LIFESTYLE AND ADVENTURE SPORTS AMONG YOUTH

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Introduction

An important characteristic and intensifying trend in the twenty-first century within Western sporting cultures is an increase in the range and diversity of sports practices, particularly more informal and individualistic activities. A vibrant example of this trend is the emergence and growth of what the academic and popular literature has variously termed extreme, alternative, adventure and lifestyle sports. In this chapter we consider the growing popularity and significance of these sports, illustrating their impact on the contemporary sporting landscape. We use the term lifestyle sports as an umbrella term to refer to a range of participatory, informal and 'stoke'[1]-seeking urban and rural sporting activities, including long-established sports like climbing and surfing through to emergent activities like snowboarding and parkour. Many of these sports either originated (or like surfing were re-popularised) in North America around the 1960s. With their origins in the counter-cultural social movement of the 1960s and 1970s many had characteristics that are *different* to traditional rule-bound, competitive and institutionalised sport. They have been characterised by their challenge to the dominant Western 'achievement sport' culture and values (Eichberg, 1998).

First, we explore what lifestyle sports are and the ways in which they have impacted contemporary youth lifestyles, focusing on the UK, where much of our own research has been conducted and North America, where many of these sports originated and have had most impact on the sportscape. We consider how we can understand and conceptualise the youth (sub)cultures and identities that underpin them, and highlight some of the key trends in their development, including commercialisation. Second,

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[1] Stoke in a term used by participants of sports like surfing to refer to the feeling of enjoyment and thrill they get doing the activity.

the chapter reviews literature on lifestyle sports as an urban spatial practice and the attendant cultural politics associated with youth lifestyles expressed in urban environments through street sports like skateboarding and parkour/free-running. Third, acknowledging the virtual/real interface at the forefront of youth identities and experiences, we consider the role of digital media in fuelling the popularity, culture and economy of lifestyle sports.

What are 'lifestyle sports'?

A number of characteristics define lifestyle sports (see Wheaton, 2013: 28-30). Participants show high commitment in time and /or money and a style of life that develops around the activity. They have a hedonistic, individualistic ideology that promotes commitment, but often denounces regulation and institutionalisation, and tend to be critical of, or ambivalent to, commercialism and formal 'person-on-person' style competition. They emphasise the aesthetic realm in which one blends with one's environment. Some practitioners refer to their activities as art. The body is used in non-aggressive ways, mostly without bodily contact, yet participants embrace and fetishise notions of risk and danger. Yet while perceptions about risk pervade public debate about adventure sport, the majority of lifestyle sports activities are practiced in controlled ways. Indeed, many activities labelled 'extreme' are actually relatively safe (Booth & Thorpe, 2007: 173) and according to statistical evidence cause fewer injuries and deaths than many traditional sports including rugby and boxing (Clemmitt, 2009: 297; see James, Barr & La Prade in this volume). The locations in which these sports are practised are often new or re-appropriated urban and rural spaces, without fixed or delineated boundaries, and lacking regulation and control. Academics have used a range of labels to characterise these sports including; extreme,

alternative, lifestyle, whiz, action sports, panic sport, postmodern, post-industrial and new sports. While these labels are used synonymously by some commentators, there are differences which signal distinct emphases or expressions of the activities (see Rinehart, 2000; Wheaton, 2013). *Adventure* sports tend to be nature-based, and include more regulated forms of the activities, particularly in education-focused settings. *Action sport* is the term increasingly used by the sports industry, particularly in North America. Initially it described board sports such as skateboarding, snowboarding and surfing. It is now widely used, however, by corporations and media to describe adventure-based and lifestyle activities. Yet, as Jake Burton, the founder of *Burton* snowboards, suggests:

> I think what's a better moniker is maybe that it's a *lifestyle* sport, and a lot of the kids and people that are doing it are just completely living it all the time, and that's what distinguishes snowboarding from a lot of other sports. (Burton, 2002; cited in Wheaton 2004: 4; emphasis in the original)

Unlike some alternative and extreme sports, lifestyle sports are fundamentally about participation, not spectating, either in live or mediated settings. The term lifestyle sport reflects the terminology used by those who participate in these sports, and as discussed below, encapsulates the cultures that surround the activity (Wheaton, 2004; 2013). That is the term *lifestyle* helps encapsulate the ways in which participants, and consumers of the activities, seek out a particular *style of life*, a way of living that is central to the meaning and experience of participation in the sport, and that gives them a particular and exclusive social identity (Wheaton, 2004). Despite differences in nomenclature, most commentators see such activities as having presented an

alternative and potential challenge to traditional ways of 'seeing' 'doing' and understanding sport (see debate in Rinehart, 2000; Rinehart & Snydor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004).

