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Journal of Sport and Social Issues 2010; 34; 176
DOI: 10.1177/0193723510367770

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Trends

Bourdieu, Gender Reflexivity, and Physical Culture: A Case of Masculinities in the Snowboarding Field

Holly Thorpe

Abstract
This article contributes to recent debates between supporters of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as exemplified by R. W. Connell, and a new generation of gender scholars, as to how best explain the dynamic and fluid relationships between men, and men and women, in the early 21st century. Here, the author concurs with many of Connell’s critics and proceeds by arguing that recent feminist extensions of Bourdieu’s original conceptual schema—field, capital, habitus, and practice—may help reveal more nuanced conceptualizations of masculinities, and male gender reflexivity, in contemporary sport and physical culture. This author examines the potential of such an approach via an analysis of masculinities in the snowboarding field. In so doing, this article not only offers fresh insights into the masculine identities and interactions in the snowboarding field but also contributes to recent debates about how best to explain different generations and cultural experiences of masculinities.

Keywords
masculinity, Bourdieu, gender reflexivity, physical culture

A debate has recently emerged between supporters of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as exemplified by R. W. Connell, and a new wave of gender scholars, as to how best explain the dynamic and fluid relationships between men, and men and women, in the early 21st century.

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Since its emergence in the late 1980s, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been widely influential in theorizing about gender, particularly the cultural dynamics by which men establish and maintain dominance in society, in many disciplines. Recognizing notable shifts in contemporary gender relations, however, a new generation of men and masculinities scholars has emerged that is critical of any conceptual schema that locates all masculinities (and femininities) in terms of a single pattern of power—the “global dominance” of men over women (Connell, 1987, p. 183). More specific criticisms include the ambiguity of the hegemonic masculinity concept, its overemphasis on structure and dualistic model of hegemonic power, a tendency to focus on men and ignore women, a lack of attention to the relational aspects of gender, the privileging of negative aspects of masculinity, and the narrow representation of men’s subjectivities (see Demetriou, 2001; Donaldson, 1993; Edley & Wetherell, 1995; Martin, 1998; Miller, 1998; Pringle, 2005; Seidler, 2006; Speer, 2001; Star, 1999; Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Whitehead, 1998, 2002).

Summing up the thrust of recent critiques, Seidler (2006) asserts we can no longer assume the viability of a theoretical framework that emerged during the era of second-wave feminism:

We need to be aware of how gender relations have transformed within patriarchal cultures . . . This does not imply that patriarchal relationships have disappeared or that violence against women and gays has lessened, but such relationships do not carry the same legitimacy for young people who have often grown up within very different gender and sexual orders. They do not have the same concerns as previous generations; nor do young women and men identify the centrality of their relationships with feminism. (p. 3)

Similarly, Whitehead (1998) sees critical writing on masculinity locked in an unproductive, sterile and incestuous relationship with concepts that, while useful, have little more to tell us about men—and even less to tell us about multiple masculinities as ways of being, now apparent in late or post-modernity. (p. 61)

Thus, for those of us seeking to “relate to different generations and cultural experiences of masculinities” and femininities, it might be argued that the time has come to “break with some of the inherited frameworks and ask new kinds of questions” (Seidler, 2006, p. xxxvi).

In this article, I concur with many of Connell’s critics and suggest that a feminist reading of Bourdieu’s original conceptual schema—field, capital, habitus, practice—may facilitate fresh insights into the multiplicity, dynamicism, and fluidity of masculinities and gender relations in contemporary sport and physical cultures. To illustrate the potential of such an approach, I offer a case study of men and masculinities in snowboarding culture. Building on previous literature on masculinities in sport, youth
culture, and alternative or lifestyle sports (e.g., Beal, 1996; Evers, 2004; Ford & Brown, 2006; Henderson, 2001; Kusz, 2001; Robinson, 2008; Waitt & Warren, 2008; Wheaton, 2000, 2003; Wheaton and Tomlinson, 1998), and drawing from an extensive array of sources (e.g., interviews, participant observations) and cultural artefacts (e.g., magazines, films, Web sites, autobiographies, cultural histories) gathered over six years, the following discussion consists of two parts. This article begins with a brief introduction to recent feminist critiques and extensions of Bourdieu’s original work, and some comments on my methodological approach. The remainder of the article consists of two main parts. First, I offer a description of some of the practices and performances of four different masculinities identifiable across the global snowboarding field—“the grommets,” “the bros,” “the real men,” and “the old guys”—and the power relations between these groups. Here, I also discuss some of the reciprocal relationships between men and women in this mixed-sex snowboarding environment. Second, I consider the potential of the gender–habitus–field complex for explaining how some male snowboarders come to critically reflect on problematic aspects of the hypermasculine snowboarding habitus. Ultimately, this article not only offers fresh insights into the masculine identities and interactions in the snowboarding field but also contributes to recent debates about how best to explain different generations and cultural experiences of masculinities.

(Re)reading Bourdieu With Feminism: Beyond Hegemonic Masculinity and Masculine Domination

The influence of the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and gender order on critical gender research in sport studies cannot be overstated. Since the early 1990s, Connell’s conceptual schema has helped facilitate understandings of the gendering processes related to sport, particularly the “critiques of heavy contact, male-dominated sports such as American football and rugby union and the sexist and violent cultures that support such sports” (Pringle, 2005, p. 257). Despite their continued popularity among sports scholars, the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and gender order display fundamental inconsistencies and weaknesses when it comes to understanding the dynamic and fluid relationships between political categories of gender and between individual men and women in contemporary sporting cultures. Moreover, Connell’s relatively dualistic and reductionist model of power is insufficient for explaining the agency of sportswomen or the subjective gendered experiences of young men and women who have grown up in different social, cultural, and political contexts, and gender and sexual orders (Pringle, 2005).

