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‘All the places we were not supposed to go’: A case study of formative class and gender *habitus* in adventure climbing.

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Abstract

This paper explores the origins of meaning in adventurous activities. Specifically, the paper reports on a study of 10 adventure climbers in the Scottish mountaineering community. The study explores how formative experiences have influenced engagement in adventure climbing. Work has been done on the phenomenology of adventure and how individuals interpret and find meaning in the activity – this paper goes a step further and asks where do these dispositions come from? Using Bourdieu's ideas of *field*, *habitus* and forms of *capital* to frame these experiences in the wider social environment, early experiences are identified that, for the subjects of this study, provide a framework for their later adoption of the 'adventure *habitus*'. Among these influences are: mainstream education, adventure education in particular, as well as broader formative experiences relating to factors such as gender and class. In addition, the study suggests that accounts differ between males and females in terms of their attitudes and dispositions toward adventure. This may relate to their respective experiences as well as expanding opportunities for both males and females. However, while the 'adventure *field*' provides a context where women can develop transformative identities these are nearly always subject to male validation.

Keywords: Habitus; Adventure Climbing; Gender; Middle Class; Formative.

Introduction

The focus of this paper is the application of Bourdieu's *Field* Theory to gender and class issues in adventure climbing. In particular, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and its interpretation of gender and class are applied to climber's accounts of how their formative experiences influenced their subsequent engagement in adventure climbing.

This paper follows previous studies that have applied Bourdieusian concepts to *adventure* sports (e.g. Thorpe, 2005, 2009; Brown, 2009). In relation to gender and class, there has also been a resurgence and re-engagement with Bourdieu's theoretical perspective in feminist work. This analysis therefore draws upon Bourdieusian concepts and some feminist perspectives to understanding gender and class positioning as well as the process of social change, agency and identity transformation (Relay, 1997; Skeggs, 2004; Ohi, 2000; Kraus, 2006; Mottier, 2002; McNay, 2000; McLeod, 2005).

***Field* theory**

Bourdieu developed *field* theory as a means of analysing social spaces. *Fields* have a specific history, entry rights and their own forms of *capital* (economic, social,

symbolic and/or other forms of influence that individuals can put to productive use). Closely related to the concept of *field* is *habitus*. *Habitus* relates to both social *fields* and forms of *capital* and is an embodiment of relational social structures and is defined as a set of internalised templates which govern and regulate mental process without being consciously developed and controlled (Bourdieu 1984).

Habitus is related to *field* in the sense that a person's particular past and present circumstances, social position and social context such as the family and education systematically order a system of dispositions that influence and shape personal perceptions, understandings and ways of being (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These formative structures (*Habitus*) are enduring and transportable into other *fields* and social contexts and provide, for example, a set of rules through which we bring our histories into our current situations. According to Bourdieu (1990), this is an ongoing dynamic process that influences how we make choices and act as social agents. These influences Bourdieu terms *practices* and this refers to the internal logic of the *field*.

In the context of this study, these concepts can shed light on the social contexts in which a set of attitudes and dispositions become internalized and shape their engagement with the act of climbing. In particular, *Habitus* links the objective social structure with the unique subjective experiences of the individual. Individuals are the product of unique social configurations but these are objective relational structures that produce regularity in social actions and practices.

Social class/social position

For Bourdieu the term social class can be too concrete, instead he uses the term *social position* as a more fluid and dynamic concept to convey how a person's position can vary between different *fields* depending upon the various forms of *capital* they hold within that *field*. For example, a climber may have large amounts of social *capital* within the *field* of adventure but considerably less within other areas of their social space.

The individual's system of social positions includes a historical dimension which affects, among other things, their aspirations and expectations, and through which the pattern of change and choices in their lives and lifestyles can be understood (Bourdieu, 1984). For example, middle class men and women may choose to engage with adventure sports over traditional sports because such choices are related to an aspirational trajectory expressed through different forms of cultural and symbolic *capital* and which may be indicative of social position, status and class (Ohi, 2000).

For Bourdieu (1992) class is more than just a group of individuals who share or inhabit a similar social position. To constitute a class they must collectively act and identify as a group who have the same interests (Crossley, 2008).