Lifestyle sportscapes in the 21st Century

Lifestyle sports have witnessed unprecedented growth and have drawn participants and followers from increasingly diverse global geographic settings. They continue to develop through a unique historical conjuncture of global communication, corporate sponsorship, and entertainment industries, which recognise the lucrative potential of a global and affluent youth demographic (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). A variety of products, services, facilities and events have been created to cater for a growing consumer demand, shaped by consumer trends rooted in changing youth lifestyles and tastes. The self-defined 'worldwide leader' in action sports, ESPN's X Games (Rinehart, 2008) has played a central role in the global diffusion and expansion of the lifestyle sports industry and culture (Rinehart, 2000). In 1995, the inaugural summer X Games held in Rhode Island (US) featured 27 events in nine categories, ranging from bungee jumping to skateboarding. Following the success of the summer events, ESPN staged the first winter X Games in California in 1997, drawing 38,000 spectators and televised in 198 countries and territories in 21 different languages (Pedersen and Kelly, 2000). Blurring the boundaries between music festival and sporting event (Rinehart, 2008), the X Games have been hugely successful in capturing the imagination of the lucrative youth market. The 2002 X Games were watched by 63 million people globally and, in contrast to the ageing Olympic viewership, the average age of these viewers was 20 years (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). While in the early years the X Games were all based in North America, they

are now also held in Europe, Asia and South America (ESPN.go.com). Audiences have also become increasingly global. The Winter X Games 13, for example, was televised on ESPN's international networks to more than 122 countries (Gorman, 2009).

The outdoor, non-association-based and nomadic nature of these activities makes it hard to accurately measure participation levels. For example, few activities have formal clubs and participants move between different sites. However, from the available sources such as sales of equipment, market research surveys and wide-ranging media commentaries, it is evident that participation in many types of lifestyle and adventure sports continues to grow rapidly, outpacing the expansion of most traditional sports in many Western nations (Booth & Thorpe, 2007; Comer, 2010; Jarvie, 2006; Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton & Gilchrist, 2005). L'Aoustet and Griffet (2001) claim that in France any observable increase in sports participation can be attributed to non-institutionalised informal sport activities, with surveys showing that 45-60% of the French population now practise informal sports. Sport England's *Active People Survey*s also reveal the increasing popularity of more informal and individualistic sports and lifestyle sports specifically (see Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011). The ever-increasing body of participants and consumers range from the occasional participants who experience a range of alternative and traditional sports; to the 'hard core' committed practitioners who are fully familiarised with the lifestyle, argot, fashion and technical skill of their activity.

Increasing numbers of women and girls participate in many lifestyle sports (see Comer, 2010; Thorpe, 2011; Wheaton, 2013), and new consumer markets have

developed, including so-called 'tweens' and hen parties. There is some scepticism of the extent to which increasing numbers of female participants challenge the gendered discourses, representations, identities and power relationships in lifestyle sports. As Wheaton enquires, do lifestyle sports 'offer different and potentially more transformatory scripts for male and female physicality, than the hegemonic masculinities and femininities characteristic of traditional sports cultures and identities?' (Wheaton, 2004: 6). Recent research, across a range of sports, suggests that lifestyle sports present *opportunities* for embodied identities that differ from those in traditional sports (Mackay & Dallaire, 2013a; Olive & Phillips, 2013; Thorpe, 2013). In some lifestyle sports the boundaries of gender identity are expanded but, in most, sporting femininities continue to be 'framed by discourses and practices that perpetuate stereotypes of white heterosexual attractiveness, and masculinities based on normative heterosexuality and whiteness, skill and risk, working within, rather than subverting traditional patterns of gendered and bodily domination in sport' (Wheaton, 2004: 19). This is also the case for many other non-normative lifestyle sporting bodies such as African-American surfers (Wheaton, 2013). Nonetheless, while participants have increasingly broadened to include women, girls and older men, the core market has been middle-class white teenagers and young males, especially among urban activities such as skateboarding.

The ways in which consumers can experience lifestyle sports are also expanding and diversifying. This rapid expansion has led to fragmentation, with enthusiasts engaging in a wide variety of participation styles, supporting new and profitable niche markets (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). In surfing, for example, a range of participation styles co-exist including short boards, long boards, paddle-boards and body-boards. Skate-

boarding has street and park, ramps and bowl, long-boards and hybrids (Atencio *et al.*, 2009). Mediated sources have also proliferated, from traditional forms like DVDs, films and television shows to internet-based media (see below). There are also those who play video games, buy clothing and accessories, and experience activities through commercial, adventure tourism or education-based adventure-settings. These range from schools to organisations, such as the Scouting movement, to commercial outdoor education operations.