Attempting to offer more nuanced understandings of men, masculinities, and the gendered body in contemporary sport and physical culture, critical sport sociologists are increasingly employing diverse theoretical, conceptual, and empirical approaches (see E. Anderson, 2009; Messner, 2007; Robinson, 2008; Wellard, 2009). Whereas some scholars are developing their own theoretical and conceptual approaches (see, for example, E. Anderson’s [2009] recent work on “inclusive masculinity”), others are progressing gender research in the field through ongoing and intense dialogue with
various critical positions in the social sciences (e.g., Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault; see, for example, Pringle, 2009; Pringle & Markula, 2005). The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, however, has gone largely unheard among critical sports scholars interested in gender. Notable exceptions include the work of Atencio, Beal, and Wilson (2009), Brown (2006), Kay and Laberge (2004), and Laberge (1995), who offer insightful theoretically informed analyses of the gendered sporting body, and particularly how male domination is reinforced and naturalized in various sporting cultures (e.g., skateboarding, surfing, adventure racing). In particular, Brown (2006) takes up Bourdieu’s observation–somatization–naturalization thesis explaining the “everyday embodied enactments of gender relations in sport” (p. 162). More recently, Atencio, Beal & Wilson (2009) draw on Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, field, habitus, and symbolic violence to offer an insightful analysis of gender and the skateboarding body. Somewhat surprisingly, however, these studies overlook recent feminist critiques and extensions of Bourdieu’s work that have been prolific and cogent.

For many years, Pierre Bourdieu had little to say about gender with most of his writings framed preeminently in class. In the article “La Domination Masculine,” however, Bourdieu (1990a) draws on his ethnographic research into the Kabyle of North Africa to show how “masculine domination assumes a natural, self-evident status through its inscription in the objective structures of the social world,” which is then embodied and reproduced in the habitus of individuals (McNay, 2000, p. 37). Although Kabyle is a peasant culture and his data were gathered during the 1960s, Bourdieu claims it exemplifies the ways in which gender hierarchies are maintained in modern industrial society. The publication of “La Domination Masculine” drew almost no reaction from feminist sociologists. It was only when the book version was released in 2001 that Bourdieu’s analysis was noticed. However, it evoked strong criticisms from feminist scholars who argued that it presents an ahistorical, androcentric worldview and is “largely restricted to analyzing the structural constraints of masculine domination” (Fowler, 2003, p. 479). According to McLeod (2005),

[Bourdieu] writes defensively [in Masculine Domination and] appears somewhat oblivious to the diverse range of important feminist work that has historicized gender division. Moreover, his insights into gender reproduce standard binaries of masculine domination and female subordination as if these structures are unitary, coherent and unchanged by and in contemporary social life. (p. 53)

Despite such criticisms, some feminist scholars—including Adkins (2003), Fowler (1997), Krais (2006), Lovell (2000), McCall (1992), McLeod (2005), McNay (1999, 2000), Moi (1991), and Skeggs (1997, 2004)—recognized the potential in Bourdieu’s social theory for “deepening and developing” (Walby, 2005, p. 376) feminist theorizing and set about deploying, rethinking, and critically developing his conceptual schema. Most of these studies have focused on the embodied gender experiences of women. In this article, however, I argue that recent feminist appropriations of Bourdieu’s...
original work may be critically extended to explain some of the complexities and
nuances of masculinities, and the relationships between masculinities and feminini-
ties, in the early 21st century; I illustrate the potential of such an approach via the case
of snowboarding.

Understanding Gender and Contemporary Physical Culture:
A Snowboarding Case Study

Snowboarding is a good barometer of the “generational shifts” in gender relations in
contemporary popular and youth cultures, and sports cultures per se. In the public
imagination, snowboarding has traditionally been viewed as an activity best suited to
young, White, hedonistic, rebellious males (see K. Anderson, 1999; Heino, 2000;
Humphreys, 1997; Thorpe, 2007a, 2007b). The distinctive personalities and styles of
early male snowboarders certainly contributed to the general public’s perception of the
activity and subsequent extreme labeling. While the hypermasculine image of snow-
boarding repelled many, representations of sexist, aggressive, and violent behavior and
hedonistic lifestyles of early professional male snowboarders combined to create a cul-
tural ideal that appealed to many adolescent males seeking a distinctive, youthful,
masculine identity. Today, with more than 75% of snowboarders under the age of 24,
and between 60% and 70% of all participants being male, young men in their late teens
and early 20s continue to constitute a dominant force at the core of the snowboarding
culture (Thorpe, 2007a). The majority of these snowboarders are White and middle-
upper class, yet there are signs that demographics are changing (particularly on the
margins of the culture); women increasingly occupy a physical presence in the sport,
culture, and industry (see Thorpe, 2005, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a), and men from
different ages, ethnicities, nationalities, and sexual orientations are also participating in
a variety of styles and engaging in an array of embodied cultural practices (Thorpe,
2009b). Within the highly fragmented contemporary snowboarding culture, ways of
talking, thinking, representing, and practicing masculine and feminine identities are
increasingly plural and in a constant state of flux.

