier football clubs to work with local schools in full recognition of how sport can motivate children and youth, but oblivious to this sport and its potential. So it was obvious; data needed to be gathered and analysed to provide evidence of the possible benefits of unicycling, and in doing so I would have a new identity within the unicycling community, as well as providing that much-needed and appreciated support that I had used as an example to Tu, I would now be there in an independent role, in my own right.

I present that data and analysis here in my thesis and, in doing so I seek to identify some of the evidence.

Chapter 6

Riding with Friends –
The Potential Benefits of Sport and Unicycling

Riding with friends is a key aspect of unicycling for all levels of riders. This is clear from interviews, observations and questionnaires completed for my study. Indeed social development is one of the acknowledged b   enefits of sport I discuss in this chapter. For most of the young riders at the heart of this study, riding with friends is key to their enjoyment, their motivation and (for some) their self and group identity. To follow the metaphor between undertaking PhD study and learning to unicycle, researching with friends is a key stage in the development of the new researcher. As confidence grows you become willing, indeed enthusiastic, to share your work, your ideas with your peers, your friends, as other researchers who can comment and make suggestions. This chapter is the first of five in which I review literature on my key themes. In reading others' work I have found what feel like friends, as I have come to know their work and, at times, rely on it for support or comment.

After acknowledging unicycling as a circus act, a performance for entertainment, with its roots in trick cycling, I presented a case for it to be recognised as a sport in Chapter 1. I illustrated the different disciplines within unicycling with short narrative extracts and in doing so hoped that this has given the reader something of an understanding of what the sport of unicycling involves, what it is to actually experience it, do it, to ride, to spin, to drop, to score a goal or basket, and what motivates riders, particularly young riders. I have discussed my methodology and research plan and given a rationale for my presentation of the data in narrative form. I will now move on to present and analyse the data from the five narratives with common themes across the community being identified through the supporting quantitative data. I shall examine this in relation to existing literature on the key themes of the study. As I have already sought to make clear, unicycling has yet to receive any academic attention, except from a technological and scientific

point of view. My subsequent literature review has drawn on related research and literature, for example from other lifestyle sports or sport generally.

In this first section of the literature review I will discuss the potential benefits of unicycling. Having made a case for unicycling to be acknowledged as a sport, whilst recognising its circus links, I will review the potential benefits of engaging in sports and circus skills for youth in existing literature. I will then consider these with particular reference to unicycling as a discrete lifestyle sport.

The Potential Benefits of Sport

My thesis is based on the hypothesis that learning to ride a unicycle, and develop this skill, has a positive influence on the rider. A considerable amount of research has been undertaken into the benefits of sport and physical activity. As I have presented a case for unicycling to be recognised as a sport, in Chapter 1, my first literature review will consider the positive outcomes of engaging in sport before examining the specific benefits of unicycling.

The UK Health Education Authority convened an international symposium in 1999 on physical activity and young people. The primary recommendation to come out of it was that "all young people should participate in physical activity of at least moderate intensity for one hour per day" (HEA, 1999). This was in recognition of the benefits of sport on health and well-being. Interestingly, unicycling is described as a mid-range activity and so would meet the HEA recommendation (Cook, 2006). More recently the Central Council for Physical Recreation, CCPR, (2005) has called on the Chancellor to double government funding for sport and recreation in recognition of the contribution made to "promoting health, developing sustainable communities and decreasing social exclusion". My thesis is primarily concerned with benefits of unicycling to individuals; however, it will consider group benefits as they relate to individuals, such as riding with friends, the title of this chapter.

The Government is currently investing heavily in sport, although not at the levels the CCPR calls for. This policy is based on the recognition that sport can contribute to health, education and behaviour. Whilst Prime Minister, Tony Blair made a public commitment to sport, acknowledging its positive impact on health, education and social development:

> *It is important that we give this encouragement to sport not only for its own sake but because, as many people now recognise, it is one of the best anti-crime policies that we could have. It is also as good a health and education policy as virtually any other.* (Blair, 2002)

The broad themes of my thesis - identity, motivation and achievement - could be described under the headings of health, education and social development; mental health as well as physical in terms of a positive self-identity for example, achievement in education brought about, in part, through healthy development and enhanced levels of concentration and social confidence in terms of a strong self-identity as it relates to others, to a group identity.

The benefits summarised from existing literature so far have been very general. Collins and Kay (2003) compared more focused research into the benefits of taking part in a sport in order to identify specific outcomes related to individuals, community and country. They examined four different studies carried out between 1992 and 2001 (Parks and Recreation Federation of Ontario, 1992; Sullivan, 1998; Sport England, 1999 and Coalter, 2001). They considered the findings in relation to 34 different forms of benefit grouped under the headings Personal, Social, Economic, Environmental and National. None of the 34 benefits were identified by all four studies. The following benefits were identified by three of the four and so can be deemed to have significant impact:

Personal
- Aiding a full/meaningful life
- Ensuring health
- Helping stress management
- Giving self-esteem/image

Social

- Reducing alienation/loneliness/antisocial behaviour
- Strengthening communities
- Promoting ethnic/cultural harmony
- Community involvement/ownership/empowerment
- Promoting community pride

Economic

- Cost-effective health promotion

Environmental

- Protecting/rehabilitating environments

It is the first five listed above which I am most interested in as these are the ones which are likely to relate directly to individual unicyclists. The four listed under Personal relate to both health and education; the first one listed under Social obviously relates to social development. Collins and Kay identify a significant increase in interest in sport as an intervention in youth disengagement. This, they conclude, is based on the consensus that sport has the potential to raise self-esteem and have a positive impact on mood and perception of competence or mastery. It can reduce self-destructive behaviour such as smoking and drug abuse. It can also improve socialisation with peer groups and adults. In most cases it can improve educational attendance and performance. Research by Videmsek et al. (2003) support the view that active participation in sport is linked to a reduction in smoking. Their findings, with approximately three hundred 14 year olds, showed that those young people who do not smoke spend more time in sport activities than those who do smoke and that the desire to be healthy was a key factor in not smoking and in engaging in sport. In contrast to this relatively small-scale study, Wright et al. (2003) do caution that research concerned with health promotion linked to sport has been dominated by large-scale, quantitative studies. These have

focused on the amount of time young people should actively engage in sport in order for it to have a health benefit rather than actual health benefits.

Other research focusing on young people and sport also identifies positive outcomes from sport and concludes that there are many positive developmental outcomes for youth involved in sport (Fraser-Thomas et al. 2005). (While Fraser-Thomas et al did not undertake their own empirical study they did critique the findings of much published research.) The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2002) identified four main areas of youth development which sport can enhance: psychological or emotional; social; intellectual; and physical. Sport provides opportunities for young people to experience challenge, fun and enjoyment while enhancing their self-esteem and reducing stress (Health Canada, 2003). These support the positive findings of Collins and Kay above. A number of research projects conclude that sport develops citizenship, social success, positive peer relationships and leadership skills (Elley and Kirk, 2002; Wright and Cote, 2003). Some of these benefits may apply to sports which involve team work rather than individual performance. Unicycling is predominantly an individual activity, although there are opportunities for team sports, such as Unicycle Hockey, or competing as a team in a 400 metre sprint relay race or a twenty four hour Muni endurance race, representing your country in an international competition for example or just participating with friends. The benefits identified in relation to social development may still be significant for unicycling as the social opportunities it provides are important to many riders.

With regard to positive social development in children and young people, Siegenthaler and Gonzalez (1997) have attributed the increase in organised youth sports of the 1990s to the recognition of the potential of sport to enhance participants' social skills and reduce antisocial behaviour. The UK has seen a sudden rise in Street Sport initiatives seeking to exploit this potential; a large number of local authorities advertise such schemes on the internet, often in partnership with local police forces.

With regard to intellectual development, young people's involvement in sport has been shown to increase academic performance by having a positive impact on school grades, attendance, engagement in academic study and educational aspirations (Marsh, 1993; and Whitley, 1999). In respect to physical development there has been much interest in this area in recent years. Various studies confirm the commonly held belief that engagement in sport facilitates normal growth and development in children and young people, leads to greater health and establishes positive lifestyles for adulthood (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

Riddoch (1998) stresses the existence of research which contradicts some of these claims for the benefits of sport; it suggests that participation in physical activity does not have a significantly lasting effect on young people's health. Telamo et al. (2005) draw attention to this, emphasising that a potential benefit, or goal, of youth sport should be that of "establishing regular exercise routines or habits that will last throughout life".

It must be recognised that while the potential benefit of engagement in sport is great for the vast majority of young people, and those of many other age groups, there are possible negative outcomes. Fraser-Thomas. et al summarise these. Some young people may experience a negative impact on their emotional development if they feel under significant pressure to win when they see themselves as unskilled. This is highlighted by Fry (2001), who gives the example of teachers or coaches who put emphasis on outcomes and make comparisons between young participants' achievements and abilities. This may create a stressful situation and may lead to low self-esteem and a reduction in self-confidence. Ultimately it may drive some young people away from sport and physical activity with a perception that their sporting competencies are weak. This is likely to be particularly so in highly competitive sports. The nature of unicycling is not as a highly competitive sport and individuals can participate without feeling that they will let down team members as they can participate on an individual basis. This pressure to win may be felt by a whole team and the stress it produces can and has led to violence and aggression and poor sportsmanship in youth sport settings

(Colburn, 1986). This is unheard of in the sport of unicycling (Bignold, 2007). I will present an observation of a young person who was not particularly successful at unicycling, Jon, in Chapter 15 as acknowledgement that not everyone who picks up a unicycle masters it. While everyone has the potential to learn, success is largely dependent on the level of commitment and perseverance. As this example will show, those who do try to ride but do not succeed do not appear to be negatively affected by the experience or suffer from low self-esteem as they recognise the inherent difficulty of the task.

In the area of physical development some research has linked sport participation to negative physical outcomes, for example, sport-related injuries and eating disorders (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). This may be true of unicycling as some riders push themselves to complete harder and harder tricks, such as high jumps or drops, or to beat speed records, and in doing so injure themselves. Coakley (2003) is concerned about injury rates of young participants in what he terms "alternative sports" because of the lack of formal organisation and adult supervision. However, unicycling is regarded as safer than riding a two-wheeled bicycle as the maximum speed is limited by how fast the rider can pedal, even going downhill, rather than how steep the hill is (Wilson, 2006). If a rider does fall off a unicycle there are no handlebars to be thrown over as on an ordinary bicycle and so accidents are often, although not exclusively, less severe.

> *I would argue that bikes are considerably less safe than unicycles, they not only have more accidents but when they do they almost always are worse. When you fall off a bike you tend to be moving faster than on a unicycle and the bike tangles you up with it. It then either holds you in a slide across the ground or rotates you head first in to the ground – both nasty. When you fall off a unicycle it normally just falls away and leaves you standing or in a heap on the floor. I would say that even with high speed falls you rarely hurt yourself on a unicycle. (Davies, 2006, p.11)*

The Potential Benefits of Circus Skills

I have already made the case for unicycling to be recognised as a sport rather than a circus act in Chapter 1. However, as I explained earlier, many riders do come to unicycling as part of a circus skills workshop. It is therefore appropriate to consider the benefits of it in this form too. Circus skills have received considerable interest in schools over the last 10 to 20 years as teachers and headteachers have recognised the potential of them to develop a range of skills, attitudes and values in children (Southern, 1995). There have also been a number of circus initiatives based within the community as a means of engaging young people and promoting social cohesion.

Circus arts, including unicycling, are increasingly recognised as serious, skilful activities which demonstrate perseverance, commitment and a high level of mental and physical skills and technical understanding in the performers. This is illustrated in the establishment of Circus Arts degree courses in a small number of universities around the world (Cohen, 2003). Circus skills are acknowledged for contributing to the development of confidence, for providing a sense of achievement and for raising the social status of individuals within groups (Southern). The last point here is of particular interest to me with its emphasis on youth at various levels of engagement. Southern reports on observations he made of young people taking part in circus skills workshops. To many of them the opportunity to learn something which is different and which lots of other people cannot do was a significant motivator and gave them street credibility amongst their peers. This hypothesis, that being skilled at something which is different gives street credibility, has resonance with unicycling and has been suggested to me in several conversations I have had with teachers of unicyling.

As well as peer recognition, the acquisition of unusual skills may lead to peer education as individuals share their new abilities with friends, as illustrated below:

Peer education is a buzzword right now and it works well in a circus because you are always having to push yourselves to learn something new, which means you retain the ability to break down skills clearly, and passing those skills to someone else comes naturally. (Newnham, 2003, www.tes.co.uk)

This is a trend I have observed at unicycle meets when a young person who has mastered a particular trick teaches others how to do it. On the internet, too, riders post short video clips of themselves doing new tricks with a commentary for others to learn from.

The development of circus skills and the progression to a "performance", however informal and basic, has been acknowledged for the contribution it can make to social skills as well as personal development. Early research by Rogers and Rogers (1990) showed that

...through circus children learn the four cornerstones of social bonding, attachment, commitment, involvement and belief ... Attachment emphasizes caring about other persons, mutual expectations, and shared aspirations. Commitment denotes the investment of time, energy and self into positive behaviour. Involvement speaks of the joy of engrossing activities. Belief refers to a set of values and norms which society deems worth instilling in its youth. (Rogers and Rogers, 1990, p.92)

Subsequent observations of children and young people taking part in circus skills workshops have emphasised the development of listening and observation skills, particularly in early stages of learning (Haigh, 2003). Listening skills were also a key benefit identified in an evaluation of a circus project for young offenders commissioned from the Adolescent Psychology and Research Unit funded by the Northern Ireland Office. This evaluation also identified the positive impact on self-control, teamwork and cooperation, more important social skills. The evaluation concluded that

The group as a whole appeared less impulsive and more self-controlled. As impulsivity is usually a key indicator for anti-social and delinquent behaviour this was a crucial finding. (Croall, 1996, www.tes.co.uk)

This is of particular interest to me with its focus on young people at various levels of engagement, some of whom have displayed anti-social behaviour in school. One reason for the possible decrease in anti-social behaviour may be the recognition of success by significant others, such as teachers, and the sense of personal achievement. These are both increasingly important in today's education system with its emphasis on academic achievement. Circus skills, including unicycling, allow for achievement of a different sort and "reduce the pressure for competition" as individuals often work together to accomplish new skills (Prunster and Vigl, 1994). Achievement in non-academic areas can have a positive impact on academic achievement, another theme of this thesis, as one teacher interviewed about her pupils' circus skills and quoted by Haigh described:

A creative child, whose inclinations are to music and dance, will thrive academically if that creativity is understood and encouraged by a sensitive teacher. (Haigh, 2003, p.23)

In Chapter 1 I presented a case for unicycling to be recognised as a sport, though I acknowledge that as a circus skill and it can have the benefits discussed above.

The Potential Benefits of Unicycling

My thesis has developed out of a number of discussions with unicyclists and from observations of unicycling, particularly by young people. A significant amount of anecdotal evidence, which I now seek to substantiate, credits unicycling with a range of benefits for riders. There is no specific academic research to draw on here which is why I have discussed the recognised benefits of sport and circus skills in an effort to draw parallels with unicycling. Some anecdotal evidence has been presented on the internet and in newspapers and I will now summarise this. Although I acknowledge that it has not been substantiated, and exists in grey literature only, it may indeed indicate potential benefits and could identify areas for me to explore. In keeping with the preceding review of published literature I will discuss the

potential benefits of unicycling in relation to health, education and social development as they relate to motivation, achievement and identity.