Lifestyle sports, and their associated lifestyles, are significant sites for identity construction and bear some of the central issues and paradoxes of late-modern societies, such as the expression of self-identity becoming increasingly self-reflexive, fluid and fragmented (Wheaton, 2004). In lifestyle sports, consumers are being sold a complete style of life, one that emphasises many of the aspirations of postmodern consumer culture (Wheaton, 2004). Like other 'alternative lifestyle' groupings that have emerged from the counter-culture, lifestyle sports involve 'locally situated identity politics rooted in lifestyle practices' (Hetherington, 1998: 3).

Youth studies and conceptualising lifestyle sports cultures
Sport researchers have adopted a range of concepts and theoretical approaches for examining and conceptualising sporting-based collectivities and their lifestyles and identities. Useful conceptual tools include: subworld (e.g. Crosset, 1995), Bourdieu's ideas of field and distinction (e.g. Kay & Laberge, 2002) and Stebbins' (1992, 2007) serious leisure. Here we focus on subculture, lifestyle and identity as conceptualised within the tradition of youth studies in the UK, which we argue are terms also useful

for conceptualising and mapping the cultures of lifestyle sports, and particularly the construction and performance of social identities.

Lifestyle

Despite concerns that as a concept lifestyle lacks theoretical clarity, when used in the sense proposed by Chaney (1996) and Miles (2000), it helps signal that in late capitalism lifestyle is intrinsically linked with patterns of consumption. As King and Church (2013: 68) note, 'Whilst identity is a personal project, lifestyles are a means of personal, social and cultural expression. They capture how social actors understand themselves both as individual entities, and as part of emergent types of networks and groups of social identification inherent of late modernity.' As illustrated above, the participants and consumers of these activities seek out a particular *style of life* that is central to the meaning and experience of participation in the sport and that give them a particular and exclusive social identity (Wheaton, 2004: 4). However while youth in Western societies create identities through consumption, lifestyles are also 'manifestations of the ways young people negotiate with structural constraints in their everyday lives' (Miles, 2000: 35). So, as Miles (2000: 18) argues, we need to conceptualise the concept of lifestyle in a way that 'actively addresses the duality of structure and agency.' It is in this sense that we can start to understand the significance of lifestyle in these sporting cultures. Their consumption is a socially and culturally constructed act, underpinned by determinants of choice such as age, class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and which cannot be understood simply in terms of market dynamics, nor in terms of a 'position which seeks to preserve the field of lifestyles and consumption, or at least as a particular aspect of it (such as lifestyle

sport), as an autonomous playful space beyond determination' (Featherstone, 1991: 84).

Subculture

Various conceptualisations of subculture have historically been and remain influential in the study of lifestyle sports (e.g. Beal, 1995; Humphreys, 2003; Wheaton, 2007). Since the late 1990s, subcultural scholarship in the context of youth and style has undergone substantial revision, largely in response to criticisms of previous research from or inspired by the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (e.g. Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003a). The body of work (referred to as post-CCCS youth studies), which has (re)conceptualised 'subculture', has received extensive airing in the sociological literature, and is the basis for an extensive discussion in Wheaton (2007). Here, therefore, we highlight key points for understanding lifestyle sport cultures, and their identities.

The first point to note is that the term 'subculture' is limited in its applicability to many contemporary youth contexts. It is suggested that more temporary, transient gatherings or 'postmodern tribes' (Featherstone, 1991: 111) characterised by 'fluid boundaries and floating memberships' (Bennett, 1999: 600) have replaced subcultural communities, particularly in style-based contexts. Nonetheless, we can still usefully think about lifestyle sports as subcultures. Many lifestyle sport participants demonstrate more stable, shared and uniform notions of subcultures and forms of status and identity (Kiewa, 2002; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Wheaton, 2003). As Hodkinson's (2002) assessment of the contemporary Goth scene concluded, the 'bounded form' taken by the group did not fit with the postmodern emphasis on

cultural fluidity, but could be conceptualised as a re-working of subculture. Hodkinson documented 'group distinctiveness, identity, commitment and autonomy' (2004: 136), terming these aspects as 'cultural substance'.