Attempting to understand some of the complex gender relationships, practices, and
performances, within the snowboarding culture, I drew on a type of methodology
Bourdieu describes as “discursive montage” of “all sources” (Bourdieu & Wacquant,
1992, p. 66). More specifically, I engaged his key concepts in conversation with my
insider cultural knowledge of snowboarding as well as 14 “ethnographic visits” con-
ducted in six countries (Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the
United States) between 2004 and 2009. During this fieldwork, observations were
made in natural settings both on and off the snow (i.e., lift lines, chair lifts, resort
lodges, snowboard competitions, prize giving events, video premiers, bars, cafes,
snowboard shops). My ethnographic observations were developed in dialogue with 54
participants (28 female and 26 male) from an array of countries, including Australia,
Canada, Europe, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, and
the United States. In conjunction with my multisited transnational fieldwork and
interviews, I also gathered evidence from cultural sources, such as magazines, films, and Web sites, to help deepen my understanding of masculinities, femininities, and gender relations in contemporary snowboarding culture (see Thorpe, 2007a, 2009b). The multimethodological qualitative approach adopted in this study was central to developing the depth, complexity, and roundness of the data required for constructing a multidimensional social understanding of the tensions and power relations between men, and between men and women, in the global snowboarding culture. But even the richest caches of primary source materials “will speak only when they are properly questioned” (Bloch, 1952, cited in Hardy, 1999, p. 91). Adopting a gendered reading of Bourdieu’s conceptual schema—field, habitus, capital, practice—helped me “ask new questions” about gender in the snowboarding culture and facilitated fresh insights into the diverse masculine identities, the relationships between masculinities and femininities, and the potential for male gender reflexivity, in contemporary sport and physical culture.

Masculinities in the Snowboarding Field

Field refers to a structured system of social positions occupied by either individuals or institutions engaged in the same activity. Fields are structured internally in terms of power relations. “In order for field to function,” said Bourdieu (1993), “there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes, and so on” (p. 72). Although Bourdieu failed to consider the full implications of the concept of field in his work on gender, other theorists have claimed it has the potential to illuminate some of the “complexity and multilayeredness” of relationships between the sexes in contemporary social life (Mottier, 2002, p. 355). Recently, feminist scholars from various disciplines (e.g., education, youth studies, and women’s studies) have engaged with field to explain how gender norms and practices, and interactions between men and women, vary between and within different classes or groups in social fields (e.g., Allard, 2005, Hills, 2006, Huppatz, 2009). Adopting a gendered reading of field in another project, I have described female boarders as holding distinctive positions in each of the groups that make up the snowboarding field (e.g., professionals, core, weekend warriors, and poseurs). In so doing, I explain how the legitimate forms of femininity, preferred forms of capital (e.g., symbolic, social, cultural, gender), and gender relationships differ between groups in the contemporary snowboarding field (see Thorpe, 2009a). This examination of the interaction of gender and social group distinction in the snowboarding field supports Bourdieu’s claim that gender is a secondary principle of division. The embodied practices of snowboarders suggest that an individual’s initial capital is gender neutral, being fundamentally defined by their relative position in the structure based on their ability and commitment to the activity and lifestyle. Thus, in contrast to R. W. Connell’s theory of social stratification (i.e., gender order), Bourdieu’s conceptual schema helps us move beyond gender hierarchy. According to McNay (1999), the result of introducing such a notion
of differentiation into an understanding of the social construction of gender identities is that “masculinity and femininity can be seen as imbricated in complex ways rather than as opposed and separate categories” (p. 112).

Despite the potential of field for illuminating the multiplicity and fluidity of masculinities and femininities in various social spaces and places, it is somewhat surprising that it has been largely overlooked by scholars interested in men and masculinities. The work of Coles (2008, 2009) is a notable exception. Combining Bourdieu’s concept of field with Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity, Coles (2009) explores the possibility of multiple dominant masculinities operating simultaneously within various subfields bound by a “field of masculinity” (p. 30). According to Coles, within the “field of masculinity” there are “sites of domination and subordination, orthodoxy (maintaining the status quo) and heterodoxy (seeking change), submission and usurpation” (p. 36). Continuing, he describes individuals, groups, and organizations struggling to “lay claim to the legitimacy of specific capital within the field of masculinity” (Coles, 2009, p. 36). While Cole’s idiosyncratic interpretation of Bourdieu’s conceptual schema certainly offers some interesting possibilities for thinking differently about multiple masculinities in and across various social spaces, I find his notion of a “field of masculinity” problematic, primarily because it presents gender, and masculinity in particular, as a separate field.

According to some feminist scholars, gender does not constitute a specific social field as it is sometimes assumed but “enters into the ‘game’ of different social fields in ways specific to each field” (Krais, 2006, p. 128). Adkins (2004), for example, argues that, rather than a specific, autonomous field, gender is far better conceptualized as “part of a field” because gender is “extraordinarily relational, with a chameleon-like flexibility, shifting in importance, value and effects from context to context or from field to field” (p. 6). Thus, while all fields contain and enforce a set of gender rules, some of these rules may be common to many other fields, whereas others may be specific to that field (Chambers, 2005). Indeed, the snowboarding field overlaps with other sport fields (e.g., surfing, skateboarding, freestyle skiing, big mountain skiing) and youth cultural fields (e.g., music, fashion), such that they share some similar cultural values, including some common gender rules. Yet these fields are not identical; surfing, skateboarding, and snowboarding each have distinctive histories, environments, geographies, identities, development patterns, equipment, and physical requirements—and thus masculine and feminine identities, and gender relationships (see Thorpe, 2006, 2009a). Thus, rather than conceptualizing snowboarding culture as a separate “field of masculinity” or as a subfield bound by a “field of masculinity,” the following analysis focuses on masculinities in the “field of snowboarding.”