A small number of teachers in the UK and other countries have established unicycling clubs as extra curricular activities, to teach unicycling to their pupils. Their motivation for doing so has largely been that they recognise the potential benefits of it, usually as riders themselves. There is much anecdotal evidence of it having a positive impact on the self-esteem of young riders and their ability to set goals and persevere with difficult tasks. One example of this is from a headteacher of an American elementary school who runs a unicycling club at his school, reported in his local newspaper, the *St Petersburg Times*:

> *I've had parents tell me it's (unicycling) helped their child with self-esteem and also helped them to set goals ... I challenge them to go one foot further each time they ride* (Church, 2001, p.14)

Its impact on the self-esteem of children, young people and adults has been informally observed over a period of five years, and has provided a major stimulus for this study (Bignold, 2004). I have watched it enhance the self-esteem of my husband and eldest son, as described in Chapter 5, for example. An increase in self-esteem, I would argue, may be seen as improving the mental health and well being of the individual rider.

Rather than being relegated to extra-curricular activities, unicycling is taught in 95 percent of Japanese primary schools as part of the mainstream curriculum (Author unknown, 1999). The Japanese government has encouraged this, recognising the potential benefits to health, both mental and physical (Nishimura, 2008). An internet report for a Japanese news agency concludes that unicycling provides a good physical workout while being easier on the heart than jogging. This may be of significance to the increasing number of Japanese adults who are taking up unicycling, inspired and encouraged by the children. Its potential contribution to the development of concentration, balance and agility is also acknowledged in Japan and was confirmed in an interview I had with a Japanese educationalist (Nishimura).

Research in Japan identifies unicycling as having a positive effect on children's body posture (Makoto et al., 2000) and as enhancing their physical balance (Miyahara et al., 1998). Interestingly, Miyahara et al. confirm that the majority of Japanese primary schools encourage unicycling in their pupils (the figure has been difficult to substantiate, other sources estimating about 60 % of schools). The school in which they conducted their research had a unicycle available for every pupil and all 132 students could ride competently. When unicycling the top part of the body is used for balance and so is constantly moved and turned in order to stay mounted. Thus the abdomen is exercised as well as the lower body, in contrast to bicycle riding (Wilson, 2006), so unicycling fosters a healthier body and greater all round physical agility. The contribution of unicycling to a healthy body is recognised by Cook (2006) who acknowledges that the agility in changing direction quickly, required by most disciplines, and the balance and coordination required generally works the muscles which are at the core of the body in a way that many other sports do not.

Questionnaire data that I gathered from British unicyclists provides some evidence of the health benefits observed in themselves that riders credit to the sport. Participants were asked questions about unicycling, based on the benefits identified in sport by Collins and Kay (2003). With regard to health these were:

- Has it aided you in having a full/meaningful life?
- Has it helped you to keep fit and/or healthy?
- Has it helped you to manage any stress?
- Has it raised your self-esteem/self-image?

There were 62 male respondents and 20 female respondents. The results are in the following table:

Table 1: Health benefits of unicycling as perceived by unicyclists. (BUC 2006)

Positive responses	Male respondents	Female respondents
Yes, it has aided me in having a full/meaningful life.	53%	50%
Yes, it has helped me to keep fit and/or healthy.	82%	75%
Yes, it has helped me to manage any stress.	60%	40%
Yes, it has raised my self-esteem/self-image?	60%	60%

With the exception of the female respondents considering their stress levels, over 50% of respondents felt that unicycling had had a positive impact on their health in response to the questions asked. I present this here as an introductory analysis to the questionnaire data, to identify apparent benefits which will then be illustrated in the five main narratives. A more detailed analysis of the quantitative data from the UK and the international community, with specific reference to youth age groups and those immediately following it, will be discussed in the analysis section, Chapter 16, once all five narratives have been presented.

Academic literature on the benefits of unicycling to educational achievement is virtually non-existent. In America, unicycling has been used as an educational enrichment activity for dyslexic children. The benefit of it in this instance has been academically researched by Yoshimoto (2000). It was reported to "promote athletic prowess and development of thinking processes". However, the research examined a package of enrichment activities, of which unicycling was one, and did not focus on it as a specific activity, so it is not possible to draw significant conclusions from this. Yoshimoto's research does support anecdotal evidence however. In a review of the function and purpose of cognitive processes Chater and Oaksford (1999) use unicycling as an example of a "cognitive challenge". This academic reference provides support for the potential of unicycling to develop cognitive processes. Byosiere and

Luethge (2008) draw on knowledge theories of Kakabadse et al. (2001) and Nonaka et al. (2001) to categorise the ability to unicycle as a form of "tacit knowledge" which they describe thus:

> *Tacit knowledge has a personalised quality that makes it hard to formalize, and is therefore deeply rooted in action and commitment in a very specific content ... Tacit knowledge also has two dimensions ... One dimension is the technical or skill dimension which embodies the type of crafts or individual skills which are commonly called "know-how". The other dimension is the cognitive dimension, which consists of mental modes, schemata, beliefs and values which are embedded in our persona. (Byosiere and Luethge, 2008, p.67)*

This description supports the complex cognitive processes at work in unicyclists. Whilst using unicycling as an example of tacit knowledge they acknowledge the difficulty of mastering this physical activity. Byosiere is a Japanese academic and as such may be familiar with the physical activity of unicycling. Were this not the case it would be most surprising to find unicycling used as an example of knowledge theory in an article on knowledge management within organisations.

The positive impact of unicycling on cognitive development is not something which I have set out to prove; that is for another time and a more scientific or positivist approach. However any enhancement of cognitive skills must impact positively on educational performance. What I am interested in here is the impact of an enhanced self-esteem on educational achievement; whilst it is difficult to prove this without formal measurement, it is interesting to have found examples where riders feel that this is true for themselves. If they believe it to be true then it must have had a significant impact on them and their self-identity, another focus of this study, and who am I to dispute it? An informal conversation I had at UNICON XIV with a rider in his early twenties gives an example of one person's belief in the benefits to him. I recount it here as a short, illustrative narrative:

> *"Have you had many questionnaires completed?" the nice, young Danish man asked as he took my son's other hand and helped him onto the tight-rope.*

"Yes, about forty!" I replied, surprised that he knew it was me who was gathering data for my PhD research here. Tio started to wobble along the line.

"That's very good. I filled one in and put it in the box."

"Thanks!"

"When I started unicycling I noticed my grades go up at school – they got better. Unicycling made me feel good. It was very interesting and good for me." Tio was becoming more confident now, less timid, with the nice, young Danish man giving him instructions and encouragement.

"Oh? That's exactly what I am looking at." I let go of Tio's hand and he continued towards the tree which one end of the slack-line was tied around, only being supported by the young unicyclist and tightrope walker.

"A film crew came to our unicycle club. They made a documentary about unicycling and how it helped children learn to concentrate. They were very interested in us." Tio had reached the tree and turned around.

"How long have you been unicycling? I asked the nice, young Danish man. He had released his grip on Tio's hand and now just let his hand rest under Tio's hardly supporting him at all but giving him confidence with a light touch.

"A few years. Are you interested in the documentary? I could get it and translate it for you."

"Oh, that would be great. I am very interested; yes please." Tio reached the tree at the starting-end and jumped down looking very pleased with himself. I gave the nice, young Danish man my card with my email address as the next child climbed onto the slack-line rather shakily.

This short narrative records very accurately the brief exchange that took place. As well as the young rider's self-belief I was interested in his commitment to promoting the sport, something I have observed in many unicyclists who have genuinely wanted to help with this study, keen, they have told me, for unicycling to get the recognition which they feel it deserves based on their own experiences.

How unicycling might have impacted on his or her educational ability or achievement is very difficult for someone to identify, that I acknowledged. I asked questions in the questionnaire, however, to see if people *thought* that it had or not. 13 of the 62 boys and men thought that it had increased their concentration and 14 thought it had improved their self-control, both attributes which can in turn have a positive impact on educational achievement; if

someone concentrates for longer they are likely to do better at a task, whether practical or mental, for example. Eight girls or women thought that it had helped their levels of concentration while six felt it had increased their self-control. Of course these numbers are less than a quarter of male respondents and less than a half of female respondents, but what is significant to me is that some unicyclists do think that unicycling has a positive impact on their concentration and self-control. These are both elements of achievement behaviour as identified by Roberts (2001) and which I will discuss in Chapter 8 as part of the literature review on motivation. An increase in self-esteem, illustrated through the above short narrative, may of course increase academic achievement too as it is likely to enhance confidence and self-belief. I will discuss the link between self-esteem and achievement as presented in published literature in a later section of the literature review, Chapter 10.

Moving on to consider social development, whilst unicycling is predominantly an individual sport, many riders do like to ride with others and so the social opportunities within unicycling are a key element of it. It is the social aspect of unicycle meets and events which is a major reason for participants to attend; "Making new friends, and meeting up with old ones is the real reason to attend for many riders" (Penton, 2006b, p.63). At the extreme end of this is the biannual UNICON meets; while only a small percentage of unicyclists actually attend, the cultural exchange which takes place at them illustrates the sharing of ideas, of new ways of doing things, of jointly exploring how far the boundaries can be pushed, which takes place at any meet, formal or informal, international or local. For Monney this cultural exchange across different nationalities is the most important feature, but it could equally be across different age groups at a local meet and may have, she suggests, a direct link to antisocial behaviour:

> *Beyond national interests, UNICON recreates every two years a truly open international community. This sets up a framework within which it is possible to get in touch with other cultures and understand them. I deeply believe that this type of contact between nations promotes genuine international understanding, and, on a wider scale could help to avoid conflicts based on mutual mistrust.*
> (Monney, 2006, p.30)

Learning new tricks or skills from others is a key way to enhance your own unicycling ability and this exchange is part of the culture of unicycling. It has a strong sense of camaraderie in which riders help and support each other with ideas, advice and, when necessary, equipment. This strong social network or commitment, often with people from other backgrounds, age groups for example, was observed as significant by Maher, a spectator at a unicycle event:

> *During the week of June 16th, I was able to press my nose against the windowpane of an entirely new society and observe them. I am not a member of this social sect, but they welcomed me into their fold unquestioningly and I admire them all immensely. There is no other sport where a thirteen-year-old girl can compete against a fifty-seven-year old man and no-one bats an eye. Unicyclists don't seem to have the mentality necessary to kick their friend's taillights out, just so they could win. Instead they all pulled together and exchanged tires, tools, parts that might well have come in handy for themselves later, whole unicycles if necessary and friendly tips on how to make riding easier or more effective....You have opened my eyes to a whole new world where camaraderie, compassion and humour reign supreme.* (Maher, 2008, p.31)

Many riders writing for *Uni* magazine recognise the social opportunities they have had through the sport and it is one motivator for them continuing with it, as this extract illustrates:

> *I hope to use unicycling as a tool to travel around the world, experience new environments and continue to meet lots of interesting people.* (Holm, 2006, p.61)

Given this anecdotal evidence it can be expected that unicycling has the potential to develop social skills in young riders, of course these may not necessarily be with a wide range of other riders, including those from different backgrounds. It may promote social development in the form of strengthening friendship bonds with immediate peers. An example of this is in Chapter11, in Pete's story, where unicycling created a sense of group identity for him and his friends.

Data gathered from my UK questionnaires (BUC, 2006) do indeed confirm that unicycling has had a positive impact on the social development of riders. In the questionnaire I asked unicyclists if the sport had had any of the following benefits for them:

- Has it helped you to make new friends and feel included?
- Has it helped you to stop any antisocial behaviour you had?
- Has it helped you get to know people from different backgrounds, age groups, etc?
- Has it strengthened friendships for you?

There were 62 male respondents and 20 female respondents. The results are in the table below:

Table 2: Social benefits of unicycling as perceived by unicyclists. (BUC, 2006)

Positive responses	Male respondents	Female respondents
Yes, it has helped me to make new friends and feel included.	81%	100%
Yes, it has helped me to stop any antisocial behaviour I had.	3%	10%
Yes, it has helped me get to know people from different backgrounds, age groups, etc.	81%	90%
Yes, it has strengthened friendships for me.	57%	65%

With the exception of it stopping any anti-social behaviour the responses were all significantly high indicating that riders do think unicycling has a positive influence on their social development. Of course, respondents may not wish to answer yes to the question on anti-social behaviour as they may not wish to admit that they had previously, or still do have, any form of anti-social behaviour. Again I will discuss this data in more detail in the analysis in Chapter 16, I just include it here to make links to related literature.

In this chapter I have discussed literature which clearly demonstrates potential benefits of taking part in sport and physical activity, as well as the positive impact of learning circus skills. The lifestyle sport of unicycling is able to bring both sets of benefits together for maximum impact on individuals and I have given some examples of these. Some of the potential benefits I have drawn out of the published literature will now be illustrated through the first of the five young riders' narratives, Scott's story, Chapter 7. In the following four literature review chapters I examine literature relating to:

- motivation,
- self-identity and self-esteem,
- group identity and culture, and
- alternative curriculum (achievement).

How unicycling influences each of these will be discussed with reference to the literature and then illustrated by a subsequent narrative.

Chapter 7

Striker Satisfaction - Scott's Story

Introduction

Sources and Contexts

I have placed Scott's story here as it illustrates some of the potential benefits of sport and unicycling identified in the previous chapter. Scott is a 14 year old who likes to play unicycle hockey with his dad and younger brother. He provided a significant challenge for me as an interviewer; I anticipated that the conversation with him would not flow as freely as with the older interviewees, and that Scott would be less articulate, favouring one-word, or very limited responses to questions and other stimuli. This was based on previous observations of him in dialogue with others. Therefore, I condensed the format of the interviews somewhat and the story is based on one extended dialogue which had three distinct components to it: current unicycling, early riding and future aspirations. I combined his interview data with that from observations I made of Scott at a large unicycle hockey tournament, similar to the one in the story.

As well as observing him the tournament also provided me with an opportunity to observe formally the culture of the sport of unicycle hockey and the behaviour, camaraderie and so on, of individuals and teams taking part in it - Scott was one of approximately 70 players, his team one of ten. Informal observations and conversations also took place with some of the other participants and have provided additional background to the story by way of descriptions of a match in full swing, for example, as have observations and conversations from other hockey matches and tournaments that I have attended. My construction of this story does then meet the criteria for creative

non-fiction as given by Sparkes (2002) and referred to earlier, being based on real events, and one in particular, which I was present at.

Despite being based on one individual, this narrative seeks to present common themes amongst unicyclists, such as the motives for learning to ride and for taking up a particular discipline within the overall sport. In Scott's story there is a second main character, his mentor and a key figure in the discipline nationally. This character, John, and his actions and attitudes are based on one rider whom I have observed playing over a number of years and have had numerous informal conversations with about unicycle hockey, the rules, tactics and attitudes to it of unicyclists and non-unicyclists.

At interview Scott described himself as a "motivated" individual, who, in his view, works suitably hard at school:

"How would your teachers describe you? ... Would they say you worked hard?"
"Yer, a bit!"