Feminist theory: *habitus*, *field* and social class

It has been argued that Bourdieu's own work tended to neglect issues of gender (Mottier, 2002). For Mottier (2002) a criticism that is levelled at Bourdieu's masculine domination has been the emphasis placed on gender differences rather than the ways inequalities of power have produced and reproduced those differences and inequalities. Kraus (2006) reiterates a number of general criticisms of Bourdieu's work

which has been identified as being deterministic and incapable of accounting for individual agency, reflexivity and comprehending the process of social change. This is also a view that is generally supported by Mottier (2002).

However, McLeod (2005) has noted that there has been a re-engagement with Bourdieu's work with the issues of identity and gender relations. For example, McNay (1999) and McLeod (2005) have revisited some of Bourdieu's key theoretical insights and have examined the effects of crossing different *fields* and how gender identities have been transformed or rearticulated.

Relay (1997) conceptualises class as encompassing a set of complex social and psychological dispositions and has drawn upon Bourdieu's *field* theory as a method for examining the dynamic between structural constraints and subjective forms of consciousness via the concepts *field* and *habitus*. Relay (1997); Skeggs (2004); Ohi (2000) also recognise that social positions are not fixed but dynamic and reflect historical changes in class or group structures as well as individual changes of a class agent through life history. Relay (1997) also acknowledges that class is not always overtly expressed or articulated but is still an important part of the tacit understandings and perceptions that they bring to relationships with others.

Skeggs (2004) also views Bourdieu's *field* theory as a way the individual can examine the positions and perspectives from which they speak and view the social world via reflective awareness. In the context of this study, it is possible to ask if climbers are aware of how their gender may affect the social space and social positions in which they climb and if it allows them to affect change in these areas?

Class and the climbing mountaineering *field*

Climbing and mountaineering encompass a range of activities that have historically come to develop a clear set of traditions and rules which collectively define what it is to be a climber (Brown, 2009; Beedie, 2008; Warde, 2004; Howitt, 2004). Tejada-Flores (1978) engages with the question: 'what is climbing'? He defines it as a range of different but related games with their own distinctive rules and hierarchy.

Climbing and mountaineering are well established activities that emerged in the early part of the nineteenth century and according to Beedie (2008) have had a close association with the notions of physical challenge, wilderness, solitude, contemplation, self-development, spirituality, mystery, authenticity and awe in the face of sublime nature that has continued to be influential and formative in the contemporary traditions.

In a Bourdieuean analysis of the tradition, Brown (2009) traces the changing *habitus* and *field* of post war (WWI & WWII) Scottish climbing – the context for the current study - from an activity of the social elite to a working class pursuit. The lack of economic *capital* of the new climbing class resulted in a creative response to climbing practices that impacted on the established *habitus* and *field* of the 'the grand bourgeoisie'. Brown (2009) identifies an important element of working class movement which relates to what he describes as a materialist basis to their interaction with nature as well as the proletarian philosophy (Brown, 2009) which marked a clear break with what had gone before but nonetheless a strong alignment with some dominant traditions such as: individualism; physical achievement; modesty of language, assertion of natural ability and superiority and selective entry into climbing clubs (Brown, 2009). What resulted was a culture that emphasised climbing ability as a basis of hierarchy and status (cultural *capital*).

The contemporary climbing *field* has subsequently experienced further changes through the impact of globalism, commercialism, neoliberalism and patterns of consumption from the post 1960 period. A new, professional middle class emerged, with a different set of *capital(s)*. This included more women and young people who brought with them alternative and subcultural influences into the traditional mountaineering and climbing *field* (Breivik, 2010).

Fletcher (2008) argues that such sports now appeal to members of the professional middle classes who in terms of their profile tend to work in areas which require higher education qualifications, engage in mental labour, are relatively well paid experience a high degree of personal autonomy whilst also requiring substantial self-direction. This aligns a number of related and associated *fields* and *habitus* such as the family, education, work and adventure climbing. This constellation of *fields* and *habitus* represent an influential form of socialisation that impacts on subsequent lifestyle and aspirational trajectories.