Many different masculine practices, performances, and identities can be observed in and across the field of snowboarding. In Bourdieu’s (1984) own words,

Sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions. (p. 107)
Indeed, in the highly fragmented snowboarding field, there are almost as many ways of realizing masculinity as there are groups and styles of participation. Global flows of media, patterns of consumption, and participants, however, communicate cultural values and styles across local, regional, and national fields, such that many of the elements of the youthful, hypermasculine snowboarding identity are observable in most locations where groups of young male snowboarders congregate (see Thorpe, in press). While cultural differences in and across various local, regional, and national snowboarding fields are observable, here the focus is on masculinities in the global, particularly Western, snowboarding field. In the remainder of this part, I describe four snowboarding masculinities identifiable across the global snowboarding field: the grommets (pre- and early adolescent boys), the bros (young men), the real men (big mountain snowboarders), and the old guys (30s and beyond)—categories used by the participants themselves—respectively. As the forthcoming discussion reveals, the legitimate forms of masculinity, valued forms of capital, and gender relations differ between these groups.

Male snowboarders’ gendered identities are not only multiple but are also dynamic. The configuration of power and the cultural dynamics in the snowboarding field are in a constant state of flux, and groups and individuals continue to struggle to preserve or transform the configuration of power, or rather the legitimate use and meaning of male (and female) snowboarding bodies. Moreover, some male snowboarders practice and perform different masculine identities as they move across different fields in their everyday lives, including school, family, work, snowboarding culture, organized sports teams (e.g., soccer, rugby, basketball), other sport and leisure activities (e.g., skateboarding, online gaming), and youth fashion or music cultures (e.g., punk, hip-hop, Emo). As Coles (2009) explains, the masculine behaviors practiced by men often depend on the field, their location within the field, their knowledge of the rules and stakes structuring the field as well as “the resources they have available at their disposal in the way of capital” within these fields (p. 42). One of the participants in my research, for example, identified different cultural norms and gender expectations regarding legitimate masculine practices (e.g., physical confrontations) at school and the ski resort, and described performing different masculine identities in these two distinct fields:

To be honest, in all the days I have spent on the mountain, I have never thrown a single punch, let alone seen a fight. In contrast, at high school, where I spent a comparable number of days in my life, I was suspended three times and involved in well over 20 fights. (personal communication, November 2006)

The key issue here is that, although the snowboarding field is a central site for the creation of masculine identities, it is not the only domain: “Masculinities are fluid, and learned and negotiated in a variety of [fields] such as the family and work environments” (Wheaton, 2000, p. 445) as well broader social, cultural, and national contexts. Male snowboarders do not embody a youthful hypermasculine identity at all times.
Rather, they position themselves in multiple ways, depending on the context such that they can seem “both hegemonic and non-hegemonic . . . at the same time” (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 343). Simply put, [some] men embody multidimensional masculine identities that they practice differently in and across various fields. Yet, to date, many studies have focused on masculinity at the structural level “with little consideration given to the strategies men use to negotiate masculinities in their everyday lives” (Coles, 2009, p. 30). Arguably, Bourdieu’s conceptual schema can help us account for the variety of masculinities present within and across fields at any given time and “describe how masculinities operate in and over men’s lives” (Coles, 2009, p. 31).

As previously suggested, unlike hegemonic masculinity or masculine domination, a feminist interpretation of field also encourages us to move beyond conceptions of men as the bearers of power and question the tendency in previous studies to dichotomize the experiences of men and women. Adopting a gendered reading of field, our attention is drawn to relational issues, particularly the connections between, and hierarchies among, men as well as the interactions between men and women.10 This is an important contribution to contemporary theorizing on gender because, as Brod (1994) accurately observes, there has been a tendency in men’s studies to presume “separate spheres” and proceed as if women were not relevant to the analysis (cited in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 837). According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), the exclusion of women from men and masculinities research is regrettable because “gender is always relational” and “patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contrast to some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity” (p. 848). Thus, in addition to describing some of the practices and performances of four masculinities in the snowboarding field—the grommets, the bros, the real men, and the old guys—and the power relations between these groups, the following discussion also examines some of the reciprocal relationships between men and women, as well as individual male participants experiences, in the mixed-sex snowboarding environment.

Grommets: Learning Masculinities

Grommet is a name typically given to pre- and early pubescent male snowboarders.11 Grommets tend to experience snowboarding in different ways to their older peers. They take snowboarding very seriously; as one young male boarder wrote, “I eat, breathe, and sleep snowboarding. It takes all of my thought away from me during school and while I’m at home. I almost get breathless watching snowboarding on television” (available from www.snowboard.com). For these young males, snowboarding is an important site for constructing a distinctive “snowboarder identity” that has links to masculinity. As with many other sports and physical youth cultures, physical prowess seems to be, and is seen as, a “rite of passage” to manhood, the “completion of a young boy’s masculinity” (Whannel, 1992, cited in Macdonald, 2001, p. 106; also see Young, 1965; Messerschmidt, 2000). Especially among young male snowboarders, for whom “other sources of recognized masculine authority (earning power, sexual relations, fatherhood) are some way off, the development of body appearance
and body language that are suggestive of force and skill is experienced as an urgent task" (Whitson, 1990, p. 23). Indeed, many grommets approach snowboarding with full gusto and, having yet to experience or understand the full consequences of serious injury, often appear fearless. According to Pamela, a New Zealand snowboarding coach, “being naïve is the most valuable thing and you see that with the young guys, before they have their first big accident, they are just mad, they have so much youthful enthusiasm and energy” (personal communication, September 2005). Many older male boarders are more cautious: “Grommets seem out of control . . . always trying to progress too fast and end up endangering us all. Plus, they seem so overdone with the current fashions, music, and catch phrases. They look and act like dickheads sometimes” (Nick, personal communication, April 2006).