He placed himself one quarter of the way along the motivation continuum (an aid I took to all interviews, a copy of which is in Appendix 1), from the highly motivated end, although based on observations of Scott, on the interview, on my previous knowledge of him and on conversations with both parents I would place him half way along. I thought him to be an interesting study as he is a typical young unicyclist in terms of his skill and commitment. He was regularly riding once a week and participating at a local club but did not excel at his chosen discipline, unlike Max. Of particular interest was the fact that his motivation for unicycling has recently been replaced by a motivation to play football; this is typical of many riders who pursue the sport for a significant period of time but then move on to other interests and so provides a balance to some of the other main characters in the stories presented in this thesis.

I had recently come to know Scott, his family and his story and I thought that already being known to him might contribute to a more relaxed conversation

at interview. He was fourteen when the interview took place and his age put him within the focus of this research on 'youth' riders. Scott asked for his mother to sit in on the interview and I agreed to this hoping that it might make him more relaxed and so willing to talk more. I do acknowledge it may have affected his answers. On a small number of occasions she asked his permission to add a comment to a question or story and this helped the dialogue flow. In no way did she dominate the interview, nor, in my opinion, did she significantly influence what Scott had to say. Her contributions can be seen directly in the story when Scott refers to what "Me mum thinks....". I have made her thoughts explicit so that readers can distinguish between Scott's perspective and his mother's.

Voice and Authenticity

The narrative account draws very closely on Scott's personal experiences and thoughts as he told them in the interview. It paraphrases many of his own words and chosen phrases from the transcript, often in the order that they occurred, and I am confident that it is a fair and accurate representation of his story; Scott and his mother have both read it and agreed this. I transcribed the interview in its entirety, rather than selected parts of it, because the answers were shorter and therefore the overall length of interview was shorter; it was particularly important not to lose any pieces of information. (His transcript is in Appendix 5 as a sample.) As with all of the stories I have presented in my thesis I take responsibility for my actions in deconstructing Scott's story, interpreting it and retelling it. This is crucial in ensuring authenticity for him so that his reading of the narrative account does not damage his self-identity as Elliot (2005) warns is possible, particularly at his young age of 14. As I have constructed it tightly around his own words and descriptions his voice comes through distinctly, despite his limited responses to questions and stimuli. The interview was a three-way dialogue involving his mother. In my opinion her limited contributions strengthened Scott's voice as she occasionally prompted him with reminders, for example, riding at primary school, which he then responded to. The interview was more tightly structured than some as Scott's

responses were less free-flowing and required more direct questions than some other interviewees. The validity and credibility of the interview is further supported by the fact that I was present at the tournament which forms the basis of the story and so it is constructed around actual observations rather than imagined events.

In reflecting on my influence on the story as the researcher, I was known to him and he to me before the interview but not in any considerable depth and I do not think this has influenced the final product, except possibly for Scott agreeing to take part in the first place. Before conducting the interviews I knew him to be fairly ordinary, a typical young lad who enjoyed playing a sport, in his case unicycle hockey, and this came through in the interview and the subsequent narrative account.

Compared with some of the other participants, it has been easier to write a narrative which ensures anonymity for Scott (not his real name), because of the relatively large number of unicycle hockey players - I would estimate around 350 in the UK. However, I have changed the locations, team names and individuals' names to allow as much anonymity as possible. The level of anonymity has been approved by Scott's father who also read the story.

Striker Satisfaction! - Scott's Story

It was a beautiful November day, cold but crisp with bright sunshine; it really lifted your spirits after the gloomy, drizzling rain of the last few days. It was a perfect day to be at Hillsborough watching the Owls move their way up the league but instead he'd been sent to cover some minor hockey tournament – unicycle hockey; it wasn't even a proper game. Being a sports reporter on a local rag was a great job most of the time, but there was always the occasional bummer to cover. Today was one of those days and Paul reluctantly took his rucksack out of the car. The sports centre car park was mostly empty, apart from a few cars parked close together with people milling around them. They were lifting unicycles out of boots and off roof-racks, shouting greetings as the next car pulled up and the occupants piled out. They seemed in good spirits, without the usual pre-tournament tensions he was used to observing, but then this wasn't a proper sport so they probably didn't take it seriously. How could they? Pissing about on one wheel; they were having a laugh, surely! He read the bumper stickers on the surrounding cars with minor amusement and major irritation:

"My other car is a unicycle!"
"Reality is a do-it-yourself project!"
"That's how I roll!"
"Live, Love, Unicycle!"
"Like a bike without the training wheel!"
"UNI – it's not just for circus any more!"
"One seat, one wheel – anything else is unnatural!"
"UNI-que!"

It was Saturday, he should be at the match; how dare they intrude? But his thoughts were interrupted

"Hey, Paul, over here." Gary, one of the rag's sports photographers, was getting out of his car. "Isn't this great? Look at all these people! I had no idea they'd be so many of them. Have you seen the hockey sticks they've got?

Striker Satisfaction – Scott's Story

Must be ice hockey ones looking at the length of them. Oh, this is going to be so great, I've never watched this sport before. What angle are you looking for?"

"Why are you so bloody excited? It's only a bunch of clowns pissing about in a sports hall. You could be out photographing some real action."

"This is real action, it's a minority sport so not many people've heard of it. It'll be something different for the back pages; it'll be great. Did you know England has a national team? So does Germany and the USA, even Japan; they have international championships every two years. I've been reading about it on the internet; it has its own rules and everything. This could become something much bigger. Come on, I'm going in to check out the light; they're going to start soon." Gary slung his camera bag over his shoulder and was off. Paul sighed and followed him; at least he wasn't on his own with this bunch of weirdos and it would give him a good tale to tell in the pub that night; should get a few laughs. Besides, if he got away quickly he might catch the second half of the match.

Illus. 7: Did you know England has a national team?

Inside there were two adjoining halls, five-a-side football size, each with a set of ice-hockey goals in them, and a bench diagonally across each corner. The

teams were sorting themselves out, they'd each been given a home corner to dump their stuff in and each corner had been labeled with the team's name. Paul looked round and laughed; the LUNIs, the DUCs, the EMUs, the NUNs. It was a bloody circus! Gary was in the middle of one of the halls talking to a tall bloke with long grey hair tied back in a ponytail ('Sad-o!' thought Paul as he checked that the front of his hair was still spiked sufficiently). Gary called him over.

"Hey Paul, come and meet John. He's in charge; he'll explain everything to you."

Paul reluctantly walked over and took a few quick notes, trying to look interested and give the illusion of listening. "This is so exciting," said Gary. "John here reckons it's the biggest tournament they've ever had in the UK. There are ten teams here from all over the country, isn't that right John?"

"Yer!" John replied enthusiastically, "London, Southampton, Derby, Cambridge, Cardiff. I had to turn other teams away, we couldn't fit any more in."

"That's amazing," said Gary. "Do you think the sport is taking off?"

"Yer, I guess so; there are a lot more people who play but who don't belong to a particular team. The teams are mostly based around unicycling clubs and those don't exist everywhere, so a lot of unicyclists just play hockey when they come to a national meet." A national meet? Of unicyclists? Now that must be a bundle of fun, thought Paul. 'Bet they take time out from train spotting to go along,' he thought cruelly and smiled to himself.

"We're gonna start the warm-up now," John said, "so can you move to one of the corners and keep behind the benches? Watch out for the ball though, it can go very fast. Don't sit with your legs in front of the bench - if two riders clash there they won't wait for you to get out of the way. They play fast and furious."

"Great!" replied Gary.

"If you want any more info just ask any of the players. They'll be happy to talk to you."

Paul groaned. Still, it had to be done, he had to return a report of some kind so he might as well get on with it. He looked around. Now, who looked normal that he could interview? They were all riding round on these small wheels; the bikes looked disproportionate with such undersized wheels compared to the long seat posts. (Paul didn't appreciate the extra manoeuvrability the small wheels gave the players.) Because the wheels were small everyone's legs went round really fast - it looked so funny. "What a bloody laugh!" he said to himself.

He spotted a tall, lanky lad with short, spiky blonde hair across the hall; he looked normal, or as normal as he could do sitting on a one-wheeled bike going backwards and forwards on it on the same spot. He'd do; he walked over to him and held out his hand.

"I'm Paul from the local Advertiser. Mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Awright" nodded Scott, still moving backwards and forwards.

"What's your name?"

"Scott."

"Scott?"

"Scott Rhodes."

"How old are you?

"Fourteen."

"You look like a normal sort of lad; what are you doing with this lot, playing this?" Paul asked cocking his head at the other unicyclists.

"Me dad made me," Scott replied.

"Your dad made you; you mean you don't normally do this?"

"Yer, a bit."

"You play a bit?"

"A bit ... used to play a bit ... a lot ... got bored, rather play football now."

"I'm not surprised; I'd rather be watching football," Paul replied, laughing. "This is a bit odd isn't it?"

"A bit!" said Scott.

"Bit of a circus thing isn't it?"

"A bit ... not much!"

"OK, ready to start?" John yelled across the two halls. "We've got to keep to time to get all the matches in, so let's go."

"Gotta go," said Scott. The general muddle cleared and twelve riders assembled at the centre of each hall, six a side, two matches to be played at once. A whistle went and they were away. Blimey, they moved fast! That took Paul by surprise.

Illus. 8: Blimey, they moved fast! That took Paul by surprise.

The ball had been hit hard and was shooting down the pitch towards him; five players were chasing after it, all descending on it from different corners of the pitch; bloody hell, surely they couldn't stop in time? He expected them to come crashing on top of him and instinctively he leaned backwards to keep out of the way, putting his hands over his face. There was a loud crash of metal on metal and several swear words as the five players collided into each other just the other side of Paul's bench. Riders fell off their unicycles with limbs flailing ungracefully and unicycles hitting the floor. One rider landed hard on the floor. "Ouch, that must've hurt!' thought Paul. Another offered him his hand and pulled him up. He got back on with only his pride hurt and rode

towards the action. It was the tall lad, Scott; he wore a grey ice-hockey shirt with the name of his club on, the LUNIs, with a number 6 on his back. He reached the ball and tackled the bloke who had just helped him up and who, according to his t-shirt, was playing for the Severn Wheelers. Bristol based? Paul wondered. Scott flicked the ball up with the blade of his stick and sent it flying through the air. Paul watched the ball as another grey t-shirt, John, stopped it in mid-air with his stick, steadied it on the ground then hit it down towards the opposition's goal. Paul followed it with his eyes and realised John had hit it to Scott who was there waiting for it, poised with a clear line to the goal, but as Scott stopped it with his stick to line it up a Severn Wheeler rode towards him at amazing speed and took it away up the pitch. Scott chased after him. Paul had to smile – it was pretty impressive, and that young lad, he was good. It must be bloody hard to ride one of these things in the first place, thought Paul, never mind have to wield a hockey stick on one of them.

The Severn Wheeler passed to a team member who shot the ball into the back of the goal. Scott hit the ground crossly with his stick.

"Never mind!" John called encouragingly to Scott, noticing his frustration. "It's early days!" The ball was thrown into the middle and play resumed. Scott kept up front with John; there seemed to be an unspoken language between the two of them and respect. They rode close together most of the time and kept an eye on each other always knowing where the other was and playing off each other. Scott took control of the ball and dribbled it down the full length of the pitch. John raced ahead and positioned himself near the opponent's goal to provide cover. A Severn Wheeler chased after Scott; he must have been able to see him out of the corner of his eye but he wasn't fazed and kept going. He stopped just about parallel to the goal and flicked the ball towards the net – almost. He hit the floor again with his stick – frustration showing on his young face. The opposition had picked up the ball and were already back down the other end. It looked as if it would be 2-0 but John got in between their goal and the ball and flicked the ball hard, back down the pitch.

"Scott!" John called. Scott was in front of the goal, waiting; leaning on his stick, he glanced around to see where his opponents were, then as the ball reached him he moved behind it and shot it forward – goal!

"Yes!" he exclaimed, punching the air. John rode up behind him and put his hand on his shoulder, "Well done mate!"

The game played on for the allotted ten minutes and when the final whistle blew it was 5-4 to the Severn Wheelers. The teams went back to their respective corners and another two teams took their place. Paul jogged over to the LUNIs' space.

"Well done," he said to Scott. "That was amazing, took me by surprise I must say! Have you been playing, or should I say riding, long?"

"A bit!" replied Scott, taking a drink and wiping the sweat off his forehead with his shirt.

"How old were you when you started?"

"Dunno ... eight?"

"You've been riding for six years?"

"I guess."

"How did you learn?"

"Dunno, just did."

"It must've taken a long time – to learn I mean."

"A bit ... I guess ... Me mum says I learnt really quickly, in a day or two - rode between two chairs."

"Wow, you must've been really motivated!"

"A bit!"

" Was it really hard, it looks really hard."

"A bit ... 'ave to be focussed."

"Why did you want to learn?"

"Score goals!"

"Yer," laughing.

"Is that the same with football now?"

"I guess."

"Do you do other stuff on your unicycle? I mean, I don't know what else people do on them but do you do anything else with it?"

"Na."

"Just hockey?"

"Yer ... but not now, I'd rather play football now."

"What is it, or was it, about the hockey you liked?"

"Scoring goals ... made me proud."

"You're a striker?"

"Yer."

"It looks really hard – and dangerous!"

"A bit ... you 'ave to 'ave good balance ... be focussed. You 'ave to be fit."

"How does it feel when you're actually playing?"

"Fun ... but tiring as well ... makes me proud ... scoring goals."

"Fun? It looks bloody hard work! Sorry!"

"A bit ... you 'ave to be focussed; go fast; get the ball - there's no point if you don't get the ball ... don't score goals."

"And what frustrates you the most about it?

" Dunno ... losing!"

"Do you think you take it quite seriously?"

"A bit!"

"So if you like winning, is the team you play for, the LUNIs, is it good?"

"A bit!"

"What does it mean – the name of your team?"

"Loughborough Unicyclists; LUNIs!"

"Who else is in the team?"

"John ... he's mint ... really good ... wins the ball a lot ... passes a lot ... scores loads of goals ... mint. Me bruvver and me dad ... Lewis and Mike."

"Are they good?"

"A bit."

"I thought it was all a bit of a laugh until I saw the first game – it's alright, isn't it?"

"A bit ... rather play football now."

"Why?"

"Bored."

"But it must be good for you; you said you had to be focussed."

"A bit."

"What else do you think you've got from it?"

"Dunno ... stay 'ealthy ..."

"It's a challenge, I guess."

"Yer!"

"Me mum says it 'elps me concentrate. She says it 'elped me balance too."

"Didn't you want to give up when you couldn't ride immediately?"

"A bit ... me mum says it taught me to try 'ard things ... I don't mind 'ard things now. I'll 'ave a go. Me mum says it's good we ride together, wiv Lewis and Dad ... and Anna."

"Sister?"

"Yer."

"What do your mates think about it?"

"Dunno."

"Do they know?"

"A bit."

"Do any of them ride?"

"Na ... used to ... used to come to the club – and me cousin. Were lots of us; it was mint."

"What about your teachers? They must think you're really clever."

"Na ... they don't know!"

"But they'd be amazed if they saw you play this."

"Me mum says I used to ride it at primary school ... won a talent show!"

"Scott, we're on again in a minute. Are you ready?" his dad called.

"A bit ... almost!"