The second point is that the 'post-subcultural studies' approach has potential for understanding the cultural politics in lifestyle sports (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2013). The approach can help to map, understand and explain the complex and shifting power relations involved in the commercialisation of youth cultures before, during and after the group becomes incorporated into the mainstream. It also brings a greater sensitivity to the multiple voices, subjectivities and experiences *within* the subcultural group – including the marginalised – and can expose the ways in which forms of subcultural capital (economic, physical, embodied, etc.) underpin these power relations and status hierarchies. Post-structuralist conceptions of power at play in post-subcultural theory provoked us to ask questions such as 'who is the subculture resisting, where is the resistance cited, under what circumstances is resistance taking place, and in what forms is it manifest?' (c.f. Barker 2000; in Wheaton, 2007). These questions are important for explorations of how we understand the adaptability of lifestyle sport and youth cultures and to explaining how sport consumers and participants re-work the images and meanings circulated in, and by global consumer culture (e.g. Edwards & Corte, 2010; Rinehart, 2008 ; Stranger, 2010).

Third, while recognising the importance of (and dominant focus on) micro-political dimensions in analyses of subcultures, there has been a failure to attend to their 'macro political context' (Martin, 2002: 79). Somewhat paradoxically then, at a historic conjuncture when youth protest activities – such as the anti-globalisation and

anti-Western movements – have bourgeoned, post-subculturalists have tended to under-politicise youth formations (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003b). The emergence of environmental protest groups like Surfers Against Sewage provide examples of the politicisation of lifestyle sports cultures. Subcultural research, in lifestyle sport as in other spheres, must attend to both the micro-political – the politics of everyday life – and the macro-political, particularly issues of political economy and social stratification (Wheaton, 2013).

Identity

To understand (sub)cultural identity and how it is constructed, contested and (re)made, we have advocated an approach derived from cultural studies and post-CCCS approaches to youth subcultures (Wheaton 2007, 2013). Identity, from this perspective is a dynamic process undergoing constant transformation; about 'becoming' as well as being (Hall, 1990). Drawing on Butler's (1990, 1993) work on gender as a 'performative enactment,' Muggleton (2000: 154) suggests that subcultural identity can usefully be seen as a performance that is never fixed or determinate, but is in a state of flux and change. Central to these identity performances however are the ways in which we perceive others as locating us, and what differentiates us. As the wide-range of empirical research on youth in the cultural studies tradition has demonstrated, claims to authenticity are central to the internal and external status hierarchies in youth subcultures; 'authenticity is something sought, fought over and reinvented' (Brunner, 1989; cited in Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003: 9).

The lifestyle sport participant's group identity is marked by a range of symbolic markers, extending from the specialist equipment used and clothing, to the vehicles driven (such as the long-term status of the VW kombi van in surf culture) and musical taste. There are also less 'visible' aspects that contribute to the social construction, performance and regulation of embodied identity including argot, 'attitude', forms of physical competence and prowess, and the use of space. As research across a range of different street, mountain and water-based lifestyle sports has demonstrated, although taste and style play an important part in constructing a distinctive sporting identity, members cannot 'buy their way into' the core of the culture (e.g. Ford & Brown, 2005; Thorpe, 2011; Wheaton, 2000). Rather, for core participants, 'authentic' identity tends to be constructed around the embodied performance of the activity, around 'doing it' (Wheaton & Beal, 2003).

The negotiation of space for the expression of community and subcultural identities has long been a thread in youth subcultures (which can be traced back to both the CCCS and Chicago School traditions), essential to how young people define themselves vis-a-vis adults and other young people and how they fashion self identity. More recently, however, the 'spatial' turn in the social sciences (Warf & Arias, 2009) – particularly through the influence of cultural geography – has alerted youth researchers to the ways in which power inequalities are played out and reproduced through space. As we explore below, the impact of spatiality in lifestyle sporting spaces, exploring the competing uses of social space, and how 'different social groups appropriate and mark out social spaces' (Bennett, 2000; 53), is a growing and productive thread. We consider two spaces considered important to wider processes of developing lifestyles and identities linked to youth leisure activities: lifestyle sport

as practised in the urban environment and the impacts of digital media and virtual space in shaping lifestyle sports cultures.