Older male snowboarders often see it as their responsibility to actively patrol boys’ behavior on and off the mountain. According to Gavin, a more senior core boarder, “Grommets are the best, they are the future of the sport and it’s good to see them ripping. But it’s important to pull them up when they get out of line and start getting too cocky, or too smart, for their own good” (personal communication, March 2006). Grommets occasionally experience aggressive and demeaning “initiation” rituals from older male boarders who believe this is an important part of “becoming a real snowboarder.” As one male snowboarder declares,

Grommets these days lack respect, they are cocky, and will get to a stage in their lives where they will realize they should have shut their gobs and learned from those older and wiser. It is these smart-ass grommets with no-respect that get their nuts shaved and glued onto their legs. (Andrew, personal communication, March 2006)

Despite (or perhaps because of) having experienced similar “initiation” practices in his early snowboarding career, Gavin accepts it as “a rite of passage that we all experience” (personal communication, March 2006).

Most frequently, grommets, like other young males, congregate with peers of similar age and ability, who become their audience and an important source of validation (Messner, 1987). In fact, peer approval seems to be the most important motive for these boys (for similar observations in windsurfing culture, see Wheaton, 2000). These groups are hierarchically organized based on snowboarding ability, and the boys are often highly competitive with one another for positions within this hierarchy. As Kimmel (1994) writes, masculinity depends on comparison; it “must be proved, and no sooner is it proved than it is again questioned and must be proven again” (p. 122). Grommets are often so focused on proving themselves to their peers and older males that they give little attention, or respect, to female snowboarders. While largely oblivious to the talents of female snowboarders, grommets tend to hero-worship professional male snowboarders. For example, writing about his years as a grommet in the snowboarding field, Todd Richards (2003) describes his adoration of an early professional male snowboarder:
I was in the crowd of gawkers on the sidelines when I saw him . . . The world stopped, and in my mind the theme song from *Chariots of Fire* came on as he slid slow motion toward the giant kicker and floated the most stylish, gigantic method air . . . smooth, effortless, and *godlike* . . . From that moment forward, *I wanted to be Terry Kidwell.* (p. 66, italics added)

This excerpt is representative of many grommets’ cultural idolization of professional male snowboarders who demonstrate significant physical prowess.

The transition from grommet to one of the bros can be an exciting experience for young male boarders particularly when it is based on recognition of their physical prowess and thus “manliness.” Richards (2003) recalls an occasion in which he first started gaining acceptance into the snowboarding fratriarchy:

This session was just for fun but I still felt the *pressure to perform.* I waited for a gap in the action, dropped in, snapped into an Andrecht [hand-plant] on that little wall . . . I looked around and noticed Tucker and Kidwell were staring at me. Kidwell said, “Dude, that’s messed up!” Nothing compares to that moment . . . when Terry Kidwell and the Tahoe crew paid me a compliment for my riding. (p. 89, italics added)

Continuing, Richards (2003) describes another important event at which, on being “invited inside the fence” to “session the pipe early” with other “proven competitors”, he realized he had finally “graduated from the minors” (p. 98). As these comments illustrate, for young male snowboarders to gain acceptance into the snowboarding fratriarchy, it is not simply enough to *be* “A [young] man must do, display and prove” (Miles, 1991, cited in Macdonald, 2001, p. 103). Making claim to a masculine snowboarding identity also “depends upon public acceptance of that claim and social support for expressing that claim” (Emler & Reicher, 1995, p. 229).

**The Bros: Fratriarchal Masculinities**

A fratriarchy is a group of young men who compete for prestige through demonstrations of physical prowess, courage and gameness. Fratriarchy is the “rule of the brother-[hood]s” (Remy, 1990, cited in Loy, 1995, p. 265). Remy (1990) notes that fratriarchy (a) “is a mode of male domination which is concerned with a quite different set of values from those of patriarchy”; (b) “is based simply on the self-interest of the association of men itself”; (c) “reflects the demand of a group of lads to have the ‘freedom’ to do as they please, to have a good time”; and (d) “implies primarily the domination of the *age set* . . . of young men who have not taken on family responsibilities” (cited in Loy, 1995, p. 265, italics added). Across the social world, young men engage in action situations in which they display, test, and subject their behavior to social evaluation. This fratriarchial behavior is also apparent in snowboarding,
particularly at the core of the culture. Indeed, young men in their late teens and early 20s, sometimes referred to as the *brotherhood* or *the bros* (field-notes, 2003, 2004, 2005), have always constituted a dominant force in the snowboarding field.