Adventure climbing

Adventure climbing is a type of climbing that takes place in more remote locations and emphasis is placed on the importance of the natural environment where there are real objective dangers. The natural environment provides the opportunity for climbers to develop and test their skills and mastery (Llewellyn, Sanchez, Asghar, & Jones, 2008) under conditions which are unpredictable and uncertain. Being in control and using their skills are emphasised rather than seeking out risk or risk cultivation for its own sake (Holland-Smith & Olivier, 2013). It is clearly acknowledged that adventure climbing carries with it the potential for serious injury

and even death (McNamee, 2008; Breivik 2008, 2010; Holland-Smith & Olivier, 2013). Climbing is an embodied experience where the climber becomes closely connected with the natural environment (Midol & Broyer, 1995; Humberstone, 2011). Adventure climbing has its own distinctive set of rules and ethics which define its practices and contribute to making this a meaningful activity.

Methodology

This study used semi-structured interviews to gather data from 10 participants over a period of 10 months. The subjects all came from the Scottish mountaineering community. Emergent themes were identified and analysed using interpretative methodologies (Crist & Tanner, 2003).

Participants.

Participants were recruited through advertisements in the *Scottish Mountaineer* (Scottish Mountaineering Council and British Mountaineering Council), posters at indoor climbing walls and through the Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI). The criteria for selection was based upon a minimum of 10 years' experience in adventure climbing at a grade of 'VS 4c' or above (this being the selection criteria for advanced climbing instructors in the U.K.).

Participants: (N=10: male n=6; female n=4. Age Range: (m) 31-54 years (f) 49-54 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant gender, age, profession, education and climbing background.

*Name, Age & gender	Qualifications, Profession & Education	Climbing, mountaineering & adventure activities
Paul, 45. Male	B.Ed. Professional mountain guide, coach and outdoor education. Comprehensive school and undergraduate education.	Mountaineering. Winter climbing and mountaineering. 25 years' experience. Scottish mixed routes, Alpine mountaineering, South America, Europe and North America.
John, 47. Male	Coach and mountaineering instructor. M.I.C. Comprehensive education.	Climbing and mountaineering. Scottish mixed winter climbing. European, North America and Himalayan experience.
Charles, 38. Male	B.Sc. Sport studies and post graduate in teaching. Outdoor education and coaching. Public school and university educated.	Scottish climbing and mountaineering. Mixed winter and summer (E.1 -5B, Grade 5+).
Mark, 47. Male	M.Sc. Chartered Engineer. Public school and university postgraduate education.	Mainly Scottish winter mountaineering. Substantial alpine, European and Himalayan climbing experience. Proactive in climbing new routes at grade 5+ - 7.
James, 31. Male	Full time climber and mountaineer, lecturer and mountaineering writer. Comprehensive school and post graduate university education. M.Sc. human physiology.	Mixed technical Scottish mountaineering, climbing multi pitch traditional rock routes and sport climbs. Proactive in developing new routes. Climbs at E8+ and 7+ in winter. Extensive experience in U.K. , Europe and North America.
Martin, 54. Male	Sports Development. B.Sc. Biological science. Comprehensive and university undergraduate education.	Climber extensively in the U.K. Proactive in developing new routes. Traditional and sport climbs. Some winter mountaineering experience. Climbs at E6+ mainly technical traditional routes.
Hazel, 54. Female	Health administration. PhD. Biological science. Educated in North America.	Scottish Mountaineering. Extensive experience in the U.K. European Alpine, North America and Himalayas. Climbs Scottish mixed winter routes at grade 5+ and technical rock climbs at E3+.
June, 52. Female	Environmental policy. B.Sc. Girl's grammar school undergraduate university education.	Scottish rock and mountain routes. VS 4C.
Paula, 51. Female	University Lecturer. PhD. Biological science. Girls grammar school and post graduate university education.	Scottish mountain routes. Extensive U.K. Experience. Some winter mountaineering but mainly technical traditional adventure climbing. Has been proactive in developing new sport climbs. Climbs at E1 5B.
Margaret, 49. Female	Teacher. B.Ed. Comprehensive and undergraduate college education.	Traditional adventure climbing in Scotland and U.K. Some sport climbing. Climbs at V.S. 4C.