Paul was conscious of the whistle again. The current match stopped and the teams rode back to their corners. He noticed how sweaty and knackered they all looked. Scott grabbed his hockey stick and picked up his unicycle. They were playing on the other court and Paul followed them over there to watch – he had to admit it was pretty cool. He stood up this time, he could see more of the action then. Gary was in the same corner, just swopping over his lenses. "Isn't this great?" he called to Paul. "I've got some great action shots; they're really up for it! Great!" Yer, Paul was beginning to think it was.

"Watch that girl with the purple hair!" Gary called. "She's mad, she goes steaming in all the time and she's only little." Come to think of it, Paul hadn't

noticed any girls playing when he'd been watching and now he glanced around he realised it was mostly lads, well men.

The whistle went and the game started with the instant burst of action. "Come on the LUNIs!" Paul thought to himself, wanting Scott's team to win. Scott was all right, hard work to interview, but most teenagers were with their one word answers. Still he probably had enough to write a short piece, a kind of portrait of Scott as one young player and his family's support. He didn't need much, the paper wanted mostly shots as it was such a little known sport, the editor thought the visual images would be more interesting to the readers, but Paul thought that a positive youth story would make a change from the usual negative hoodie tales. Motivation, commitment, family values; it would appeal to all the readers, not just the sport fanatics. Scott seemed like a nice lad; Paul liked him and was amused that he seemed not to realize how skilled a sportsman he was. Was it a lack of awareness, or just taking it for granted as he'd done it for so long? It suddenly seemed quite "normal" with all these other players around, unpretentious, but fully engrossed, playing each game to win, but with such good humour and sportsmanship – quite refreshing really!

Illus. 9: ... fully engrossed, playing each game to win, but with such good humour and sportsmanship – quite refreshing really!

Scott had the ball and was steaming down the pitch with it towards the goal. "Go on Scott!" Paul yelled, then he covered his mouth, as if in surprise. Where had that come from? He laughed to himself. Scott whacked the ball towards the goal but someone in a NUNs t-shirt rode in front, blocking it. Nuneaton Unicyclists? Paul wondered to himself, or Norwich? Newcastle? The game played on.

The girl with the purple hair had the ball. Scott tackled her, their unicycles clashed against each other loudly and Scott knocked her off, her unicycling crashing to the floor. She cursed and picked it up. Scott got the ball and passed it back to his brother in defence who hit it down the pitch to John. Scott turned to Purple Hair. "Awright?" he asked and she nodded as she got on. John scored; 2-2. The ball went back to the middle and the game carried on. Paul watched Scott closely. He was tall, tall and lean; he looked athletic on his unicycle with its long seat post. He played up front most of the time and went for the ball whenever he got the chance, but he wasn't aggressive, not like some of them.

Apparently someone had cracked a rib in the last tournament when he'd been elbowed off by an opponent. Scott wasn't nervous though, not put off by older or bigger riders. Like most of the other players, Scott steadied himself with his stick when riding, or waiting in a spot for the ball. With his long legs he pedaled quickly and covered the length of the pitch fast. He was going fast now, chasing after the ball. He caught up with the it and stopped it, taking control of it level with Purple Hair's goal. He passed it back to John, who, as always, had appeared magically in the right spot at the right time. Scott passed the ball back to John who had a better line to the goal and went to score; but Purple Hair blocked it. Damn! thought Paul as the ball headed down the other end. John shouted instructions and encouragement to the team and Scott responded with a mixture of respect and awe. John heard Scott's reply above the noise of clashing unicycles and smiled to himself. The whistle went; full time. 3-2 to Purple Hair's NUNs.

John rode over to Scott and patted him on the back. "It's not over yet;" he consoled. "Anyway, you've scored most of our goals." Scott smiled, enjoying the compliment from his mentor.

"Right, I'm done, Paul!" Gary called over as he packed his camera away. "Got enough shots, loads of good ones – shall we go? We might just catch the last twenty minutes of the match. Come on, I'll take you, you can pick your car up later; it'll be quicker!"

"Er ..." Paul mumbled, surprised at what he actually wanted to say. "No, you go on. I want to watch a bit more, make sure I've really captured the atmosphere in the interview."

"What? But ..."

"Yer, I know, well ... See you later; the Rose and Crown?"

"Yer!"

"Hey that was great!" Paul shouted to Scott, coming back over to his corner. "You played well!"

"A bit."

"Are you that good at football?"

"Na."

"You're better at this?"

"A bit ... practise more!" Perhaps that was the thing about being focused, Paul thought.

"I've heard they have meets, I mean unicycle ... gatherings. Have you ever been?"

"A bit."

"What are they like?"

"Mint ... lot of hockey ... stay up late ... bored now."

"How can you be bored? This is such a great game!"

"Dunno ... me mum says I don't wanna play any more 'cos it's not cool any more."

"Not cool! I'm amazed by it, its brilliant! Anyone can kick a ball around, but this, this takes real skill!"

They sat next to each other on the LUNIs' bench watching the matches progress. Every now and then Scott went over to the results chart and looked at the scores.

"Well, how's it going?" Paul asked each time he came back. "OK?"

"A bit!"

The LUNIs play every few games and Paul watches with great attention. He cheers when Scott or John scores a goal and commiserates with them when they come off after a lost match. Some time during the afternoon his phone rings. It's his girlfriend. "We're leaving the ground for the pub. Will you meet us there?" Paul pauses and looks over to the results chart – three games left. He's got to know where the LUNIs come. "OK, but I'll be another hour."

"But Gary's here already; you can't still be interviewing those clowns. You said it'd be awful and you'd rush it through."

"Yer, I know, but ... Look, I'll come as soon as I can."

"OK!"

It was the LUNIs' last match. "Come on, let's make it the best one!" shouted John, encouraging the tired riders; it had been a long afternoon. Paul got to his feet. "Go on!" he joins in, feeling like a groupie! With youth on his side Scott is so agile; he twists and turns on the bike. He rides fast towards the ball. An EMU – Paul couldn't work out what that stood for – rides fast from across the pitch. They both have their heads down, eyes following the ball, equally determined. Ouch, this is going to hurt, thinks Paul, but they don't collide; instead they fight for the ball, sticks clashing. The EMU gets it and hits it hard, back towards Scott's goal. John intercepts it from nowhere and passes it back to Scott, clearly valuing him as a skilled striking partner. "Go for it!" he encourages his mentee. Scott dribbles it down the pitch and whacks it towards the goal. "Yes!", he punches the air as it hits the back of the net and Paul finds himself doing the same!

Illus. 10: "Yes!", he punches the air as it hits the back of the net...

"OK. Thanks for coming everybody," John begins, "and special thanks to Sheffield for hosting it – it's been great." There's a general buzz of agreement:

"Yer",

"Great",

"Mint!"

"Now, I'm going to read out the results in reverse order and Pete's going to give out some trophies to the three top teams." John continues. Paul crosses his fingers. The LUNIs have played hard and surely deserve one, especially Scott!

"In tenth place, but doing well, never having played together before, is Will's scratch team." A round of applause follows.

"In ninth place, Exeter – well done!" More applause.

"In eighth place, a new team, so well done to Cambridge." Applause.

"Next it's Southampton, in seventh place". Applause.

"Then we have Cardiff, at number six, well done lads." Applause. Paul realises his palms are sweaty; five teams left.

"In fifth place, from East Midlands, the EMUs." More applause. Only four teams left; they're in with the chance of a trophy.

"In fourth place, the LUNIs – well done to you." John smiles over at Scott and Paul feels a sense of pride, tinged with disappointment. He puts his hand on Scott's shoulder. "Good result!"

"A bit!"

"Pleased?"

"A bit!"

"You scored a good few goals!"

"A bit!"…

As Paul leaves the building Scott's dad stops him. "Here's our address; if there's any photos of Scott in the rag will you send me a copy of the paper?"

"Sure!"

He joins his friends at the Rose and Crown. "So tell us about your afternoon at the circus." Clare laughs. "Was it as bloody awful as you thought it would be?"

"No, it was mint!"

* * * *

It was a beautiful November day, cold but crisp with bright sunshine; it really lifted your spirits after the gloomy, drizzling rain of the last few days. It was a perfect day to be playing football with your mates. Scott got up and went downstairs; everyone else was already out. He glanced at the kitchen clock; it was only 9.30. He had time for some quick breakfast and put some bread in the toaster. He poured himself some orange juice and took his toast into the front room. He noticed a paper on the table and smiled as he saw the photo of him and John passing to each other. It was a double page spread, mostly photos, but the headline read: *"Skilled striker Scott scores seven goals!"* He read the article about himself and the sport.

Lightning young striker Scott Rhodes, led his team to a top position in the national unicycling hockey tournament last Saturday at Sheffield Hallam University. Scott, who plays for the Loughborough Unicyclists, better known as the LUNIs, has been riding one of these amazing one-wheeled bikes since he was eight. A skilled player, he shows great agility riding his unicycle and wielding a hockey stick at the same time and has always been motivated by

the desire to score goals in this unusual, but remarkable new sport. He is a strong striker who displays grit and determination on the pitch in an unassuming, good-humoured manner. Unicycle hockey is a fast paced, highly skilled sport, with none of the circus frivolity so often unfairly associated with it. It is increasing in popularity in the UK and rightly so as it provides a stimulating challenge which can help focus young people and encourage them to persevere at a difficult activity. For Scott, playing alongside his dad and brother, this is a family affair with elder sister riding too and mum supporting.

He smiled to himself - mint! - and glanced over at the photo on the mantelpiece; him, Lewis, Anna and Dad, on their unicycles, laughing. He remembered having it taken at the photographer's posh studio; it had been a real laugh riding around there - mint! He closed the paper and got his football boots from the hall. As he walked out through the porch he picked up his unicycle which he'd flung down there when he'd got back from last week's tournament. He stood it more carefully against the wall; well, he might ride it again, sometime!

Illus. 11: *Unicycle hockey is a fast paced, highly skilled sport, with none of the circus frivolity so often unfairly associated with it.*

Chapter 8

Persevering at Practice – Theories of Motivation

Persevering at practice is something which all unicyclists have to be able to do if they are to be successful. Scott, for example, attended a weekly unicycle club where he practised hockey with his team members. His mentor, John, would set up to practise scoring goals, passing the ball to him. Unicycling is a sport which requires immense amounts of perseverance, of motivation - as, I have learnt, is undertaking a PhD. This chapter explores motivation and I discuss possible motivational drivers for unicycling.

Motivation is a key factor for those involved in children's services today (DfES, 2003). Nationally, there is growing concern over disengagement of pupils at various levels, as the earlier reference to the Tomlinson Report in the Introduction indicates. Physical activity is acknowledged as one means of motivating children and youth (DfES). There are many different motivational drivers and theories which educationalists should consider if they are to engage, or re-engage, their pupils. I have undertaken a literature review of key theories of motivation and their link to physical activity. How motivation links to self-esteem has then been explored through literature with a particular focus on children and youth. This study is interested in the motivational drivers of young riders; it does not seek to measure levels of motivation.

Motivation of young people to take part in regular physical activity is a growing research area because of its recognised benefits and the high levels of participation across sport generally. The context of sport as a "place" where children and young people can, and do, achieve is significant (Treasure, 2001) and may have bearings on achievement in other contexts, such as school. Unicycling is of interest to me as it is a physical activity which is very difficult to master; many people will try once or twice but it demands high levels of motivation to be successful. Initial interviews with unicycle instructors indicate that not all will persevere until they achieve their goal (Davies, 2004; Hyde, 2004). Pilot observations of teachers of unicycling have observed them

praising the early efforts of new students and offering strategies or techniques to increase their success (Bignold, 2004). Those students who persevere until they can ride a unicycle demonstrate a high level of mastery orientation, a motivational drive which has a positive impact on self-esteem.

Chambers (2001), reflecting on what motivation is, described it simply as the driving force that makes people do the things they do. My thesis is concerned with motivational factors linked to the physical activity of unicycling. I base it on the premise that unicycling is a sport and, as such, shares some motivational factors with other sports. It is an activity which is pursued by a wide range of individuals. In order to investigate what motivates them to unicycle it is first necessary for me to consider key theories.

Theories of Motivation

A preliminary definition of motivation is given by Beck:

> *Motivation is then concerned with our movements, or actions, and what determines them. These factors may be internal (such as being, hungry, thirsty, in pain) or external (such as the presence of tasty food, an attractive person, or cues indicating imminent danger). Motivation is a broad theoretical concept we often use to explain why people (or animals) engage in particular actions at particular times.* (Beck, 2004, p.3)

Beck's definition recognises the conceptual nature of theories of motivation. It is a difficult concept to measure as it is very personal, with many variables, although the study of motivation has become increasingly scientific in recent years.

Key theories have developed over time from Freud's original ideas in the nineteenth century (Chambers, 2001) and illustrate the changing views on motivation. It is hugely complex, not least because different things motivate different people in different situations. Taken in isolation, one theory is not comprehensive enough to identify accurately what motivation is occurring at

a given time in a given situation. Recent studies of motivation acknowledge a more multidimensional and non-static approach. This can be illustrated by Dornyei and Otto's definition of motivation, that it is

> ... *the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritised, operationalised and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out.* (1998, p.65)

Beck (2004) identifies ten major theories of motivation which he regards as being highly relevant to sports, and so which are worthy of note here as they may be of some significance to unicycling. These are summarised from Beck's analysis and presented in the table below:

Table 3: Major theories of motivation relevant to sport, as identified by Beck (2004).

Theory	Key Features	Key Theorist
Achievement Theory	Hope of success and fear of failure. Task persistence, performance intensity, choice of tasks.	McClelland, 1987
Activation (Arousal) Theory	Optimal level of arousal and performance.	Duffy, 1962
Aggression Theory	Frustration-aggression, stimulus aroused aggression, instrumental aggression.	Veroff, 1982
Attribution Theory of Achievement	Effects of success/failure attributions (perceived causes) on subsequent performance.	Weiner, 1992
Drive Theory	Social facilitation effects and type of task.	Hull, 1951
Expectancy-Value Theory	Effects of expected outcome and value of outcome on performance.	Atkinson, 1964
Frustration Theory	Punishing effects of frustration, drive effects, frustration-aggression.	Brown and Faber, 1951
Goal Setting Theory	Types of goals (e.g. winning, mastery of task, social, money).	Locke, 1968
Reinforcement Theory	Others (e.g. fans, coaches, other players) reinforcing certain behaviours, schedules of reinforcement.	Rotter, 1954
Self-Efficacy Theory	How feelings of efficacy/confidence develop and what their effects are on performance.	Bandura, 1986

Attributional theory centres on individuals attributing causes to events or outcomes of a task and making decisions about those causes which influence them in the future. Weiner (1992), a key proponent, sees an individual's reaction to a task and the outcome of it as being highly significant for levels of motivation. Taking the context of education for a moment, rather than sport, consider a teacher and a pupil. Feedback from the teacher which focuses on the difficulty of the task without suggesting ways to improve the outcome is likely to discourage future effort by the pupil. Feedback which praises the effort shown may strengthen the pupil's belief that effort is futile and the required outcome is unachievable. An effective teacher who adheres to Weiner's attributional theory of motivation would praise the effort shown by the pupil while clearly suggesting strategies to improve the outcome in the future.