The *Whiskey* videos produced by core Canadian boarders Sean Kearns and Sean Johnson in the mid to late 1990s epitomized the snowboarding fratriarchy. They featured young male snowboarders, many of whom were also skateboarders, consuming excessive amounts of alcohol, vomiting, performing violent acts against themselves and others (e.g., smashing empty beer bottles over their own heads or over their friends’ heads, often repeatedly), and engaging in destructive behavior (e.g., smashing windows). The only images of women were in the style of soft pornography. The low-budget *Whiskey* videos were the first to document this aspect of the snowboarding lifestyle. “In those days, *Whiskey* was the dope shit,” recalled Sean Kearns, “fuckin’ smash, break and crash—that was it” (cited in LeFebvre, 2005, para. 9). In the first *Whiskey* video, a conversation between snowboarder Kris Markovick (who is seen vomiting violently) and the unknown camera operator reveals the criteria for inclusion into this fratriarchal group:

Kris: Someone told me the only way to get into the Whiskey videos was to throw up.
Camera operator: It’s either that or you smash a bottle over your head. You chose the easier way [vomiting from excessive alcohol consumption].
Kris: [Not wanting to appear “weak”] I’ll do the bottle later. (Kearns & Johnson, 1994)

The men in these videos show a complete disregard for their own, and their friends’, safety and health.14

Despite the increasing professionalism in snowboarding, many contemporary professional male snowboarders do, in various ways, continue to express widespread hypermasculine ideals, fantasies, and desires. Physical prowess, risk taking, and a “hard-core” image (e.g., hedonistic and party lifestyle, disregard for authority, heterosexual pursuits, and high jinks) are all important aspects of the fratriarchal masculinity embodied by many professional male boarders and endorsed by the media. A reckless, short-term approach to the body also continues to be celebrated by the snowboarding fratriarchy. For example, professional snowboarder Scotty Wittlake sarcastically described his relationship to his body as follows:

My body’s a temple, so only the finest fast foods enter it. And with a mug like this, you need beauty sleep, so I try to get at least six hours a week. When it comes to exercise…I try to do as many 40-ounce curls as I can. (“How Do You Stay,” 2003, p. 16)

The commercial promotion of snowboarding’s fratriarchal exemplars is a good example of how the structure of the snowboarding field is maintained. In an increasingly

14
mediatized culture, professional male snowboarders are iconic; they hold the highest position within the field, and, thus, they have the most power to define the latest snowboarding tastes and styles. Observing the influence of such cultural exemplars on the actions of other male boarders, particularly younger males, professional female snowboarder Morgan Lafonte asked, “Why do boys worship men so much? All the men in snowboarding look the same, have the same mannerisms, talk the same and ride the same . . . I can’t tell the difference and I’m inside the sport” (cited in Howe, 1998, p. 118).

Much like the stars of the early Whiskey videos, and contemporary professional male snowboarders featured in mass (e.g., television, newspapers) and niche (e.g., snowboarding magazines, films, and Web sites) media, many young male snowboarders accept injury and risk taking as part of the snowboarding experience. The following comments, shared with me proudly by a core male snowboarder during an interview, are illustrative of the reckless relationships many young men have with their bodies:

In the 2002 X-Games at Whakapapa, I was competing. I came down to the medical bay; I had 4 cracked ribs and a twisted knee and I was the least injured guy there; fractured skulls, massive back injuries, guys with their calves ripped open, you name it. It was crazy. I was just like, “give me my two Panadols [pain-killers] and I’ll be on my way.” Accidents happen aye. (Hamish, personal communication, September 2005; Italics added)

Not dissimilar to proving hypermasculinity by smashing a bottle over your own head (as seen in the Whiskey videos), experiencing serious injury and demonstrating stoic courage in the endurance of pain is portrayed as simply part of the achievement of manhood and confirms particular forms of superiority in relation to other men and women (see Seidler, 2006; Whitehead, 2002). In the telling words of one male snowboarder, “Catching an edge on hard pack [ice] will put hair on your chest. I’m a man!” (cited in Curtes, Eberhardt, & Kotch, 2001, p. 6).

The importance of male bonding as an exclusionary practice, or of the extreme desire to differentiate themselves from women, should not be underestimated. Loy (1995) notes that the presence of women as objects of ridicule, humiliation, and abuse helps strengthen fraternal bonds and reinforce male domination. Although blatant abuse on snowboard fields is rare, snowboarding media representations frequently ridicule and humiliate women by promoting them as sex objects (see Donnelly, 2003; Rinehart, 2005; Thorpe, 2008b; Wheaton, 2003). An extreme case of female humiliation resulted in a court case in which two French boarders, Julian Joud (a former snowboard champion) and Jeremy Boissonnet, were found guilty of splicing pornographic footage into a snowboarding video. According to the press release, Joud admitted it was “a really bad idea to film the sex” that took place between his friend and the unwitting woman: “I did it as a laugh but it was a bad joke” (Porn Conviction, 2005, para. 15). The court found the men guilty of invading the woman’s privacy and
making pornography available to minors; they were fined a total of 5,000 Euros, to be paid to the woman in the video, and given suspended prison sentences of 8 months. According to Whitson (1990), practices that ridicule and humiliate women “encourage male bonding and encourage the exclusion of women from the brotherhood” (p. 25; also see Laurendeau, 2004; Wheaton, 2000).