NB: *Names have been changed to preserve anonymity

Methods and procedures

Ethical approval was granted by the University's ethics committee participant were informed that data would remain confidential and be anonymized prior to analysis and consent was given before interviews were conducted.

Data was collected using semi structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed for a period of 1 to 2 hours at either the participant's private home or work place.

The interview used key themes as a template to guide the interview. The themes comprised of: Participant background; current climbing activity; early formative experiences and their influence upon motivations and attitudes toward adventure; and family and education

This approach allowed the themes to emerge, was inductive (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and 'reflexive' in nature (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In this context the interviewer became an active listener and explored the emerging issues, interpretations, recollections, and connections with the participants through probing questions and asking for illustrations and examples.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed before being checked for accuracy by the researcher and the participants. In addition to the recorded data the researcher made written notes in a 'reflexive' diary, which were compared with the final transcriptions against the participants' accounts to ensure that they had not been unduly guided (Sparkes, 1998).

The approach enabled the researcher to explore the subjective realities of participants in their own language and terms (Dowling & Naess, 1996; Jones,

Armour & Potrac, 2003). Others have also argued that the appeal of this approach is that it allows for the exploration of life experience in relation to the contemporary cultural and structural settings (Roberts, 2002). Rinehart (2000) and Mintel (2001) argue that adventure sports are best understood by the meanings, values and statuses that are developed from within by the people who participate in them. The researcher is a keen mountaineer and identifies himself as an experienced adventure climber with over 30 years' experience. As such he acknowledges that he shares a similar subject position to the participants.

This experience has enabled him to ask appropriate probing questions and to gain specific insights that would not otherwise be possible. However, it is also acknowledged that this position could create difficulties with regard to making assumptions, presuppositions and biasing the interview and data analysis.

Bracketing interviews were conducted in order to explore the researchers own presuppositions and to identify any issues that might bias the interviews and responses from the participants (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

This interview data was thematically analysed. An inductive, line by line, analysis was applied to identify individual units of meaning (VanManen, 1997). These units of meaning were organised as core themes, and sub-themes these were then linked with theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Results and discussion

From the inductive analysis three main themes emerged and these were: *formal education; extra-curricular education; and gender and the adventure habitus.*

The sub themes related to formal education were: relationships with formal education, including sympathetic and antagonistic dispositions, as a product of social position. For *extra-curricular education the sub themes were: transformation, integration and gender* structures, and pedagogic practices of adventure education in terms of transmission, integration and the construction of new identities. Finally, for *gender and the adventure habitus the sub themes were:* how life experiences and social spaces, that were factors in the individual becoming and identifying themselves as 'adventure climbers', are influenced by gender related experiences.

These emergent themes provide the structure for describing and understanding the results of the participant interviews.

Formal education

The participants came from a range of backgrounds and had different experiences of the education process. Nonetheless, an emergent theme was that all participants came to recognise that education could confer economic, cultural and symbolic *capital* that was instrumental in their being able to pursue their chosen activity.

Bourdieu recognised that 'education' is a broad *field* with a primarily 'middle class' *habitus*. The *field* of education is closely associated with the middle class *habitus* and can confer both prestige and position (Crossley, 2008 p, 96). Because of its position and status, education has the power to maintain and impose legitimacy. Through their relationship with the educational *field*, Individuals develop a sense of place and belonging (Crossley, 2008). A relation exists between the *habitus* and the *field* in terms of a fit between the individual and their social position (May, 2000).

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) there is a two-way interaction between the *habitus* and the *field* which Bourdieu refers to as 'ontological complicity'. When an individual with a particular *habitus* encounters a social *field* of which they and their *habitus* is a product, they become ontologically complicit, a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Conversely, where there is a lack of complicity between the *field* and *habitus* or a 'Don Quixote' effect' exists in which practices generated by the *habitus* are mismatched because they are a product of a different *field* or objective conditions (Bourdieu, 1986). This is illustrated in different accounts of school experiences and how participants made sense of their position in the school and wider context. Such responses are an indication of relational positioning.