Motivation with regard to sport is considered a very important tool to enhance individual, and team, performance (Laios et al., 2003). Achievement Theory is regarded by many as particularly important in the field of sport (Sewell et al., 2005). McClelland (1987), a key proponent, based his research on the need for achievement by certain individuals. This developed out of exploration by Murray in which he identified a desire or tendency in individuals to "overcome obstacles, to exercise power, to strive to do something difficult as well and as quickly as possible" (Murray,1938, p.80-81). McClelland's research concludes that people who have a significant need for achievement are more persistent in striving for their goal than those who need only a low level of achievement. Successful individuals balance the likelihood of feeling pride through success (by attempting a reasonably difficult task) while avoiding the shame of failure (more likely with too difficult a task). Atkinson, a student of McClelland, developed his tutor's ideas into a refined, mathematically based achievement theory. The individual is motivated to have a go, or take part in an activity, on the basis of a calculation that he or she makes about what the costs and rewards will be (Atkinson, 1964). The motive for success, plus the probability of success, plus the incentive value of success equal the engagement an individual demonstrates in his or her behaviour to achieve:

$N_{ach} = (M_s - M_{af}) (P_s \times I_s) + M_{ext}$

N_{ach}: *need to achieve*
M_s: *motive to succeed*
M_{af}: *motive to avoid failure*
P_s: *probability of success*
I_s: *incentive value of success*
M_{ext}: *extrinsic reward if successful*

Mastery orientation is a motivational style within the Achievement Theory which has a direct impact on self-esteem (Galloway et al., 1998). Learned helplessness, a related style, arises from a strong tendency to attribute a lack of success to a lack of ability. People who have the motivational style of learned helplessness see success as beyond their own personal control. They assume they are unable to complete the task or tasks successfully. They interpret offers of help as confirmation of their lack of ability and as a result of this they have low self-esteem. In contrast to this, individuals whose motivational style is mastery orientation are driven by the desire to achieve mastery over a set task. They are not concerned with avoiding failure or motivated to show themselves as better than others. They have reasonable and realistic levels of self-esteem and regard failure as a temporary setback.

Achievement behaviour, rather than achievement motivation, is regarded as key by Roberts (2001). He promotes a social cognitive approach to motivation in physical activity based on research over the last thirty years, which dismisses some of the key theories identified above but which builds on McClelland's cognitive work. According to Roberts, true motivational theories in physical activity must address all three aspects of achievement. These are energisation, direction and regulation. He regards those which do not address all three as incomplete. He does not view goal setting theory as a true motivational theory, for example, as it does not consider energisation. The social cognitive approach has clear links with the Self-Determination Theory promoted by Ryan and Deci (2000). In this they acknowledge the importance of personality development, which could be described as energisation and direction, and behavioural self-regulation. Research by Csikszentmihalyi (1992) with groups of rock climbers, basketball players and others showed that the merging of the action with complete absorption, a loss of

consciousness of self and a strong sense of control is what stimulates many sportsmen and women. It is the enjoyment of the experience combined with the use of the skill which motivates. This is the activity itself, the process of doing rather than the outcomes, which drives, or energises, the individual.

Roberts attributes his definition of motivation for sport and physical activity to Ford (1992):

> *Motivation can be defined as the organized patterning of at least one of three psychological constructs that energize, direct and regulate achievement behaviour in physical activity.* (Roberts, 2001, p6)

The three constructs which underpin this are personal goals, emotional arousal and personal agency beliefs, the belief in one's capabilities. The achievement behaviour they affect are behaviours such as to:

- try harder
- concentrate more
- persist longer
- pay greater attention
- perform better
- choose to practice longer.

These are all behaviours which observers take into account when they say whether or not an individual is motivated or driven in a particular sport or not. The social cognitive approach relates to McClelland's achievement theory as both regard achievement as crucial in considering the individual as being motivated by the need for achievement; the attainment of a personally or socially valued goal. Conversations I have had with many unicyclists of differing skills levels suggest that achievement is a key motivational factor in learning to ride and then developing competency.

The goal an individual is seeking to attain may be intrinsically or extrinsically driven. Motivation may arise from the internal and personal satisfaction of mastering the task or from an external reward such as winning a competition of receiving affirmation from significant others. An intrinsically driven

individual will look for challenges of task mastery which lead to "feelings of competence and the promotion of persistence, intensity and continuing motivation" (Chandler et al., 2004).The extrinsically driven individual will look for less-than-optimal challenges and focuses on "winning as a means of judging capability". Sewell at al. (2005) recognise a common belief that, in sport at least, intrinsic motivation is better than extrinsic motivation. It promotes a stronger drive and is seen as more sporting. Indeed some regard those who are intrinsically motivated as having "authentic" motivation while those who are extrinsically motivated are seen to be controlled by external factors or influences (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However their work goes on to suggest that "extrinsically motivated actions can become self-determined as individuals identify with and fully assimilate their regulation" (p.74).The external "reward", such as praise or affirmation, becomes a positive reinforcer, building behaviour by shaping it. Extrinsic motivators most likely to influence intrinsic motivation are supports for competence, autonomy and relatedness, such as affirmation of capabilities by significant others. These three psychological needs, competence, autonomy and relatedness, are key requirements for intrinsic motivation as it sits within the Self Determination Theory referred to earlier (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

Intrinsic motivation is regarded as highly positive and is defined as "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore and to learn" (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p.34). Learning to ride a unicycle is surely a novel and challenging experience in which one explores and develops his/her capacities learning new skills. What is crucial to intrinsic motivation is recognising the conditions that elicit and sustain it rather than subdue and diminish it. When the latter happens that is the point at which young people, in particular, may begin to become disengaged from their given surroundings (Lawrence, 2006).

Motivation and Gender

Research has been undertaken on motivation for physical activity and sport in relation to gender (Kay and Laberge, 2004; Lee et al., 1999; Shen et al., 2003). In the UK unicycling is predominantly a male sport, but some women and girls do participate. It is the team sports such as basketball and hockey and the disciplines requiring perceived strength such as Mountain Unicycling and Trials riding which are predominantly taken up by boys and men. Correspondingly Freestyle Unicycling is more popular with girls and women; I have observed this in participation trends at the British Unicycle Convention and UNICON. This was confirmed by Cotter (2007) who also advised me that, in some countries at least, girls who begin unicycling tend to drop out of the sport by the time they reach late adolescence or adulthood, while the number of boys taking up the sport increases with age proportionally to girls.

With regard to personal perceptions of physical ability boys generally report higher perceptions of their physical competence than girls. This could impact on motivation driven by the belief in one's ability to master a certain physical task. Research by Lee et al. (1999) with 11 year olds confirmed that by this age children had generally accepted and internalised stereotypical beliefs about sports in relation to gender appropriateness. Physical activity requiring strength, power and competitiveness, in this case basketball, was seen as masculine, while those associated with graceful movements were seen as feminine, in this case dance. It was a small scale research project with only 50 participants but it draws similar findings to others such as Enright (2006) below. Gender appropriate values, such as those described above, are assumed to be an underlying motivator or demotivator for girls and boys in physical activity (Shen et al., 2003); although Shen et al were only using a similar size sample to Lee et al. This may be true within unicycling where girls generally pursue Freestyle with its artistic emphasis and boys favour Trials (riding over obstacles) and Mountain Unicycling (off-road riding). Further evidence of gender stereotyping of physical activities is provided by Enright (2006). Research with teenage girls invited them to choose physical activities they would like to have incorporated into PE lessons. The most popular

choices were aerobics, jazzercise and kick-boxing, all activities portrayed as stereotypically female. However this was a small scale study too, within one high school, and so should be viewed with caution as well. Similar gender preferences are identified in research by Xiang et al. (2003) though. They suggest that gender stereotypes in sport are often reinforced by parents who continue to influence children's behaviour into adolescence. Although these research projects are small in scale they do draw similar conclusions with regard to gender preferences and perceptions and therefore validate each other to some extent.

Motivation and Age

I am interested in 11 to 19 year olds in my study. Research by Laios et al. (2003) asked PE teachers and coaches of 10 to 16 year olds what they thought were key motivational drivers for this age group. The findings were:

> *... as far as the internal motivating factors are concerned, the definition of goal-targets and the need for achievement (realization of goal-targets) are the most important motivating factors.* (Laios et al, 2003, p.26)

Although there were only 30 teachers in the sample Laios et al also undertook a review of related research and found support for their findings. These could be of significance in unicycling where riders set small goals for themselves against which they measure their progress. These may be staying upright for two revolutions of the wheel in the early stages or managing a complex trick as mastery increases.

Earlier research by Roberts (1984) indicates that after the age of 12 the number of boys and girls taking part in organised sport decreases. As children perceive that they are not mastering a particular physical activity they drop out of it as they do not find it rewarding and so intrinsically motivating. This links to mastery orientation discussed earlier. At the same time other rewards or significant influences, such as having time to socialise with friends, become increasingly important. If children are attracted to a

sport as a social event then they will persist with it for longer. This dropout is supported by Hall et al. (2002), who conclude that the greatest decrease in participation in physical activity occurs in late adolescence. Drop-out is greater amongst adolescent girls than adolescent boys and Bailey et al. (2005) recognise that a particular challenge for the government if it is to be successful in promoting healthy living is to provide physical activities that appeal to girls. Given that sports are associated with particular gender groups by young people, as we saw earlier, it may be increasingly important to develop opportunities in physical activities that teenage girls self-select, such as those in Enright's research above, or lifestyle sports which are increasingly popular with young people (Wheaton, 2004). Pete's story, in Chapter 11, provides an example of drop-out due to a realisation that mastery of a task is not within reasonable reach. Pete took up Trials riding when he started learning to unicycle. Despite persevering in the beginning, in part motivated by social drivers, he recognised that he was not very good at it. "He would never take such big risks as the others, so never got such big rewards." Pete did, of course, persevere with other disciplines and so did not drop out of the sport itself. As has already been suggested, this may be one of the significant things about unicycling, that the variety of disciplines enables riders to find one at which they can achieve once they have mastered the basic skills.

Motivation for Unicycling

I have discussed contemporary motivational theories which may have relevance to unicycling. Motivation has been examined with particular regard to sport, age (specifically youth), and gender to identify common trends which could be explored in this study. Some examples from unicycling will now be discussed to identify possible theories of motivation which might apply to young riders so, that they can be looked for in the data gathered. It is a sport which requires a considerable amount of skill. Data gathered from the different sources in this study clearly demonstrate that there is a strong sense of achievement in riders, first in learning to ride and then accomplishing

different feats on a unicycle whether related to distance, speed or other factors, as this response written on a questionnaire illustrates:

What motivates you to continue with your riding if you have passed the beginner stage?
Setting myself small challenges each week or month.

I expect then that achievement theory will be a major influence on unicyclists. Within this, I anticipate that mastery orientation will be particularly significant, with riders regarding failure to achieve a specific goal as a temporary setback, an attitude illustrated in this questionnaire response:

Briefly describe what motivated you to learn to ride or to want to learn to ride.
Balance has always been fun. This (unicycling) was very hard for me in the beginning. I got stubborn and learned.

Those who persevere until they can ride a unicycle demonstrate a high level of mastery orientation. Learning to ride a unicycle is a physical activity where failure is an ongoing outcome in the early stages. Exploratory interviews I held with unicyclists showed that those individuals who are successful at it are those who accept failure as a temporary setback and who are motivated to persevere and continue with their effort achieving minor successes along the way (Bignold, 2004). If a person experiences a relatively high degree of success at whatever task then his/her preservation of self-worth will be easier than if there is no degree of success. For those who learn to ride a unicycle success is measured in small steps in the early stages, for example being able to stay upright while holding on to the teacher or taking the first turn of the wheel unsupported. I suggest that the small steps of success enable students of this sport to experience the relatively high degree of success necessary to preserve their self worth and maintain their levels of motivation.

Achievement behaviour was discussed earlier in this chapter and could be linked to the sense of adrenalin felt in some disciplines and by some unicyclists, for example:

*What motivates you to continue with your riding if you have passed
the beginner stage?*
One of the adrenalin fixes for me is to push my body and my unicycle
to its limit (physically and technically) each time I ride.

The sense of exhilaration felt is a psychological construct related to a release
of adrenalin into the body.

The examples of motivational drivers for unicycling discussed so far have all
been intrinsic, early data gathered suggest that few are motivated to learn to
ride simply because they want to achieve a goal which few others manage, in
that they seek external applause. However this is undoubtedly a contributory
factor as the uniqueness of unicycling is regularly cited as why someone took
it up. While extrinsic motivation is not a significant motivator in unicycling it
does contribute, for example, in interviews with mountain unicyclists the
positive comments about their skill, technical ability and endurance from
mountain bike riders were shown to be significant motivators which had a
positive influence on their perseverance and level of effort (Bignold, 2006b).
The fact that it was mountain bikers who were affirming the riding skills and
physical abilities was important in that they were seen to be significant others,
sportsmen in their own right who recognised the level of skill and commitment
demonstrated. This is illustrated at the beginning of Max's story, immediately
following this chapter. I have frequently observed teachers of unicycling
praising the early efforts of new students and offering strategies or techniques
to increase their success (Bignold, 2005). Such praise may provide a
contributing extrinsic motivator to young learners.

Observations and informal conversations I have had suggest that there does
not appear to be a negative impact on those who do not persevere at
unicycling and do not learn to ride. Because it is recognised as such a
difficult activity to master, those who cannot do it do not feel a negative sense
of self-worth; one example of this will be presented later in Jon's story,
Chapter 15. Unicycling is acknowledged as being "the most demanding form
of cycle riding" (Hoher, 1994, p.9). Therefore less success may be needed to
motivate individuals than if it was an easy task to accomplish, the

acknowledgment of the difficult nature of the task by those learning to ride as a subconscious defence strategy necessary to protect their self-esteem and maintain their motivation. Covington describes this process as 'self-worth motivation' (1992). An individual's perception of his/her own ability can vary depending on a task and how difficult it is perceived to be. This self-perception will impact on levels of motivation (Marsh, 1990). With the acknowledged difficulty of riding a unicycle, self-perception can accept repeated failure. Children and youth who are not fully engaged at school may be used to failing tasks, particularly academic ones. Therefore it is argued by many who teach unicycling that such children can cope with repeated failure but very small successes can create high levels of motivation to persevere with the activity (Davies, 2004; Hyde, 2004). In the existing school system which has an emphasis on academic success, failure is seen as negative. This is critical to the ongoing debate about the school curriculum. If significant numbers of pupils are not to become disengaged then failure must be redefined with an emphasis on temporary setback, as in the example of learning to ride a unicycle, rather than a final unwanted outcome.

Riding a unicycle is a goal which is attainable by anyone (Dancey, 1998) although few choose to do so. It is estimated that 0.1 % of the UK population owns a unicycle, approximately 60,000 people. However, only a minority of these can ride them competently (Davies, 2005). The fact that unicycling is a difficult activity to master is a motivator in that students who want to ride will persevere at it and accept frequent failure and try again more readily than with an easy task. The early analysis of data, from which I have presented examples in this chapter, does suggest that unicycling is strongly linked to intrinsic motivation and in particular to achievement theory in its various forms. Max's story will now follow as the second of the five narratives. I placed it here as it illustrates particularly clearly one person's motivation for unicycling.