Lifestyle sport in the city

What is increasingly apparent as the 21st century lifestyle sportscapes are surveyed is that an alternate spatial configuration is emerging. Sports once practised solely in nature – climbing, surfing, snowboarding, kayaking – can be played in purpose-built, commercialised and controlled artificial settings. Climbing walls, snow domes, white water courses, and indoor skydive centres are popular with young people and have put many provincial towns on the sport tourism map (van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). This trend can be easily dismissed as another sign of the incorporation, commercialisation and commodification of lifestyle sports to the needs of multinational business; or, following George Ritzer's Weberian analysis of the rise of rationalised and calculable products in modernity, an all-to-be expected provision of Disneyfied child-centred and 'safe' environments to satisfy postmodern consumer tastes. Commentators have therefore seen alternative sport as a 'co-opted' sporting movement, increasingly controlled by transnational corporations and media conglomerations in search of a lucrative teenage male consumer audience (see Rinehart, 2000). However, as research from the Netherlands has found, the adventure/control, nature/technology, outdoor/indoor binaries present in rigid conceptualisations of lifestyle sports are not helpful as such facilities blur the boundaries between traditional and lifestyle sports. A variety of market segments are catered for and the products offered typically emerge from close interactions between producers and consumers (Salome & van Bottenburg, 2012). We concur with Rinehart and Grenfell (2002: 310) that a continuum is required to understand young

people's agency in determining the subcultural meanings and identities that cohere around lifestyle sport space, and which may render sites as inauthentic or authentic.

A grass-roots, do-it-yourself ethic persists in lifestyle sporting cultures around the world. Peripheral places in towns and cities are important to young people in terms of symbolic ownership; a site to hang-out, where adolescents can exercise autonomy and express identities in ways that are important to the making of the self. These areas can be defined, following Bauman's discussion of 'empty spaces', as 'public but not civil', existing on the 'edgelands' of cities in sites surplus to the needs of planners, government and landowners (Bauman, 2000: 94-104). However, users conceptualise these spaces as sites of freedom and possibility outside of commercial and policy interests in the urban landscape (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 1999). The emergence of lifestyle sports in 'empty spaces' is well-documented. Improvised sites – skateparks, BMX tracks, parkour training areas – have been constructed throughout towns and cities across the world; a testament to the self-organisation and initiative of children and adolescents to determine their own leisure practices (see Edwards & Corte, 2010). In the case of BMX tracks, for instance, Rinehart and Grenfell (2002) note the considerable material and emotional investments made by young people in creating and managing a site and the sense of 'ownership' and accomplishment that accrues. The negotiation of space is habitually achieved not through expensive resources, but body performances and interactions with the environment, so that mere presence of participants and subtle marks etched onto the sporting environment – scuff marks and graffiti tags – stakes a claim to occupation (Saville, 2008; Vivoni, 2009). Informal occupation and territorial marking could be considered as a deliberate spatial tactic, an appropriation of neighbourhood space beyond the surveillance and regulation of

adults, sometimes necessitated because access to and ownership of private space is denied to them (Childress, 2004; Robinson, 2000). Thus, 'hanging around, and larking about, on the streets, in parks and in shopping malls, is one form of youth resistance (conscious and unconscious) to adult power' (Valentine *et al.* 1998:7).

However, where the histories of lifestyle sports are concerned it is important to remember that 'empty spaces' are not necessarily the 'zone of inattention' identified by Bauman (2000: 103). Proposed builds can create polarised community debate around pro-social and anti-social behaviours expected of participants (Taylor & Marais, 2011). Skate parks in particular have been subjected to negative community reactions around unwelcome externalities – noise pollution, in particular – and associated experimental, illicit or deviant behaviours that could occur – e.g. drinking, drug use, graffiti (see Goldenberg & Shooter, 2009). As Steyn explains, 'Skateboarders themselves did little to help this negative image as the subculture developed in the 1980s and the dynamics of their identity became framed by aggressive attitudes, notions of indifference and rebellion, spatially and bodily destruction, and competition' (Steyn, 2004; cited in Drissel, 2013: 115-116). The moral panic over 'unsavoury types' has extended into other forms, styles and scenes within lifestyle sports. Street skaters have come into conflict with police and civic authorities (Vivoni, 2009) and its legal repression is witnessed in many cities around the world. Similarly, the 'recreational trespassing' exercised by urban explorers in London is facing legal challenge on the grounds that participants breach security and cause criminal damage to subterranean and derelict sites that were once part of public infrastructure (see Garrett, 2013; Self, 2014).

From the perspective of the young participants involved in lifestyle sports it is often the extra-sporting qualities that are significant. One of the primary drivers behind the creation of spaces for lifestyle sport is a setting for relaxation and social interaction. Young people value them as spaces to socialise outside the home. Champions for the development of skate and parkour parks emphasise their importance to adolescent development. Through managing their own space and leisure time, and relations with other users and authorities, young people can acquire self-confidence, learn new skills, and develop peer relations and friendships. For these reasons public authorities have supported the construction of purpose-built facilities in both suburban and urban locations as they are seen to offer potential resources for positive youth development and active citizenship (Bradley, 2010; Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011), as well as personal wellbeing and physical health (Dumas & Laforest, 2009). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that an 'everyday utopianism' (Cooper, 2013) is experienced and expressed in the efforts of teenagers and young adults to establish and evolve their own special sites, in which they articulate hopeful visions of personal transformation and social change (Atkinson, 2009; Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013).