While completing fieldwork in Whistler (November 2005), I overheard an interesting conversation that sheds further light on how some young men encourage male bonding and successfully discourage relationships with women that might ultimately threaten the brotherhood. A group of young males sitting at a local bus stop were chatting about a group of girls they had met the previous night. When one member of the group declared the girls “just a bunch of snow bunnies,” the others nodded and leered in agreement. But when one young man disagreed and admitted he was “interested in ‘Nancy’ and might call her back,” his friends immediately tried to dissuade him. They proclaimed loudly, “She would just be a distraction from your snowboarding man and that’s what we are here to do, snowboard every day. Come on bro, we made a pact, no girlfriends, remember? She will just get in the way!” (Field notes, November 2005). Mark Stranger (1998) finds similar sexist attitudes among male surfers where women seeking genuine companionship and shared relationships quickly discovered their expectations “clashed starkly with the pattern of a surfer’s life that prioritized the search for surf over virtually all else” (cited in Booth, 2002, p. 7; also see Flood, 2008). Like surfing, the fraternal structure of snowboarding culture devalues women as part of a process to help men define their masculinity.

While some women (e.g., pro-hos, poseurs) passively accept their marginalization, and in so doing support the snowboarding fratriarchy, others refuse to be excluded and successfully negotiate spaces for themselves within the snowboarding fratriarchy (Thorpe, 2009a). Hana, a top New Zealand snowboarder who rides, lives, works, and travels with a group of “guys,” navigated space within the group by riding fast, keeping up with the boys, and dismissing “boy talk” that sexualizes and degrades “other” women (personal communication, April 2006). By demonstrating physical prowess and commitment, and ignoring symbolic violence (e.g., boy talk), Hana earned symbolic and cultural capital and thus a place among her male peers. Yet she was conscious that other women are excluded from this group: “They treat me like one of the boys, but I’ve seen them treat their girlfriends much worse” (personal communication, April 2006). While some women (e.g., Hana) make adaptations and adopt strategies to “manage the masculine culture into which they are entering” (Chambers, 2005, p. 342), others act in ways to undercut these, often creating more alternative spaces for women within the snowboarding field (e.g., female-only snowboard camps, competitions, Web sites; see Thorpe, 2005, 2008b, 2009a).

The snowboarding fratriarchy not only excludes women but also marginalizes “other” men. As the following comment illustrates, the aggressive “attitude” adopted by young, hard-core male snowboarders frustrates some men, particularly older men and novices, who do not experience snowboarding in the same way:
There is always gonna be rudeness in any context that involves predominantly 18 to 25 year old males. Young males on the mountain tend to act like pack animals, constantly attempting to reassert their dominance . . . Sometimes it really annoys me, especially when they do stupid stuff that puts others at risk. (Andrew, personal communication, March 2006)

As well as excluding older and less skilled males, the snowboarding fratriarchy also has the potential to be violently homophobic. “I hate to think what the young hard-core boarders would do to a homosexual rider,” said Nick, “I’m reasonably sure it would be abusive” (personal communication, April 2006; see Kimmel, 1994).

Despite the prevalence of homophobia among men (and women) in the snowboarding fratriarchy, many gay men (and lesbian women) enjoy snowboarding. While most participate on the margins of the culture (e.g., weekend warriors, novices), some gay snowboarders are actively negotiating space within the field. For example, in 2002, American snowboard racer Ryan Miller became the first professional snowboarder to declare his homosexual status. After many years of “making excuses” and “putting up” with the hyperheterosexuality of his peers, Miller responded to an invite from male teammates to visit a local strip club by stating matter-of-factly, “I’m not into that . . . I’m gay.” According to Miller, the initial response from teammates and the industry was “colder than a Canadian winter”; “invitations to social events dried up, the camaraderie ended,” and he was “basically shunned” by both his peers and snowboarding companies “not eager to be associated with an openly gay snowboarder” (cited in Buzinski, 2002, para. 10). Despite experiencing marginalization from some of his peers, Miller is “out and proud” and clearly distinguishes his snowboarding body from others on the mountain by displaying stickers from a variety of gay organizations (e.g., Outboard, a gay and lesbian snowboarding group; Team Flame, an organization for gay elite athletes) on his snowboard.

Fratriarchal cultures exclude women and some men, and can encourage aggressive, sexist, and homophobic behavior. But, according to John Loy (1995), such modern tribal groups can also provide young men with comradeship; a sense of community, adventure, and excitement; and a release of youthful aggression. Indeed, friendships between male snowboarders are an essential aspect of the fratriarchy. Professional Canadian snowboarder Devun Walsh described the infamous “Wildcats” team as just a crew of friends. You don’t have to do some crazy trick to be on our team. We ride together and just support each other. The main theme of the Wildcats is fun and friendship. No one’s trying to outshine one another. [We] fail, fall, and overcome together. (cited in Dresser, 2003, para. 12)

Friendships within the fraternal structure of snowboarding culture are based on sharing mountain experiences as well as the lifestyle. Nonetheless, while the snowboarding fratriarchy provides some young men with friendship and a sense of community, it also fosters male domination in at least three ways: It brings young men
together, keeps young men together, and often works to put women down or to exclude them. In short, the snowboarding fratriarchy, like all fratriarchies, works to “develop male bonding, maintain sex segregation, and generate an ideology of male supremacy” (Loy, 1995, p. 267). In other words, young men in the snowboarding fratriarchy adopt a variety of covert and overt strategies to exclude and marginalize women and “other” men and reinforce their dominant position in the hierarchical structure of the snowboarding field.