John makes the comment: 'that going to school in Leith was risky'. Although this was said with a degree of humour there was a clear recognition that getting through school required some negotiation skills: 'not to be seen as too much of a 'swot' and to keep in with the lads'. Paul stated that:

I was one of those kids who would hang out with the gangs and hang around street corners and do my own version of activity. This mostly involved running away from the police. I guess there are a few contradictions in that I love playing and watching rugby. It was one of the things that I had success at. There's a bit of me that likes to do this in my own way and I control how I do that, I don't become part of the herd. I've always liked the fact that outdoor activities were about that. Even as a kid I was my own person even when I was in the classroom. The bastards [teachers] wouldn't grind me down. I wouldn't join in when I didn't want to. I'm sure that I was a pain in the arse.

Conversely, the female participants expressed a reasonably close association with the values of main stream formal education and viewed themselves as being academic. (Two of the women had completed PhDs and the others had undergraduate degrees). There are no concrete illustrations where they resist or are in opposition to authority, or push the boundaries. There is a sense in which these women tend to conform and use existing structures to access new opportunities.

For all of the participants, future interests were very much tied up with the education system. This is particularly evident in the relationship between gender and social class and their relationship with employment and paid status (Skeggs, 2004). Professional developments were dependent on gaining academic qualifications. All the participants had acquired advanced academic and or professional qualifications. All but one of the male participants had an undergraduate degree but had advanced professional qualifications, and indicated that they have accumulated high level cultural and symbolic *capital*.

Charles and Mark both went to well established and prestigious public schools. They both reported that their experience of school was enjoyable and they both excelled and gained confidence and self-belief. Their relationship between their *habitus* and social *field* suggests one that is ontologically complicit. Mark's example illustrates this: "School was forward looking and it had a tradition where academic excellence and sport participation was encouraged".

Paul's response which is given as a specific illustration can be interpreted as being about negotiating interests and power and engaging in strategies which would increase and accumulate *capital*. Bourdieu (1977, 1990) uses the analogy of the game to illustrate how *fields* operate as social systems where agents adopt different strategies in order to gain an advantage over others, but social agents do not enter

these *fields* with a complete understanding of the rules of the game. Their understandings gained through past experience provide a perspective through which they interpret these rules and they are developed through a process of immersion. So while pushing the boundaries might initially seem to be related to opposition it can be interpreted as learning and expressing key dispositions central to the dominant middle class [masculine] *habitus*. According to Connell (1995) this natural disposition is central to the construction of masculinity. This is about learning what it is to be masculine and is a form of compliance to the dominant social order.

Echoing Willis (1977) studies of class and education, Paul recognises how middle class lads get middle class jobs and engage in middle class alternative sports. Paul recognises how his professional work impacts on his life and how he needs to have the money and resources to climb. There is an instrumentality between education and work and between work and his leisure.

Climbing dictates my job. Climbing is something that I do in my free time. I made career decisions and chose jobs in Scotland so that I could climb and I would consider that this is my main and core activity. I'm passionate about it and have participated in it non-stop for nearly 30 years.

Extra-curricular education: Transformation, integration and gender

Adventure Education is a broad concept that encompasses a range of philosophies related to experiential education, personal growth and development in the outdoor context (Miles & Priest, 1990). However, common themes centre on the belief that there is educational value in terms of personal and inter-personal development in pursuing adventure. Another theme is the belief that wilderness and quasi-

wilderness places provide a qualitatively different learning environment to the traditional school classroom. As such, adventure education can be said to represent a set of 'values' and attitudes, as much as the idea of a physical place. In Bourdieuean terms, this type of education is a social place as well as a personal experience which constitutes an 'adventure education *habitus*'.

In Scotland, adventure education has been delivered in an extracurricular context away from the school, often as residential programmes. Teaching has been delivered with experiential, student centred approach (Mortlock, 1984). These structures are more horizontally integrated and the boundaries between teachers and pupils become more blurred, fluid and less distinct. An effect of this is to preserve feelings of choice, freedom and flexibility that are often motivational factors for adventure participants (Bisson & Luckner, 1996).

It is argued that because the structures and practices found within this pedagogy become less visible and are in some case invisible, this masks the power relationships which are more evident in the formal and tightly structured school curriculum. The boarding (i.e. private) school context represents a total institution where students are more deeply immersed in the school context and so the boundaries between traditional and experiential approaches may be less distinct.