Encroaching adult intervention has not always been welcome. Over time, the spontaneous and informal nature of lifestyle sports has been seen as under threat, with participants under increasing pressure from both commercial operators and state-funded or sanctioned leisure and education providers to professionalise, institutionalise and regulate. These processes are occurring at both the elite/professional level – to enable the activities to be incorporated in traditional forms of competition such as the Olympic Games, for example – and at grass-roots, where

conflicts around the use of space, or concerns about safety, are played-out (see Wheaton, 2013).

Under such pressures, divisions are all too common within lifestyle sporting cultures and this can impact on the types of users permitted into the sporting space. Borden (2001) discusses the 'territorialisation of skate parks' in which 'locals' claim a skate park as their own, a process that is underpinned by spatially defined insider ('us') /outsider ('them') statuses. Divisions are also present amongst users. Rinehart and Grenfell (2002: 307-308) show how BMX tracks can be captured by a 'middle-class grouping' with the social capital and resources to dominate the planning and management of the site, fashioning it according to their tastes and interests. Participants must also learn about cultural codes and signification. Status hierarchies are present in all lifestyle sports, central to boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and to claims to authenticity and the use of subcultural space (Wheaton & Beal, 2003). Such hierarchies, as Wheaton has shown in her studies of windsurfing culture, emerge from differences in types of activity, equipment, difficulty of manoeuvre to be mastered and executed (requiring most commitment in time) and the most hazardous or risky form of the activity (Wheaton, 2000). As such, lifestyle sport spaces, both informal and formal, improvised and purpose-built, possess complex social relations which can exclude some young people and which orient attitudes and behaviours towards other users of public space (Freeman & Riordan, 2002). There is still a need to consider minority participants' experiences of belonging and exclusion; particularly those that don not fit the 'somatic norm' of the white male. Revealing the gendered and racialised nature of lifestyle sports, and their articulations with sexuality, age and class, is key to understating status and identity in these spaces (Wheaton, 2013).

Further case studies are required of lifestyle sport cultures across a variety of urban settlements too. Not all cities are the same. They carry their own local cultural politics which defines the nature of sporting participation and opportunity, and which colours the social and political significance of the cultures and practices established therein. For example, turning to Northern Ireland, Drissel's (2013) participant observation and interviews with members of the Belfast skateboard scene illustrates how a transnational sport can deconstruct local sectarian divisions through the simple act of staking a subcultural space. He found that unlike the community and sporting spaces used by Protestants and Catholics in Belfast – which have been noted for being heavily segregated by ethno-religious divides – the informal street spaces colonised by young Belfast skaters provide an alternative, a shared space upon which new community relations can be built. Drissel writes: 'Rather than remaining in the fixed ghettoized stasis of Belfast's urban habitus, skateboarders have become *de facto* agents of progressive social change, acting to ameliorate and overcome social constraints through the productive use of space' (2013: 134). The case highlights the importance of analysing the micropolitical – an everyday act of resistance to the bifurcated spatial milieu of youth – alongside the macropolitical, in terms of incremental steps taken by young members of the community toward conflict resolution and peace-building.

As lifestyle sports emerge and take hold in communities, they excite interest, perhaps initial public concern, while over time avenues are explored between young people and external authorities over how the sports can be managed and the ways in which they can be harnessed to fulfil policy agendas for the public good (Gilchrist &

Wheaton, 2011). However, there remain problems over the ways in which lifestyle sports have been incorporated into state-sponsored schemes and the (unintended) forms of exclusion and disengagement that accrue (King & Church, 2014). As Daniel Turner's study of skateboarding and sport development in Scotland demonstrates, the needs of policy and community workers and those of the skaters can be at variance, and greater sensitivity is needed to the meanings and personal investments made by young people in the sport. Ostensibly, this is a call to develop shared understandings of the subcultural values and attitudes at play, so that we recognise the impacts the sport development community and its funding models make upon lifestyle sports. For Turner, the 'civilized skater' may well be a product of a bifurcation of participatory cultures. He writes:

> The punk-styled participatory behaviours [of skateboarding]… such as aggressive language and mannerisms, territorialism and a lack of interest, or indeed hostility, towards personal health and safety are, in the formal, managed skatepark, removed in order to satisfy other paying customers, insurance requirements and managerial imperatives related to maintaining a high-quality facility. (Turner, 2013: 1257)