Chapter 9

Cross-country Challenges - Max's Story

Introduction

Sources and Contexts

Max's story follows the previous chapter as it clearly illustrates some theories of motivation. It draws significantly on his own lived experience of unicycling. It is based on a series of three semi-structured interviews which took place with 'Max' over a period of two days. The three interviews focused on his current unicycling, his early riding and his future aspirations, following my common format. The information I gathered from these was added to with observations of Max at a twenty-four hour race, similar to the one in the story. As well as observing him this provided an opportunity to observe the culture of the race and the unicycle group taking part in it, where Max was one of 13 riders. Informal observations and conversations also took place with some of the other riders and have provided additional background to the story by way of comments made to unicyclists by cyclists, for example. My construction of this story, as with Scott's narratives, does meet the criteria for ethnographic fiction referred to earlier.

Max describes himself as a "highly motivated" individual, someone who engaged with school, particularly science and math based subjects, which he enjoyed. He is, then, at one end of the motivation continuum presented in the methodology chapter of this thesis. I thought him an interesting study as he is the first person in his family to go to university, indeed to take A levels, and has progressed directly from an honours degree to a PhD. Such academic achievement requires high levels of motivation and self-confidence, both requirements for unicycling. He was already known to me as an articulate and thoughtful person and so he provided both an interesting study and, I hoped, a relatively straightforward interview as I had selected him as a pilot study. He

was 23 when the interviews took place and although this is slightly older than the age range focused on for the main body of this research I hoped that he might be able to reflect more on his period as a "youth" rider, having gone beyond that age now. Indeed if comparing his interview with Scott's, when Scott was just 14, Max was certainly more able to reflect back on his youth and his relationship with unicycling. Max had started learning to unicycle when he was 12.

Voice and Authenticity

The narrative account draws very closely on Max's personal story as he told it in the interviews. It paraphrases many of his own words and chosen phrases from selected transcripts, often in the order that he described events or emotions and, as such, I am confident that it is a fair and accurate representation of his story. He has confirmed this after reading it. In constructing it tightly around Max's own words and descriptions his voice comes through loudly, made easier by his clear articulation of his lived experiences. The interviews were a two-way dialogue, not tightly structured, allowing for the "principle of dialectics" which Heikkinen et al. (2007) regard as crucial for ensuring credible narrative research. Its validity and credibility is further supported by the fact that I was present at the race which forms the basis of the story and so it is constructed around actual observations rather than imagined events, a critical consideration according to Sparkes.

In reflecting on my influence on the story as the researcher, my prior relationship with Max has undoubtedly influenced the final product. Before conducting the interviews I already knew him to be a well motivated, enthusiastic rider and I am aware that this is a very strong element of the story. However, during the course of the three interviews and the subsequent observations Max reinforced this idea of himself through his own words and body language as well as the positive attitude he showed towards being part of the research. Of course, the fact that I was already known to him and that he is engaged in his own doctoral research is likely to have ensured his

positive attitude but I am convinced by the interviews that he would have shown such a positive approach to any researcher once he had agreed to take part.

It has been difficult to write a narrative which ensures complete anonymity for Max in the small community of unicyclists and the even smaller community of regular Extreme Endurance riders. Such difficulty has been discussed by Elliot (2005) and I have given it very careful consideration here. While it is possible that another Endurance rider, if reading this, could identify him from a process of elimination, dates and other details have been changed significantly to allow as much anonymity as possible. During the interviews Max did state that outside the circle of regular Endurance riders he is not widely known in the unicycling community which does help the situation.

Cross-country Challenges - Max's Story

"Do you want to pass?" Max called behind him.

"No, I'll ride behind for you for a bit – I'm in awe!" the cyclist replied. It was a narrow single-track section, going up a steep hill through a densely wooded area. Max sat tall on his coker, its 36 inch wheel making him high on the saddle. He looked impressive on it but to the expert cyclist who understood the high level of skill necessary to ride a unicycle cross-country and at speed, he was, indeed, an awesome sight. Such a compliment was deeply gratifying to him. "Accept the compliments!" was his attitude, but it wasn't the motivation for his riding. He relished the physical and technical challenge, particularly at a cross-country endurance event like this. Extreme Endurance was the largest mountain-bike race in Europe with over 2,000 riders; a twenty four hour endurance race for individuals or teams of four, pros or amateurs. Cyclists of all levels took part, riding the ten mile track.

This was Max's fifth year. He usually preferred riding alone, going at his own fast pace, not being slowed down by others (he was one of the top five road and cross-country unicyclists in Britain), but he had made a good circle of friends with the other regular Extreme Endurance unicyclists and so the social side of this annual weekend was a big plus. Riding as one of a team of four could be frustrating, though: you were dependent on your team members' skill level and fitness for getting in enough laps of your own and you could never fully predict how long they would take to get round and hence what time you'd be going out again. For Max this was wearisome; he just wanted to be out on the course, riding as fast as he could, pushing his boundaries to beat his previous lap times; that was his motivation, to ride faster, to ride more of the circuit, pushing his limits up the hills and managing the long, tedious downhill sections which unicyclists have to keep pedalling on. This year then, for the first time, Max was doing it as a solo rider, the chance to ride for twenty fours; it would be a challenge. Not only were many of the cyclists in awe of him just riding the course on a unicycle but the other unicyclists were in awe of him doing it solo. "Typical Max!" they joked. "He's not human- he's bloody

superhuman!" He had a reputation amongst those in this lifestyle sport who knew him for being very fit and very *fast*.

He was on to a wider section of track now, a fire road, flat, along the top of the hill, but deeply rutted. He concentrated hard to stay in the same rut, to keep his wheel in a narrow, smooth line; he could go faster then than if he kept moving in and out of the deep indentations left by Land Rover tyres, which made it a bit harder. A cyclist pulled alongside him for a few seconds; "You're a god," he shouted at Max. "I'm all over the place. How do you stay so in-line, and on that?!" Max smiled to himself. He had been riding so long it just came naturally to him now; he did it without thinking.

Illus. 12: He concentrated hard to stay in the same rut, to keep his wheel in a narrow, smooth line;

He had started when he was twelve years old, about twelve years ago in fact; his sister and mum had bought him a unicycle for Christmas 1994. They'd had trouble tracking it down (it was in the days before internet shopping), but they knew how much he wanted one so they had put the word out that they were after a unicycle and eventually a local bike shop got one in. Max had only sat on one once before, three years earlier; his sister had borrowed it from a work

colleague but Max was too small then to reach the pedals. Still, just sitting on it had given him an obsession – it had made him realise how difficult it was, but he wanted to ride a unicycle and do it he would. As a young child he'd watched a Red Coat ride around camp on one at a family holiday at Butlins. It looked fun, a bit of laugh, perhaps he would even learn to juggle on it; his dad could juggle.

Even at 12 Max had a lot of perseverance and so he set to learning how to unicycle. The challenge of it, something so difficult, was what motivated him right from the beginning. With no idea of how to go about it he just set himself the goal of being able to ride across the front room; it was trial and error really, get on, fall off, get on, fall off again. His mum and dad didn't seem to mind him riding it in their front room, so thinking back to those times now they must have been encouraging. It took him ages to learn, but he kept at it. He could remember now the first time he did two revolutions of the wheel, a good feeling, a positive result, a step nearer his goal. What a sense of achievement that was as he focused on the brown, flowery curtains framing the window at the opposite end of the room, Dad watching him from the kitchen doorway. "You'll be able to go backwards on it soon!" he'd called out as encouragement. After the two revolutions it was a chair in the middle of the room, then it was the curtains – one step at a time, small goals that gave a sense of achievement and allowed Max to realise that he would indeed meet his challenge. It was there in front of him, taunting him; he had to meet it, beat it even.

He still had that original unicycle, a 20 inch Pashley ("20 inch" being the wheel size). For eight years it had been his only unicycle, the only unicycle he'd seen during that time - the only type of unicycle there was, he assumed. He hadn't had any of the DVDs that are available to today's kids, with role models like Chris Holm and Dan Heaton showing extreme riding. He'd ridden it regularly, daily almost. He rode on it with his friends; they made little jumps in the street for their BMX bikes and Max did them on his Pashley. It just became part of him, who he was, and so his friends accepted it as normal. Max, he was the kid who rode a unicycle; everyone knew it. Once it even got

stolen from outside McDonalds – he never bothered to lock it up as he figured no-one could ride off with it, well they had, or taken it at least, but it was found and returned to him because everyone knew him and his unicycle. It had even made the local newspaper; he was a local celebrity! It became something of a tradition for him to ride it to school on non-uniform days. Someone always asked for a go and he let them; it didn't do any harm. Of course no one could ever ride it, but they respected him more for it, realising how hard it was. The wheel was too small to ride it to school daily and he never seemed to get up early enough for the slow ride it would take. He rode it to karate every day though; it helped him maintain his fitness and stamina; that had been an advantage of it to him even then, a means of transport that kept him fit. His teachers had taken a bit of an interest in it - respected him more for it, he reckoned; they must have done, a child of his age, thirteen or fourteen by then, having mastered such a difficult skill; they would have appreciated that.

He was on the final stretch of the circuit now, having come down the last descent through the trees; it was a flat easy ride up to the corral where team members waited for each other to pass on the baton. As a solo rider he didn't need to do that, wouldn't need to slow his speed much, only briefly as he passed the electronic timer which registered each lap and rider. This race was well organised: all lap times would be posted on its website on Monday. He would have all his times confirmed and those of the other unicyclists, and the cyclists. He would be able to see how many he'd beaten. Would he have the fastest lap of the unicyclists? There was a bit of competition: Ben, a couple of years younger than Max; and David - unicycling was his job, so he rode a lot and it showed! Not that Max was at all bothered how he rode compared to others; he wasn't motivated by competition, by being the best, but by beating his own records, so he was after a faster lap time this year than in previous years. It was the challenge of it and he liked the satisfaction of beating the challenge, of achieving his goals. It was the same for him whatever he was doing, to climb a harder route, to brew a better beer, to make a fuller wine, to ride a faster time.

He passed the timer, 75.16, and rode straight on, starting his second lap. The commentator, who had been quiet for a while, noticed his name *come up on* his computer screen with the symbol for solo rider. "That's rider one six nine seven, Max Morris going out on his second lap. I knew those unicyclists were crazy but doing it SOLO on a unicycle, that really is mad. What motivates those boys? And here is solo cyclist two zero six eight, Ben Smithers, what stamina and fitness riding for 24 hours, a real sportsman."

Illus. 13: "That's rider one six nine seven, Max Morris going out on his second lap."

Max hadn't heard the commentator but if he had he wouldn't have been surprised at the change in attitude, just frustrated - why did the public so rarely take unicycling seriously and treat it as the sport that it was, with the respect it deserved? Riding a unicycle was harder than riding a bike, it required greater technical skill and physical stamina; there was no easy free-wheeling down

the descents; you had to pedal the whole way or you'd simply fall off, so Max was showing greater fitness than rider two zero six eight. Still, the commentator, like Joe Public, clearly didn't appreciate that, instead he too probably associated it with the circus and clowns. Max wasn't bothered by such attitudes though, he'd first thought of it in that way himself, until he'd realised what was involved as he'd learnt to ride. Anyway he didn't care what people thought of him or his unicycling, he liked who he was. That was an early lesson it had taught him. He had learnt to take the rough with the smooth, to accept the positive comments and ignore the negative ones; it was part of him, it was what he did and it had given him a sense of confidence, the confidence to be who he was, to do his own thing. He'd set himself a difficult task and he'd mastered it through perseverance and determination. That had been another early lesson: anything was achievable if he put his mind to it, and so he had kept going at school, the first in his family to do "A" levels. His teachers encouraged him to go to university. Why not? He would do what he could, and so had persevered again, got a good degree and went straight on to a PhD. He wasn't saying it was all due to his unicycling but he was convinced it had helped him along the way, made him resilient, taught him to focus on small targets to achieve big goals - his PhD was almost complete.

He hadn't heard the commentator because when he was riding his mind was clear of everything else; he was totally focused, concentrating on the ground in front of him, moving his body in the saddle as he needed to veer left or right to avoid an obstacle or to lighten the pressure on the pedals to go over a bump in the track; it all helped him ride faster. Speed was everything; it increased the adrenalin rush on a technical, cross-country section; the adrenalin rush was good, addictive, it left him wanting more; weaving through traffic quickly as he commuted to work or facing a steep downhill off-road section. One of those was coming up now, one of his favourite parts of this course, a sharp bend into a steep descent on single-track, plummeting into water at the bottom, deeply rutted underneath. It was a challenge to stay in the saddle coming down and then you immediately had to change your pressure and direction, using all your skills to get through the water and up and out the other side. It was a difficult section for any kind of rider, one

wheeled or two, and so a popular spot for spectators to watch – the chance of seeing someone come off in the water *was an added bonus* so there was always quite a crowd there. With today's conditions it was particularly tricky, being muddy and slippery.

Illus. 14: With today's conditions it was particularly tricky, being muddy and slippery.

He had ridden it well on his first lap, taking his time over it, but he knew it had slowed him down. Confident in having done it earlier he knew the undulations of the ground now, the depth of the water at the bottom; he approached it much faster the second time. Concentrating hard he eased the pressure on the pedals slightly and raised himself in the saddle to allow more sensitive movement of the unicycle under him. He got down and through it without any problems, made it look easy to the baying crowd who applauded him and commiserated with the cyclist who came off on the hill and slid down into the water a few feet behind Max.

He had got into off-road, cross-country riding quite by chance; satisfied with his small Pashley wheel he had commuted the short distance to uni and pootled around campus on it, feeling *a sense of* achievement at being able to

ride well and as fast as the wheel would let him, imagining that that was the limit of unicycling, but then a cyclist friend of his took him along to watch Extreme Endurance when he was 19. He knew Max rode a unicycle and he'd seen unicyclists ride the race the last couple of years – he knew Max would be interested. Interested? It blew his mind! There were these lads riding large 26 and 36 inch wheels, with thick mountain bike tyres, riding through mud and over rocky terrain; here was a whole new side to unicycling, and for Max,, a whole new challenge. Instantly, he wanted to do it. Now he had something else to aim for, other targets. His eight years of riding had given him strong basic foundations; he already had a high skill level so the switch from a 20 inch to a 36 inch wheel was easy. He got straight on his new coker and was away at a speed he had never achieved before. What a great challenge – he would be able to ride faster, further and over more difficult ground than before; always enthusiastic, that real excitement and early enthusiasm came rushing back to him. He found even higher levels of motivation as these new disciplines really matched his interests in fitness, stamina and adrenalin. Here was a psychological challenge as well as a physical and technical one; there was an element of danger in some of the steep, almost vertical drops he could now attempt. He liked the unpredictable nature of this new riding, you didn't know what obstacles you faced until you were on them and then it was too late too chicken out – besides, that wasn't him. The risk and danger motivated him, it had similarities to his rock climbing - that was the other sporting hobby he was passionate about. He was more likely to get injured in extreme, downhill unicycling than in climbing, but the injuries would be less serious so the thought didn't bother him.

It was an easy stretch now; having come out of the water, there was a long, grassy section, smooth and flat, that ran alongside the tents where competitors and supporters camped. Max could relax a little, take in a bit of the atmosphere for a few minutes; he could ride this bit with his eyes closed if he wanted to! It was single-track and people sat at the side offering encouragement as riders went past.

"Come on the unicyclist!"

"Where's your other wheel?!"

"Well done mate, good on you!"

"Couldn't you afford a proper bike?!"

Then someone whistled the circus tune, "Dit-dit diddle idle, dit-dit dah dah ...," – well, they always did, sooner or later; ironically this guy was wearing a gorilla suit – who was he calling a clown? You saw all sorts of strange sights at Extreme Endurance.