The adventure education context transmits the *habitus* of education and adventure effectively through students being immersed in the social context. According to Fletcher (2008) adventure sports and professional class *habitus* share a number of the same core dispositions which include and are summarised as: self-discipline, self-reliance, deferred gratification, asceticism, willingness to face risks and the pursuit of continual progress. It is argued that the *habitus* of the professional middle class cultivates a number of these dispositions. As a consequence of this,

adventure climbing is valued by this class position because it is a site for the accumulation and display of *capital(s)* appropriate for this particular class membership (Fletcher, 2008). Engagement with higher levels of adventure climbing require particular types of skills and are associated with accumulated *capital* particularly cultural, human and symbolic forms of *capital* which confers distinction and status (Bourdieu, 1984). Most specifically this relates to the emphasis placed on technical climbing ability (Brown, 2009) and the alignment with dominant masculine and class dispositions which are seen as representing the natural order (Bourdieu, 2001).

Therefore, while contexts are viewed as being transformative and provide the opportunity for both males and females across differentiated social positions to develop and construct alternative identities and social *capital* this may be conditional on conformity to the dominant orthodoxy and power (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As such, adventure education can be seen as alternative but nonetheless complimentary form of socialisation within the wider educational *field*.

From the participant's accounts, teachers were influential in providing opportunities and experiences which were significant to the young climbers. These included visits to residential outdoor centres and in some cases trips to the Cairngorms and Alps.

Mark: It had a tradition of going to the Cairngorms and they had been doing this for quite a number of years and it became an established thing. It taught us to look after ourselves – we were not allowed to just head off on our own, it was structured, but it certainly felt quite free. At school I used to go running over the local hills every day. I loved being out there. I felt I real sense of freedom and that was important.

There is a sense in which the new context, allowed Paul to express his natural physical prowess as an athlete, but also engage with the educational values in a way that he viewed as 'face saving'. Paul explains that he eventually got involved in a school outdoor activity group where they visited the Lake District. It is evident from his account that this was a powerful and formative experience which contrasted with his usual school experiences of teachers and how they exercised their authority:

We got to the top of *Fairfield* and we ran to the bottom of the valley. Running and leaping off little crags and boulders all the way. I just remember that being a very powerful and key memory and thinking that it was really great. I didn't think the teachers would just let us go but they just let us go all the way to the bottom, it was fantastic. I remember even as I was doing it, thinking God, you know, I'm a mile ahead, I'll have to be careful cos I don't want to break my ankle and get into trouble but it wasn't something they had mentioned so whether it was incompetence or a calculated risk they sort of thought we'd be responsible I don't know, but it was certainly an odd feeling. I remember being up there and just loving it, it was a beautiful day and I just buzzed all the way home with the fact that I was being allowed to run up the hills. It was like a dream come true at the time. I never thought I'd be able [or allowed] to do that. None of it was planned and suddenly I just realised that you can run in the mountains.

In contrast Martin was reasonably academic and enjoyed science and biology but states that he viewed himself as being: 'utterly crap at conventional sports' and a similar view was expressed by James who also saw himself as being academically able but hated conventional school sports such as Rugby and football.

This perspective of himself was constructed through direct social comparison with other boys:

When I started nobody knew anything about climbing. It was definitely not part of mainstream sport. I was utterly crap at conventional team sports such as Rugby and Football. I became attracted to it because it was something that I was good at. I liked the fact that it was a marginal minority sport that was out of the ordinary and only a relatively small number of people took part in it. I don't like normal mainstream sports – I like sports that are a bit on the edge and not an established conventional part of mainstream society. I don't like authority – being told what to do and my life being prescribed by other people, rules and regulations”.

A similar view was expressed by James:

I hated sport at school; I absolutely hated it and think there were reasons why I hated it. The main thing was that I wasn't very confident and was probably fairly low in the social pecking order. I wasn't particularly interested in football. As far as rugby was concerned I was a third of the size of most people. They were all bigger than me. I didn't like rugby very much and nothing else appealed. The other aspect that I found negative was that it was forced on you.