As other research has found, neoliberal ideologies are increasingly present in both the informal neighbourhood parks and corporate-owned, purpose-built facilites and are rewriting the levels of responsibility and risk to be expected in lifestyle sport spaces and of participants (see Howell, 2008). And, as younger participants are attracted to these facilities, we also need to consider the extent to which purpose-built and managed facilities for lifestyle sports fit the requirements of modern family lifestyles,

the increasingly structured leisure time exercised by parents on behalf of family members, and the moral duties expected of the 'good parent'. It is not just a relationship between the participant and the (state) authorities that legitimise (or appropriate) the presence of activities within communities that is core to the investigation of youth lifestyles, but those negotiated with the people closest to them.

Lifestyle sport, youth culture and digital media

The mass and niche media are central to lifestyle sporting cultures, fuelling their popularity and transnational cultural influence, as well as being integral to the everyday lives of young people (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013). The growth of social media since the 1990s and its social and cultural impacts on adolescence and youth popular culture have been well-documented (Buckingham, 2013; Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Miegel & Olsson, 2012), making it necessary to consider here young people's virtual engagement and the interplay of online and offline practices in the making of sport cultures. The personal and professional uses of new media technologies have had a profound impact on how we view subcultural life, particularly the ways in which it enables interaction and exchange between subcultural groups and participants at a global level. According to Osgerby (2004: 193) 'offering instant communication across the world, new media technologies may have accelerated the dissolution of barriers of time and space, redefining notions of the global and local and offering possibilities for the development of new communities based on affinities of interest, politics or any form of cultural identity'. While we should remain cautious towards the alleged impacts of technologically-driven social change, new media technologies play an essential role in the social lives of many young people with websites, blogs and social media tools enabling

interaction and social networking between participants as well as being important resources for social support, learning skills, community organisation and the provision of information on participative opportunities and events.

Digital media are seen as an important resource for identity processes of adolescence. They are a mode through which transitions – into developed bodies, adult roles, significant peer relationships, work – can be managed and questions of 'becoming' are pursued (see Weber & Mitchell, 2008). By creating their own websites, webpages, blogs, or video channels, young people assemble digital media products, some by way of reflexive consumption of existing media outputs, others from materials available to them, which may be more personal. The result is often a bricolage of influences and ideas which says something about their hopes for the future, belongings and imaginings, as their identities and social relations adapt over time. In this way the internet blurs the relationship between producer and consumer. According to Miles (2003: 230) interactive online media, e.g. video blogs, 'are less about consumption (watching others' content) than exploring models for authorship and production ... it is the ability to participate as communicative peers that is much more significant and viable for distributed networks than our reconstitution into new consumers.' By making use of digital media young people not only extend user-generated content, they also engage in communities and forge interconnections essential to senses of belonging.

Recent research on lifestyle and action sport cultures has highlighted the creative ways in which internet usage facilitates identity projects for participants and how young adults are engaging in civic, community and political spheres as they pursue

their sporting interests in sometimes challenging social and cultural contexts (see Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013). MacKay and Dallaire's (2012, 2013a, b) study of the Montreal-based Skirtboarders, a skateboard crew of young women with an active online presence, reveals the importance of blogs as a form of opposition and resistance to hyper-masculine representations of skateboarding bodies and experiences which circulate within the subculture through traditional sport media and websites in ways that maintain a notion of 'authenticity' among core and elite skateboarders, reinforcing insider-outsider statuses (see Dupont, 2014; Wheaton and Beal, 2003). By blogging about a small skateboarding scene involving young women of varied social backgrounds and aspirations, the Skirtboarders create and circulate alternative discourses of the material and ideological meanings of the sport. Their blog profiles female skateboarders only, so promoting the sport among women and girls, with blog entries written by participants expressing a variety of female subject positions in ways that disrupt the normalising disciplinary power of the male-dominated skateboarding culture. Their online presence helps to create an alternative space for young women to articulate more complex poly-gendered identities and subjectivities thereby achieving the self-work and identity-building central to adolescence and young adulthood mentioned above.