Max rode past the bottom of the unicyclists' camp, the huge yellow banners unmissable from any point on the site. "One wheel – no limit!" they proclaimed, a suitable motto for himself, Max always thought. His friends' kids ran down to wave him past.

"Go Max!" they shouted and whooped, waving their yellow flags and honking their hooters. "Yeah!" they cheered as he waved back at them. He revelled in their childish excitement – he had watched them grow up over the last few years as he and Beth became family friends to them. It was a good group, all extroverts in some way. At least, the riders were; they really had to be willing to attract so much attention; an interesting mix of people from all backgrounds and walks of life, different ages and professions but with a common interest and a shared laid back attitude to life, individuals who accepted you for who you were. Yes, unicycling had been good to him. It had enabled him to meet new people, develop a different social circle to uni and climbing; it had helped him keep fit and healthy, to manage any stress from his studies; it had added to his identity giving him an individuality, and it was a great conversation starter. The balance he had developed had improved his climbing too, he was sure it had - oh, and it had been fun! He glanced down at the stopwatch on his watch: 32.46. He was ahead of his time at this point in the first lap; he focused again and put his head down, increasing the pressure on the pedals slightly. John had told him to pace himself for the 24 hours but he couldn't, he had to ride as fast as possible even if he had to rest up at some point; slowing down just wasn't in his nature! He kept his head down and rode on, completing the second lap.

Illus. 15: ...he had watched them grow up over the last few years as he and Beth became family friends to them.

As he started up the first hill on the third circuit he caught up one of the unicycle team riders. Pete was in Team Three, the newer riders, and was just going out on his first lap, the second of his team. Max took minor satisfaction in being a whole lap ahead!

"How's it going?" he called over.

"Fine, I feel confident, but Ads had a bad time; he had to walk half of it. How about you?"

"I've ridden 90% of each lap, it's pretty good. 1.15 was my first time, 1.09 just now."

"That's impossible! They said you were amazing." ("Max, he's only half-human, he's bionic!" had been someone's exact description!)

"I'm trying for under an hour so I'll ride on – good luck!" and he was away up the hill before Pete could reply.

He had to do at least one lap in under an hour. He'd not quite managed it the year before – deeply frustrating; the conditions weren't right, too much rain and mud, the wind had been against them in the evening and night-time too. He would give this lap everything he could, it was just him and his wheel. He

smiled to himself momentarily. Pete was riding a brand new Schlumpf, the most expensive unicycle you could buy at just over £2,000. Made in Germany and with two gears it was seen as a real technological development in the sport; Max was not convinced yet, but he would be interested in it if it would let him go faster! If you wanted to be a better rider you should practise more often and keep your fitness levels up, that was his opinion; at the end of the day it was your skill level and stamina that made the difference. Practise for an extra hour a week and it could have a real impact on your riding. He had stopped taking part in the Forum discussions on length of cranks and weight of pedals; none of it made a significant difference to performance in his view. It had been an important source of information for him when he first specialised in road and cross-country riding but now he just logged on occasionally to see what events were taking place. His friends always emailed him directly if they were organising a meet he might be interested in. He only bought new gear out of technical necessity, not bothered by how he or his unicycle looked, whether he had the latest frame or this season's t-shirt. He wore cycling shorts now but only because they stopped the chafing; being more comfy he could ride for longer. He did consider the safety side of things too now, he had bought wrist guards which he never rode without these days; but all things done, it was you that could improve your performance, same as karate and climbing - you couldn't hide behind fancy equipment. It was a pure sport and that added to the appeal.

Over the lumpy grass at the start of the course, round the end of the lake and up the first climb.

"I thought I was mad, you must be fucking crazy on that!" a cyclist shouted as Max overtook him oblivious, his legs pushing the pedals round as hard as he could, every part of his concentration focused on getting to the top of the steep rise. The incline eases off but carries on around a grassy field near a copse, along the top of the ridge. This is easy terrain for a good unicyclist, with less weight than a bicycle and the speed of such a large wheel; Max cruised past several bike riders. "I've just been overtaken by a unicyclist!" one of them wailed down his mobile phone.

The course narrowed now as the single-track traversed along the grassy *ridge* and then plummeted through woods. To start with the trail was smooth and just the right gradient for Max to go flat out again without the risk of the wheel spinning out of control. "I don't get round that quick!" another cyclist shouted as he passed.

On either side of him trees flash past and Max briefly sensed some frustrated cyclists behind him, unable to pass him on this single track. "Do you want to pass?" he called, as he did earlier, keen to be considerate to other riders and not get unicyclists a bad name on the course.

"Thanks - keep going mate," a rider calls encouragingly as Max lets him by, "you guys are amazing!" The support and respect from cyclists is welcomed and appreciated.

Illus. 16: The support and respect from cyclists is welcomed and appreciated.

A long flat section and Max is onto the water-drop now; down and through with no problem again. "Look, its difficult enough on a bike, you guys are just taking the piss!" a muddy cyclist just remounting from a fall jokes as Max passes him to a cheer from the spectators.

"Go, unicycle man!" a child calls after him.

Now the easy section alongside the camps.

"Well done Uni!"

"You've lost a wheel – and your mind!"

"Excellent, keep it up mate!"

"Show us a wheelie!"

The comments vary, some positive, others negative but not in a nasty way. Max is oblivious to them all though, his mind is simply on his riding, even on this easy section. He enjoys the *total focus the ride* gives him. He pushes on, pushing himself hard. Finding reserves of energy, he swerves round roots and lumps in the track - it's not the smoothest of surfaces. Before he realises it, he is half-way up the final hill.

"Oh, man, you make me feel so inadequate!" a cyclist calls as Max passes her pushing her bike up the hill. Then comes the last descent, the track roughens back down towards the campsite and he is on to the final straight, up to the timer; will he do it? He finds an extra burst of energy and pedals hard, and as he passes the timer flashes 58.27 – he's done it, under an hour. One more goal achieved – what a great feeling!

Beth was waiting for him with more water to refill his camel-back, a bowl of cold pasta and a banana, cyclists' staple endurance food.

"Well done, you star! Why don't you take a break?"

"No, I've got a good rhythm going."

"How's your ankle? she asked.

"Fine, can't feel it much, just that last section when I really pushed myself." He had hurt his ankle a couple of years ago while unicycling and it sometimes gave him trouble if he rode too fast or for too long. The doctor had checked it out and x-rays didn't show anything up. He had rested it all year resorting to a two-wheel bike to keep his fitness levels up and to commute to uni – his friends had given him some stick for that. "Joined two unicycles together have you, Max?" "You've got too many wheels!" they teased him. The rest seemed

to have worked and it wasn't troubling him at all. He quickly ate the pasta while Beth refilled his camel-back and he rode off, peeling the banana.

He had got a rhythm going by this point and was into a routine. The fourth lap in five hours: he knew the course well now. He'd achieved his first goal of the weekend, to beat his previous times. Now he could relax, just a little; his second goal was to ride more laps than he'd done at any Extreme Endurance before – five to beat then, and twenty hours to do it in – and thirdly to ride as much as of the 24 hour period as he could.

Over the lumpy grass at the start of the course, round the end of the lake and up the first climb, he felt his ankle twinge as he rode up but thought nothing of it.

Around the grassy field by the copse and along the top of the ridge.

The narrow section of single-track now as it traverses along the grassy ridge and steeply drops through the woods, the trees flashing past again ...

By the time Max got to the water drop his ankle was a constant ache. What to do? He had become more sensible over the last few years; as he pushed his body further he became more sensitive to its limits.

Beth came down to the side of the track as he rode past the unicyclist camp. "My ankle's nagging me!" he called. "Meet me at the finish and I'll make a decision there."
"Take it easy!" she shouted back. "You've already done well!" He knew he had, beating his first and, to him, his most important goal. A couple of years ago when he was doing this race for the first or second time he would have ignored it and ridden on, wanting to prove to himself he could do it, but then it was easier as he'd been part of a team and could pace himself over the two days. This year the pressure had been constant as a solo rider.

He focused on the wheel and on the cycle of his breathing, taking his mind off his ankle. The track zigzagged down the other side of the camp towards the final hill. He was up it and on to the last descent; he'd have to make a decision in a minute.

Illus. 17: Beth came down to the side of the track as he rode past the unicyclist camp.

It was a hard call to make but he had nothing to prove to himself any more – he'd met most of the challenges he'd set himself over time and those he hadn't could wait. What would he do if he had no challenges left anyway? Reluctantly he decided to call it a day rather than make his ankle worse – that might finish his unicycling for good and he certainly didn't want that. He had too many other things he still wanted to do - set a new 100 mile speed record for starters! He was Max, the guy who unicycled, it was him, it was part of who he was and it was too big a part *of his identity* to risk. When he passed the timer for the fourth occasion he took the electronic tag off his ankle, feeling frustrated and disappointed. He'd been looking forward to a night lap – riding this course in the dark was always an additional challenge! Still, he was pleased with his performance. It had been good, four fast laps with 90% riding

and one personal best time. The other goals would have to wait.... There was always next year!

Chapter 10

Feeling Good About Those Jumps –
The Development of Self-Identity and Self-Esteem

As I have already sought to explain, many young male unicyclists are particularly motivated by Trials, Street and Flatland unicycling. A key element of each of these disciplines is being able to jump along an obstacle, or on and off an obstacle, by bunny-hopping. For new riders who have mastered basic riding, being able to jump successfully is often an early goal; success at jumping and remaining upright on the unicycle brings a great sense of satisfaction. Similarly, as this PhD study has progressed, I have felt increasingly good about its development. In this context successful jumps could be seen as resolutions to problems encountered along the way, jumping over obstacles; for example, a planned interview being cancelled so that a further young rider had to be sought. In relation to this specific chapter, these successful research 'jumps' have positively influenced my self-identity as a researcher.

There is increasing evidence that self-esteem and school attainment are significantly linked (Davies and Brember, 1999). This interest in any correlation between the two has received further attention over the last ten years and the relationship of both to motivational behaviour has also been investigated (Wong et al. 2002). I am interested in the motivational drivers of young people, the development of their identity, including self-esteem, and their achievement, or means by which they might achieve their academic potential. Yu et al. (2006) acknowledge

> That self-esteem and academic achievement are reciprocally related in the sense that better academic performance leads to higher self-esteem, and higher self-esteem brings about better achievement". (Yu et al., 2006, p.334)

It is the latter observation, "higher self-esteem brings about better achievement" that I am particularly interested in.

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A sense of self is key to children and young people's personal achievement both in school and out of it (Marsh and Craven, 1997). The 'self' is a complex and multidimensional concept and has traditionally been considered as embodied, as an inner essence (Pini, 2004). A more recent, poststructuralist view is that the 'self' is socially constructed. A key figure in support of this *theory is Foucault who* describes selves as not emerging naturally, but being produced within wider historical and social contexts *(Pini). There are different* ways an individual can "work upon" his or her body to become a 'self' and achieve a sense of personal fulfillment.

> *Technologies of the self... permit individuals to effect by their own*
> *means or with the help of others a number of operations on their*
> *bodies and souls, thought, conduct and way of being, so as to*
> *transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness,*
> *purity, wisdom, perfection or immorality.* (Foucault, 1988, p117)

There are a number of elements within the sense of self. Marsh, a key theorist on self-esteem suggests that terminology such as "self-esteem" and "self-concept" are in everyday use and there is an implicit assumption that everybody knows what they are (Marsh and Craven, 1997). As a result of this assumption "researchers do not feel compelled to provide any theoretical definition of what they are measuring" (Marsh, 1990, p.79). This provides a difficulty in defining the different elements. Indeed Crozier et al. (1999) suggest:

> *A clearer picture might emerge if research were to treat self-esteem*
> *as one facet of a multidimensional self, that is, if it recognises that*
> *an individual's level of self-esteem can vary from one domain to*
> *another, so that someone with low academic self-esteem might*
> *have a more positive self-image where, say performance in sports*
> *was concerned.* (Crozier et al., 1999, p.128)

For my study the two key foci within self will be self-esteem and self-identity, given that there is a strong link between the two, particularly for young people. Gibson and Jefferson (2006) acknowledge that these two constructs are often strongly entwined in adolescence. I will first discuss literature on the

development of self-identity and its significance then review literature on self-esteem.

Development of Self-Identity

There are two elements to self-identity; these can be simply described as self-concept (a developing awareness of oneself) and self-knowledge, (recognising one's strengths and weaknesses) (Bignold, 2006d). Self-identity is constructed from an individual's sense of self, based on his or her personal, family and community history and his or her belonging to one or more social groups (Weingert, 1986 in Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Young people's developing identities are significantly influenced by their leisure activities, consumption, style, music and friendships (Hill and Tisdall) - all elements of unicycling culture. According to Hill and Tisdall (1997), in a seminal text on youth, it is necessary to have a positive and accurate identity in order to achieve a holistic sense of self and high self-esteem. This can be problematic for a young person whose sense of who he or she is, is threatened by "negative social images, discontinuities of life experiences or conflicting loyalties" (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Adolescence can be, for many, a time of conflicting loyalties as peers take on increasing significance, often over and above the family (Geldard and Geldard, 2004).

Erikson identified the need for a young person to grow out of childhood with a clear sense of who he or she is. He regarded "youth" as a period of "role confusion" during which time children's *ideas became clearer* about their own function (occupational identity or role in society), beliefs (ideological identity) and sex role (sexual identity). Hill and Tisdall argue that Erikson's self-identity framework is too stereotypical. It assumes a progression of increasing certainty. This is not the case for some young people whose self-identity does not develop in a linear and increasingly positive direction. It suggests a limited basis for identification and conceptualisation and is out-dated for today's society. It focuses predominantly on a person's future occupation.

This may have been appropriate when Erikson was writing in the 1950s and 1960s but given the emphasis on leisure by today's society and the large number of unemployed it is no longer as relevant as it was, Hill and Tisdall argue:

> *Traditional means of young people's socialisation, such as family, school and community, are seen as becoming much weaker and the influence of peers and media much stronger. ..young people are faced with so many messages, so many contradictions, so many options and freedoms, that they can feel lost and disorientated.* (Hill and Tisdall, 1997, p.114)

This idea of modern society creating greater complexity for adolescents as they develop their sense of identity is discussed by Denscombe (2001) and explored by Furlong and Cartmel (2007) who see society as extending the period it recognises as "youth", in part due to earlier physical maturation, and an increased marginalisation of young people from the rest of society during this period.

> *For young people, the lengthening of the period between physical maturity and the attainment of adult status can be seen as problematic due to difficulties involved in constructing a stable identity in a period characterized by economic and social marginality... For much of the twentieth century, the establishment of adult identities was much more straightforward because of the speed with which transitions were completed, their relative simplicity and because of the fairly stable nature of the occupational world. (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p.58-59)*

They go on to discuss social identity, how someone sees his/her relationships with others or how he/she thinks others perceive him, as an important part of self-identity. Leisure and youth cultures are significantly important here, they suggest, as being central to changing social identities among young people. For example, Scott's social identity is changing as he chooses to spend more time playing football over unicycling. He is like many teenagers who move in and out of different social, or physical, activities as they explore their self-identity, develop different friendships groups and learn more about their own strengths and weaknesses. Being able to choose which activity to pursue is,

in itself, significant to self-identity as it is one means by which young people are empowered. Furlong and Cartmel confirm the influence of peers on social identity and particularly on the development of individualisation and the place of risk in this. Unicycling, as has already been noted in this thesis, is an activity that encourages individualism and which, through some disciplines, promotes "risk", and so it has the potential to be a significant activity in terms of influencing self-identity and social identity within this.