For all of the women climbers, formative adventure activities altered the normal gender role, expectations and gender dynamics. The integrated structures provided an opportunity to access new social *fields* where these dynamics had been suspended and stated that they felt that there was a greater level of equality. They

also recognised that in this context they could transcend, rather than challenge, the established gender norms. For example, in Paula's case illustration:

We went on a few trips which were probably quite brave of my mum because she was letting her teenage daughter go away with all of these lads. Whilst at school I remember climbing in North Wales. It was pouring with rain but I absolutely loved it. We climbed this really easy route but it was interesting. It was about being outside, although we did spend a great deal of time in the café. I now realise that's what you tend to do on climbing trips. I wanted to do more mountain type of climbing and walking activities and was given the opportunity to go to Greenland and the Alps.

For many of these women, school channelled them towards traditional sports such as hockey and netball, which reinforced their difference and status in relation to their male counterparts. Climbing was a new and empowering experience and could be interpreted as being transformative particularly for those who had felt a degree of mismatch between their *habitus* and the school *field* either or through a sport or academic context.

Gender and the adventure *habitus*

For Bourdieu early experiences are particularly significant in that they form enduring templates which the individual carries into other social domains and experiences (Bourdieu, 2001; Skeggs, 2004). In term of the learning process, Lying (2005) argues that early experiences are essentially about learning and development through trial and error and confronting the potential consequences.

From the participant's accounts differences between males and female formative experiences were identified that relate to apparent pre-dispositions to seek out new experiences and sensations; what Zukerman and Kuhlman (2000) and Breivik (1999) refer to as *approach behaviours*. Such differences between males and females have been explained as reflecting a natural, genetic and biologically based predisposition (Zukerman & Kuhlman, 2000). However, these differences can be explained as reflecting a gendered opportunity structure and differences in socialisation rather than a natural or biological disposition.

According to Bourdieu (2001) those who see gender as being biologically situated ignore the importance of historical power and social construction. In society, the biological view allows gender differences to become normalised and naturalised. This is what Bourdieu refers to as 'Doxia', a way of legitimizing existent power relations through the *habitus* in the form of day to day practices and interactions (Krais 2006).

From the accounts of male participants, the formative *habitus* seemed to emphasise taking control, challenging, pushing the boundaries and engaging in risk in situations which are not under supervision or surveillance. This indicates a relatively high degree of autonomy and agency and corresponds with the dominant male *habitus*, Bourdieu's (2001) *Libido Dominandi*, that is about taking and being in control (Brown, 2006).

For the women climbers interviewed they seem to follow more established traditional opportunity structures related to their own perceived gender. These opportunities are made available to them either through the family, school or organised extracurricular activities. In this case, the formative *habitus* seems to include ideas of constraint, surveillance and external appropriation to how they

engaged with these experiences, and this corresponds to a broader female *habitus*, *Amour Fati* (Bourdieu, 2001), that is about accepting ones destiny.

From the participant interviews these two positions are illustrated:

John makes reference to the freedom he saw that his parents allowed him to have, although this was more about a lack of formal boundaries and structures. John takes advantage of the opportunities to explore environments which were understood to be limbic and forbidden and these sentiments and values are translated into individual expressions of those structures and relationships:

I was given a reasonable amount of freedom, probably a bit more than my folks [parents] realised. In Leith there were inner-city landscapes where they were clearing slums. From a kids point of view these were potential adventure playgrounds. Although they were in the city you had quite country areas. Water and all the places that we were not supposed to go, and if we had been caught we would have got a real skelping. We did it and that was the exciting bit. I think that was the risk, you were going somewhere where you were not allowed to go to [forbidden limbic space] and you were keeping it all hidden, but you didn't want to fall in and get wet or come home covered in dust. You become pretty good at hiding your tracks.

There are examples which relate to a broader understanding of the approach behaviour and general sensation seeking. For example, engaging in radical politics and subcultural youth cultures: John's remarks illustrate this:

I used to be involved with a punk band through my teens at a time when I was getting involved with hillwalking. I eventually got pissed off with the whole punk scene. Climbing offered me a chance to do something different and explore myself. It was a chance to go off with two fingers to things. It was about getting a buzz from a reasonable anarchic lifestyle. I enjoyed the freedom.