Other lifestyle sports are inseparable from a digital environment. Kidder (2012) identifies a real/virtual dialectic at the heart of parkour which explains its transnational development and global cultural ubiquity. The Chicago-based participants studied by Kidder favour online videos accessed via YouTube and Vimeo to analogue printed coaching manuals and guides. They use social media to make sense of their sport through the sharing of moves, manoeuvres and styles and engage

in vibrant discussions on web forums about evolving practices and the deeper philosophical meanings attributed to parkour. User-created videos profile the talent of participants, whilst web tools and apps like GoogleMaps help to share information on training spots. Websites, blogs and social media are thus important repositories of local scenes and developing customs and cultures. These participant-led discourses, both textual and visual, amount to a dynamic and evolving onscreen pedagogy of the sport that novices must confront to understand its demands (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013). For Woermann (2012), in a discussion of freeskiing, the life-world of the freeskier is also partially a screen reality with digital media offering a layer of global comment and interaction which is fundamental to the achievement of bodily actions. In both of these cases digital media is helping to rewrite how we understand the embodied, athletic and aesthetic demands of lifestyle sports. The digital traces left by lifestyle sports participants reveal the convergences and possibilities of evolving sporting cultures as they borrow from a blend of media, genres, and cultural influences in their evolving scenes and local practices.

Kidder suggests such flows of information and interactions among users online and through offline practices are 'the very essence of Appadurai's global ethnoscapes – ideas and images from around the world become integrated into our aspirations and self-understandings. Even if these objects are incapable of interacting with us; we interact with them. And, we bring them into our other social interactions' (Kidder, 2012: 242). Through this interaction with digital media content parkour is more than a local phenomenon because participants must negotiate and orient themselves to the global imaginary of the sport. As Kidder states: 'traceurs grapple with fitting their actions and motivations into the virtual parkour canon they access in their lives on-

screen' (Kidder, 2012: 244). In this regard, it is less a case of globalisation of a culturally ubiquitous sporting form, and more an example of a truly 'glocalised' sporting culture as participants work with cultural artefacts and resources, making them meaningful to their everyday lives and local conditions (Giulianotti & Robertston, 2004).

Exploring local parkour cultures in the Middle East, Thorpe and Ahmad's (2013) research on traceurs in Gaza has shown how Internet videos of parkour became a prime inspiration for young participants. Traceurs in Gaza used social media sites like Facebook and YouTube as a form of informal transnational cultural exchange with other youth to articulate their vibrant local culture and the challenging contexts of participation. The videos and photographs uploaded to the sites relay the everyday risks of participation as bombs fall nearby and gunfire from Israeli forces interrupts training. They communicate the necessity to find spaces at the social margins to practice; the liminal spaces of abandoned pockmarked settlements and unmanned border walls. More importantly, the online presence of the traceurs – 'PK Gaza' – sends a message of hope in a conflict-ridden society. The consumption of the digital media products created by PK Gaza by others in the international parkour community has helped to raise awareness of the problems young people face living in Gaza. Some traceurs have been fortunate enough to be invited to Western Europe to show their skills. These exchanges have helped build alliances within and across the action sport community as participants advocate human rights and social and political justice. As Thorpe and Ahmad (2013: 21) conclude: 'we should not overlook their agency, nor should we assume them to be victims, ideologues or fundamentalists.' The vibrant

sporting culture profiled online shows the resilience of young people and their ability to snatch a degree of normality from the jaws of desperation.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have highlighted a range of lifestyle sports forms, cultures and practices and have critically reflected upon the importance of lifestyle, identity and subculture to understanding their growing popularity and global cultural appeal among young people. Much of the early commentary and research on the institutionalisation and commercialisation of lifestyle sports (reflecting the CCCS' approach to youth cultures) focused on the negative effects of incorporation of subcultures as a process that undermined the 'authentic', oppositional or resistant character of 'alternative' sports (Wheaton and Beal, 2003), typically conceptualising commercialisation as 'a top-down process of corporate exploitation and commodification' (Edwards & Corte, 2010; 1137). Through the limited examples provided here, we have shown the inventiveness and resourcefulness of young people and their ability to fashion their own cultures, identities and experiences in ways that are never fully determined by adults, public authorities, corporate interests, or socio-cultural norms. Whether it is the skaters of Belfast, Skirtboarders of Montreal, or the traceurs of Gaza our examples show that lifestyle sports are fundamentally about participation and performance – about *doing it*. The sports are adapted in relation to spatial opportunity, changing cultural tastes, financial pressures, regulatory constraints and the availability of new technologies, but continue to be established worldwide through the agency of young people seeking opportunities for both sport and sociability.

There remain challenging and significant questions to explore in the relationship between youth and lifestyle sports and the social contexts and determinants of participation should be to the fore. In particular, research must attend to the myriad ways in which difference and exclusion is manifest in and through these sport cultures: exposing the complex and contradictory articulations of race, gender, sexuality, class, nationhood, dis/ability in these informal but increasingly globally wide-spread spaces and settings in which lifestyle and adventure sports takes place.

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