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Mapping Joe Rockhead's Indoor Climbing Gym

At our site, the warmth of brisk movements, clashing voices, cushioned floors, and bright colors invite you into the cavern created by the climbing walls. Despite being on the sides of the space, these walls take center stage, movement is constant, with individuals stepping onto the stage and flitting back into the onlooking audience. A collection of individuals is crucial to the creation of a community, and whether it is through supporting a climber mid-climb from the sidelines or discussing perspectives on the route, the structure of the studied climbing gym is a crucial feature that facilitates interactions between them. These interactions helped inform our research question. How do individuals at Joe Rockhead's Climbing Gym use its built space to facilitate community building?

The attached map is a combination of field and participatory mapping of climbing route strategy on a single wall face in the gym. The context provided by observing how individuals and the community view the wall and the surrounding space provides multiple perspectives on how the space is used. Through participatory mapping we extracted annotations from gym users and superimposed the notes over a "heat" map of the climbing wall. The data was recorded separately in a 30-minute observation period, tallying the highest frequency grips with the use of more saturated colors. The volunteered mapping by individual users of the wall includes jotting down brainstorm, potential climbing strategies, and frustrations caused by obstacles in their climbing, and was an insightful tool to incorporate into our site research -- visualizing and narrating the space for both other community members and those unfamiliar with the space. Choosing to form our map around the wall centers our research around the gym's built environment. The information gained from mapping our space closely connects the built space to the community members that use the wall, making it an effective tool to visualize how the community moves within vertical space.

The individual reflections about the climbing routes vary in their specificity and use of climbing jargon. One climber uses distinct climbing terminology such as "sloper" and "heel hook", while another climber colloquially refers to their problem as "babybell cheese". Despite the stark differences, the variety of thought processes and reflection enriched the conversations that we heard off the wall. Climbers brought diverse opinions, their unique comments contributing to the larger common goal of solving a mutual problem. Teamwork is evident from how the individual commentary contributed to community problem solving. This heterogenous set of commentaries

highlights the value of diversity in community building, as individuals participate in community building by contributing and collaborating on collective routes.

Through our design of the heat map, the concentration of bright and saturated grips to a few select courses, whilst others being mostly desaturated, visualizes a tendency for users to concentrate on the same routes. This map shows two primary routes which were most popular during the observation period. There was also a tendency for courses on the wall to have one major 'critical point' about halfway up which involved a difficult maneuver that the individual had to overcome to reach the top of the course. Thus, the most saturated grips were also surrounded by the most annotations, as many people often shared a common 'critical point'. The level of support from the climber's audience audibly grows as they approach the critical point, reflecting discussions being had about each person's perspective of the route. We found that these peaks, the hot spots on the map, are crucial in the process of community building – pulling the focus of the audience to the spotlighted climber attempting the problem. This subsequently encouraged people to use the space to solve problems.

Thematically, our map highlights the role of the individual within communities. Our map records our initial observations about the community – the thoughts and annotations of the individuals closely reflected the conversations that climbers were having with each other about the wall. The built space of the gym serves as a tool for individuals to tie the first knots of community building. By recording annotations on our blank map, this focus on individuals was able to further structure our research question. Each person attempting to climb the wall has a different perspective and the individual's annotations visualize that, anchoring the perspectives within the larger space of the climbing gym and the walls. In mapping this phenomenon, we succeeded in visually demonstrating the role of the individual in community building at Joe Rockhead's.

To conclude, the mapping assignment was a useful supplement to the preliminary observations and analysis conducted. This visualization of the wall helped to clarify our research question; how do individuals at Joe Rockhead's Climbing Gym use its built space to facilitate community building? The annotations provided by the members demonstrate that individuals are foundational to a community. Their shared attempts at reaching a common goal whilst maintaining a diverse set of inputs makes for a rich community building experience. Mapping the space further emphasized how the climbing wall is crucial to the growth of the network within Joe Rockhead's, putting individuals on display and giving them a platform to engage with others.