While some researchers emphasise the importance of leisure in the development of self-identity, others focus more specifically on sport. Mills confirms that sport has traditionally had a major impact on boys' identity:

> The sporting arena is a site in which the validity and status of a boy's/man's gendered identity can be asserted, challenged and negotiated. Traditional mainstream sports have mostly played a role in this with their "strong emphasis on violence these sports valorise the extremes of masculinity: aggressiveness, strength, speed, competitiveness and domination of the opposition. (Mills, 2001, p.24-25)

Mills goes on to suggest, that the development of such an identity can create problems in schools with the valuing of sports which are hegemonised, promoting the domination of one group or team over another. By valuing such sports, schools can inadvertently create an atmosphere of aggression within the playground generally or amongst specific groups. If you are an individual, or social group, who does not value such values yourself then adolescence, with its time of changing identity, can be even more difficult. Unicycling has the potential to provide an alternative identity which is not based on violence, aggression or competitiveness. This concern over schools valuing too highly some traditional, competitive sports, is shared by Martino and Meyenn (2001), who recognise it as one popular strategy to address boys' underachievement:

> Teachers wanting to find ways in which they might address boys' underachievement are most likely to come across strategies linked to the concept of 'recuperative masculinity. For example,... schools' use of football as a means of stimulating boys' interest. The government too has looked to football as a strategy by sponsoring a scheme called 'Playing for Success' which links clubs in the

Premier and first divisions with specially set up study centres.
(Martino and Meyenn, 2001, p. 5)

They criticise this, as does Mills, for reinforcing macho stereotypes with an emphasis on violent, competitive sports.

The influence of the media is also recognised as being highly influential on young people's self-identity (Madge, 2006). The assumption is, usually, that this influence is negative, as Furlong and Cartmel illustrate; "The mass media, for example, attempt to sell identity scripts which frequently involve stereotyped gendered images" (p.59). I am interested in the potential of some forms of media to influence self-identity positively or negatively. I will consider the influence of computer-based media and magazines on young people's identity, which is widely acknowledged:

> *Adolescents are attracted to a variety of media which play an important role in their everyday lives. This is especially true for computers and computer-based new media. Adolescents routinely use many forms of new media as well as classical computer applications.* (Dinter, 2006, p.235)

Indeed, Dinter, in a research project with young people goes on to recognise that engagement with computer-based media has a direct impact on individual identity formation. Many young unicyclists regularly engage with internet forums, both public and private, and post images and recordings of themselves riding on sites such as YouTube. In doing so they are promoting themselves as they see themselves, their self-identity being that of successful unicyclists. The images are usually of a difficult trick being successfully carried out, or a significant fall which can be interpreted as being equally impressive!

Taking a different approach to the development of young people's self-identity, Denscombe (2001), rather than examining agencies affecting it, suggests five concepts which he regards as being desirable to them. These are looking "grown-up", "cool", "hard", "in control" of themselves and the situation and "taking calculated risks". Being in control is seen as desirable as

it implies empowerment of the individual; taking calculated risks provides self-affirmation as it demonstrates an ability to cope with risks. Being a competent unicyclist, and particularly being skilled at Trials or Street, could enable an individual to demonstrate each of these concepts, both to himself and, equally importantly, to his peers. In support of this, Mills (2001) identified a strong sense of powerlessness among adolescent boys, greater than amongst girls:

This powerlessness is not always derived from their identity as a male. For instance, boys experience powerlessness as young people. The hierarchical nature of schools and the positioning of youth in society often work to ensure that young people have little influence in the day-to-day running of their lives. In schools boys, like girls, have every move monitored and they are under constant surveillance as they are expected to conform to the dictates of the education system. (Mills, 2001, p.129)

If boys do, therefore, crave empowerment does unicycling provide a sense of power, power over the environment, over a piece of technical equipment, enhanced by adrenalin and a sense risk? Can achieving your own goals, as Scott and Max have so far done, be empowering in itself?

With regard to group identity, as opposed to self-identity, Brent (2005) focuses on what he terms "collectivities"; by this he means communities or adolescent friendship groups or gangs. He prefers this term as he regards it as having less negative connotations when applied to young people. The formation of these groups then, or of the group-identity which they hold, takes into account *"the issues of identity, activity, aesthetics, control and place"* (p.162). I will briefly illustrate each through the example of unicycling:

- *Identity* relates to the formation of group members' identity as young people rather than children or adults. I have observed that children rarely have sufficient strength and stamina to really excel at the unicycling disciplines which are most valued by young people; being successful in these disciplines then indicates a certain maturity beyond childhood.

- *Activity* provides a shared identity through a common activity, *"working together to be part of something, not being left on the sidelines as a mere spectator" (p.163).* I have already illustrated unicycling as a grass-roots sport, one of the criteria for lifestyle sports. Its emphasis is on participation, the bodily experience, not just spectating.

- *Aesthetics* puts an emphasis on performance and can also include pleasure gained from an otherwise barren physical or social landscape. The reader can, I'm sure, make her own links back to unicycling here, as I have already discussed performance and place in my thesis.

- *Control* can apply to several things in Brent's view; it can apply to taking control over the environment, using it for your own purposes, not that which it was intended for. In unicycling control is also exercised over the body by the individual rider; balance has to be exact, especially when riding along the top of a narrow fence, for example.

- *Place* recognises the importance of the place to the group or collectivity that uses it, both the social and geographical space. Pete, whose narrative immediately follows this chapter, talked in his interview about the importance to him and his friends, of hanging out in skate-parks as youngsters, it was somewhere to go, a geographical place, but it took on great social significance as they spent much time there becoming a group, *forming their group*-identity and their self-identities within that.

Several different approaches to the development of self-identity have been discussed. What is clear is that self-identity is influenced significantly by peers, leisure, sport (if viewed separately from leisure) and the media. Each of these features is illustrated in the narratives.

Development of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a key focus of my research. This is based on my general observations that unicycling has a positive influence on self-esteem (Bignold, 2007a) and the understanding that a stable, high self-esteem can have a positive impact on personal achievement whether academic or otherwise:

> *Self-esteem enhancement contributes positively towards academic achievement and towards personal and social development.* (Lawrence, 2006, p.xvii)

As with motivation, there are numerous definitions of self-esteem but there is general agreement that it is based on self-identity and how this fits with his or her ideal self (Lawrence). The following definition of high self-esteem indicates its sometimes fragile nature, particularly during adolescence as the earlier reference to conflicting loyalties often felt during this period emphasises:

> *Secure high self-esteem ... reflects positive attitudes toward the self that are realistic, well-anchored and resistant to threat. Fragile, high self-esteem, on the other hand, reflects feelings of self-worth that are vulnerable to challenge, need constant validation, and frequently require some degree of self-deception.* (Zeigler-Hill, 2006, p.120)

Self-esteem can be global, an all-round feeling of self-worth and confidence, or specific, with regard to a specific activity or behaviour. Key elements of self-esteem are academic ability, physical appearance and popularity among peers and the importance of each of these based on what the individual values and defines as worthwhile (Fox, 1992). Much research, including that by Marsh et al. (2006), concludes that a person's "context, environment and life-events" are highly influential. The values held by society and/or significant others, such as parents or peers, form part of the context in which the individual operates. As children grow older the influence of the family becomes less important and that of peers becomes increasingly important (Geldard and Geldard, 2004). Research by Xiang et al. (2003) confirms that the influence of parents on the motivation of 11 and 12 year olds to take part

in sport is significant as they set achievement goals for their children. Their research, although only sampling 102 parents, is broadly supported in it's findings by general literature in this area, such as Geldard and Geldard. However, as children grow older the significance of parental aspirations decreases generally (Lawrence, 2006).

With further regard to sport, research by Fox (1992) indicates that the physical domain, constituting both physical appearance and physical ability is a key influence on self-esteem. This can be particularly so with children and young people and reinforces Foucault's thinking that the physical body is the primary surface on which an individual constructs his or her sense of self (Pini, 2004). Success in physical activities affects specific self-esteem and subsequently give rise to an enhanced global self-esteem (Fox, 1992). This is illustrated by Max, whose early success in cross-country races in his late teens made him feel so confident in his unicycling ability that he decided to do Extreme Endurance solo, a huge undertaking. This is of particular significance to this study with its focus on the sport of unicycling and is supported by subsequent research by Ghate and Daniels (1997). They sampled almost 1,000 eight to fifteen year olds growing up in the 1990s. Three quarters of them regarded themselves as 'happy'. Taking part in sports was commonly mentioned as something which most made them happy. Ghate and Daniels identify a strong link between feeling happy and having strong self-esteem.

Adolescence is a time of great personal upheaval for many young people and as such it is a time which has a substantial impact on global self-esteem (Maiano et al., 2004). The importance of personal judgements about one's physical self are particularly important to the growth and development of self-esteem in adolescents. Fox's research above is highlighted by Maiano et al in demonstrating this. Pete's story, following this chapter, illustrates this view; lacking in self-esteem in the middle years of secondary schooling, his success at mountain unicycling increased his self-esteem and gave him the confidence to forge his own way. Global self-esteem, as it relates to age, has

been shown by Marsh (1989) to increase across the 11 to 19 age range for most young people. Research by Maianao et al. (2004) with over 600 adolescents supports this further. However Marsh also found that 12 to 16 year olds' global perceptions of their own physical competence declined significantly during these years. This would appear to contradict Fox's work, that physical self has a major impact on global self-esteem in adolescents. Research by Thompson et al. (2004) suggests that it is not the age group but a child's place in an age group that is deeply significant. For example, in a traditional sports league such as rugby, where children play according to their academic year group, it is those who are younger than average in their age-group who are likely to have low self-confidence and self-esteem. Unicycling, as with most other lifestyle sports, does not generally operate in a rigid, age bound structure and therefore age is far less significant than in traditional sports. This may be important to young people who learn to ride and who participate in semi-organised meets and group events. Indeed Ignico et al. (1999) suggest that in relation to physical activity, the achievement of personal goals can raise self-esteem:

> *Setting goals, or establishing a standard of how one wants to perform or improve, can also facilitate the development of self-esteem by providing a series of successful experiences.* (Ignico et al., 1999, p. 33)

As I have demonstrated in Scott's and Max's narratives so far, the achievement of personal goals is hugely significant in unicycling.

Self-esteem, or levels of self-esteem, can be influenced by gender. Research by Balding (2002) identified self-esteem as being intrinsically related to happiness of children and young people. The majority of a sample of 16,000 primary and secondary schoolchildren showed medium to high self-esteem. At all ages more boys than girls had high self-esteem and more girls than boys had low self-esteem. Marsh's age-related research cited above also examined links to gender and reached the same conclusions as Balding with regard to global self-esteem. In the area of physical self-concept Marsh concluded that adolescent boys have higher perceptions of their physical

attractiveness and sport competency than adolescent girls (Marsh, 1989). However, research by Maiano et al. (2004) contradicts this; their findings suggested that there was no relationship between age and gender with regard to global self-esteem and physical self-perceptions. They concluded that age and gender did influence self-esteem but that the two factors did not interact. However they did acknowledge that their research sample was not large enough to draw overarching conclusions and that they were unable to set up age and gender groups of equal size. Their findings should therefore be viewed with caution. Wigfield et al. (2005), researching the development of self-identify in early adolescents, remind practitioners of the fact that the onset of puberty for boys and girls is quite different, with approximately an 18 month gap. Girls enter puberty significantly earlier than boys which means that young people of the same chronological age but different gender groups are normally at different points in their physical development, affecting their emotional development. This may also affect differences in the development of self-identity and self-esteem related to age and gender.

Motivation and Self

Motivation is a key factor in the extent to which young people engage with the different contexts they operate in, such as school, sporting activity or friendship groups. Clear links between self-esteem and motivation have been recognised for a number of years. Weiner (1992) reasoned that positive self-esteem is experienced as a consequence of a positive outcome attributed to the self. This implies that motivation to undertake an activity is key to the development of self-esteem. Hein and Hagger (2007) researched young people's self-esteem in relation to goal achievement theory. They concluded that "A general achievement orientation, regardless of its nature, influences self-esteem..." (p.156). Bandura (1986, cited in Beck) recognised, within his self-efficacy theory of motivation, that people with a greater self-esteem do perform better on many kinds of tasks than someone with a low self-esteem. This is not just a matter of will-power or determination but comes about

through actually being successful at other tasks. Research by Kernis (2005) concluded that low self-esteem may undermine the desire to take on challenges and so reduce the motivation to achieve a particular task, particularly intrinsic motivation. This would have a direct impact on achievement motivation or achievement behaviour. The concept of mastery orientation has at the centre the emphasis on learning something for its own sake and not to outdo others. This supports the long term development of self-esteem as it is not a fragile sense of self-worth based on the underachievement of others who may go on to outperform the individual concerned.

The above review of literature has sought to show that there is general agreement that self-identity and self-esteem, both deeply complex, are significantly intertwined. As such, it would be difficult for me to analyse one without considering the other. There is also a consensus of opinion amongst researchers that adolescence is a time of critical change and development to an individuals' sense of self and that peers, specifically in the area of leisure are a major influence (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Interestingly, the UK questionnaire which focused on the 11 to 22 age group, showed seven taking up unicycling because they had friends who rode, while six took it up because family members rode; there is no significant difference here. Of course this is a very small sample but a greater difference might have been expected. With girls in this age group four took up unicycling because they had friends who rode, while only one took it up because a family member rode. With Madge's research suggesting that teenage girls are more influenced by their families than boys, I would have expected these results to be the other way round.

Research with adolescents by Alves-Martins et al. (2002) confirms a link between academic achievement and self-esteem, something which is of concern to this study. Their results indicated that "academic achievement affects self-esteem" (p.60) in pupils up to the ages of about 13 and 14. Interestingly they showed that pupils aged 15 or over showed less of a correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement; indeed this age

group had a tendency to protect their self-esteem by attributing "less importance to school-related areas" (p.60). Both these findings have significant implications for an alternative curriculum in schools. Such a curriculum could value youth-selected activities, including unicycling, as a means of raising the self-esteem of those pupils who do not achieve well academically but are talented in other areas. The potential of such a curriculum is acknowledged by Crozier et al.:

> *The implementation of a differentiated curriculum that affords frequent opportunities for success in different areas of school experience may serve to raise self-esteem and academic achievement.* (Crozier et al.,1999, p.134)

Differentiation should not disadvantage some but allow all to have their skills valued, albeit in extra-curricular activities, and so develop their self-worth. In such a curriculum

> *further attention should be paid to the question of assessing and raising the self-esteem of pupils who embark on their secondary education with a lack of belief in themselves firmly established.* (Crozier et al., p.134)

In the remaining literature review sections I will go on to discuss the importance of culture and sub-culture on young people's self and group-identity. I will then proceed to consider an alternative curriculum in schools as a means for enabling children to achieve in different learning contexts. First, though, I will tell Pete's story as it provides noteworthy illustrations of the importance of self-identity and self-esteem in young people and the potential of unicycling to positively influence these.