These formative experiences are essentially about learning and development through trial and error and confronting the potential consequences (Lyng, 2005). Some male accounts present the activity(s) as potentially dangerous and emphasise an apparent lack of skill, knowledge and appropriate equipment. For both males and females acquiring skills and knowledge is presented as a process which involves a form of apprenticeship characterised by episodes of experiences in different contexts with peers and more experienced role models. Role models are evaluated in terms of their qualities and provide examples of excellence and an insight into what they might become.

Paula illustrates this:

My friend and I were both about 17 and my sister was 16. We were doing our DOE (Duke of Edinburgh Award) award. It was not as structured as it is today. When we did it you had to organise it yourself and we were quite interested in rock climbing. We didn't know anybody who went rock climbing, but my mum knows a colleague whose partner climbed. He used to meet us at the local sport centre climbing wall.

These women reported that *capital* and status as a climber was gained through association with better male climbers. As such they become carriers of *capital*

(Bourdieu, 1986) which enables them to accumulate status and *capital* as climbers. Association with male climbers has facilitated their access to opportunities that enable them to develop as climbers. Paula reported that she was introduced to climbing through her boyfriend who took her climbing and introduced her to a network of climbers. Paula: "I felt that I had to prove myself to men in terms of my skill, competence, mental toughness, strength and physical endurance in order to be accepted as an equal". Hazel also stated that she became involved in climbing after leaving university by a colleague who introduced her to a climbing club in *Sheffield*. She stated that this was a positive experience:

"I found the club to be inclusive and encouraged me to climb with more experienced climbers who were usually male and better climbers. Early on in my climbing career I got in with people who were operating at a very high level and they gave me a good idea about what was possible. They were inspirational and encouraging rather than competitive".

Hazel acknowledged that climbing with men had helped her to develop as a climber she felt that this also impacted on her autonomy. "When I climb with better male climbers I tend to defer to them when making climbing decisions and will allow them to climb the more interesting and technically demanding pitches". For Hazel this reflected a broader attitude towards women climbers that they are expected to climb lower grade routes than male climbers especially when two women climb together. Women reported that climbing with other women is a fundamentally different experience than climbing with male climbers (West & Allin, 2010) and that they will take more responsibility for making decisions and lead more technically demanding routes. Women state that they feel more empowered

and become more assertive and that the experience is fundamentally different and based on different dynamics. Paula stated: “when I climb with other women the experience is very different, there is a more equal and empathetic relationship and we are more likely to withdraw from climbs if we feel that the conditions are not favourable”.

Conclusion

Personal experiences of adventure are strongly influenced by wider social spaces and the disposition contained in the *field* and the *habitus* of these spaces. Feelings towards adventure and how it influences personal identities are grounded in social spaces that reflect dispositions that are primarily middle class and institutionally located in education and adventure education. This may affect how easy or otherwise it is for individuals from differing background to access the various forms of *capital* necessary in order to participate in adventurous activities.

This paper provides an insight into the formative influences on both males and females in adventure climbing and how these have impacted on the adventure climbing *habitus*. For the men interviewed there seems to be a sense in which their status is subject to validation against dominant hegemonic criteria that is central to mainstream sport culture. Their engagement with adventure sports such as adventure climbing emphasises the importance of control, mental ability, skill and technical ability over physicality and strength. This reinforces the centrality of the politics of the body (Krais, 2006) across sport more generally and places adventure climbing at the edge of mainstream sports.

For both males and females engagement with adventure climbing has implications for their status and position. Adventure climbing provides the opportunity for participants to demonstrate their middle class credentials and *capital* (Fletcher, 2008).

However, gender variation also permeates the activity. While women may access and move across these new emerging *fields*, construct new insights and identities (McNay, 1999; McLeod, 2005), and have been able to challenge some of the established expectations, climbing still tends to be male dominated. This reflects the fact that their gender identities still remain limited and determined largely through and by male validation (Thorpe, 2005).

The contemporary climbing *field* as illustrated by Thorpe (2005) [in snowboarding] is still a contradictory social context of both ongoing sexism mixed but with greater and expanding opportunities for women.

Traditionally, wilderness environments are seen as creating 'character', and other dispositions (Mortlock, 1984). The insight provided by this study suggests that much adventure education philosophy may be more properly understood as reflections of the current middle class *habitus*.

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