The “Real” Men: Extreme Masculinities

The third group of men that I identify in this article is the so-called “real” men. Terrain and styles of participation separate the real men from the boys in snowboarding culture. For example, many boys, young men, and women spend a lot of time snowboarding in terrain parks and half-pipes. Serious injury can, and does, occur in these artificially constructed playgrounds but risk tends to be perceived rather than real. Terrain parks and half-pipes are carefully constructed and maintained by trained professionals, they are positioned within ski-resort boundaries, rules and regulations are signposted and policed by resort employees, and, if injury should occur, the ski-patrol and medical facilities are only minutes away. In comparison, the risk involved in big mountain riding is very much a reality: “Big mountain riding is downright dangerous. Avalanches, sluffs, helicopter crashes, crevasses, rocks, and exposure to the elements take their toll on those who aren’t prepared or aren’t lucky” (Howe, 1998, p. 143). It is in relation to riding big mountain terrain that the term extreme has relevance in snowboarding. Alaska, “the fabled North Shore of snowboarding,” is the home of extreme snowboarding and offers some of the biggest and most celebrated terrain in the world; “it’s a place where mythic lines and narrow escapes give way to snowboarding legend” (Reed, 2005, p. 66). Courage, experience, education, and skill cannot be feigned on top of an Alaskan peak. Big mountain riding separates the novices from those who have been around much longer; real men “prove their worth on the steeps” (Howe, 1998, p. 143).

As a result of spending “years learning about snow conditions and behaviour, weather patterns, emergency techniques, and rock climbing,” big mountain snowboarders or extreme riders are “physically different than freestyle pros”; they tend to be “four or five inches taller, with more bulk on them, so that they can ride a longer, stiffer type of board” (Howe, 1998, p. 140). The embodied cultural practices (e.g., hair styles, beverage preferences) of big mountain snowboarders are also distinctive. For example, in his autobiography, Todd Richards (2003) recalls meeting Alaskan snowboarders Jay Liska and Ritchie Fowler, who he described as “a couple of big, tough looking guys”; they were “notorious big mountain snowboarders who rode big boards, wore their sideburns long, and drank whiskey like water” (p. 157). Big mountain riders are figuratively and literally the “big men” of snowboarding culture. Although a few women are big mountain riders (e.g., Julie Zell, Victoria Jealouse, Tina Basich), the activity continues to be dominated by older, highly experienced, and typically White male
snowboarders (see Frohlick, 2005). Big mountain snowboarding remains a highly exclusive activity, but for a select few men with the legitimate social, cultural, economic, and physical resources, participation converts to unbound symbolic capital.

The Old Guys: Masculinities in Transition

As men take on more social responsibilities (e.g., marriage, children, mortgages, long-term employment, etc.), it is inevitable that their snowboarding experiences also change. No longer is snowboarding culture a site for proving their manhood. In the words of one ex-core snowboarder, “As you get older you become more comfortable and confident in your own skin. Proving yourself becomes less important, but it still happens for some poor sons of bitches” (Nick, personal communication, April 2006). As male boarders grow older, many tend to abandon fratricidal groups and adopt a more individualistic approach to snowboarding. Many older male snowboarders are also more cautious in terms of their bodies and risk taking. As “one of the old guys,” Gavin, a 35-year-old snowboarder, described himself as “a real wimp” on the mountain these days (personal communication, March 2006). Moreover, as they gain adult responsibilities, the importance of snowboarding in their lives tends to wane. Snowboarding is still important to me,” said Nick, “but I find it increasingly hard to get to the slopes nowadays, with work and stuff. We are also saving to buy a house next year, so no spare cash . . . I just can’t justify spending so much time and money on snowboarding anymore” (personal communication, April 2006).

For many, the focus shifts toward sharing the snowboarding experience with their partner. Many male ex-core snowboarders actively encourage their non-snowboarding girlfriends to take up the activity by buying them equipment and/or trying to teach them themselves. Participating with a partner, however, has the potential to introduce new gender dynamics to the snowboarding experience. According to Nick, “I love snowboarding with Carissa. She is so stoked, and I love her energy,” but he noted that, in general, girlfriends have the tendency to get quite grumpy when things don’t go right, especially when they are learning. And generally girls get hurt more and bruise easier, and then they pack it in. The last few years I have ridden mostly with couples and there are always a few tears on icy days. (personal communication, April 2006)

The gender dynamics can become even more complicated when both partners are core boarders or ex-core boarders. “Snowboarding is something that we can enjoy and do together,” said Jamie, but she admitted that “sometimes I don’t want to hear his [boyfriend’s] criticism and it can turn into bickering” (personal communication, February 2005). Another female ex-core snowboarder enjoys riding with her boyfriend in the weekends but acknowledged “there is always a bit of competition going on between us” (personal communication, March 2005). Some women demonstrate more physical prowess than their partners and, in so doing, challenge traditional gender
power relations where males are assumed to be “naturally” physically superior. For example, when professional snowboarder Tina Basich dated David Grohl, member of the band the Foo Fighters and novice snowboarder, she felt she had to “pretend to look the other way when he would catch an edge and fall” to save him from embarrassment (Basich, 2003, p. 146). For some snowboarding couples, traditional gender roles are nullified, whereas for others they are reinforced. When snowboarding with his girlfriend, Nick admitted, “I’m kinda the protector . . . if some idiot smashes into her I’m going to wring his scrawny neck” (personal communication, April 2006). Interestingly, as male snowboarders transition out of the fratriarchy and begin participating in different ways, some are prompted to reflect critically on aspects of the hypermasculine snowboarding habitus. Arguably, a gendered reading of Bourdieu’s field—habitus complex has the potential to shed new light on men’s multiple and dynamic subjectivities, and potential for gender reflexivity.

Habitus, Field, and Reflexive Masculinities

Habitus refers to a set of acquired schemes of dispositions, perceptions, and appreciations, including tastes, which orient our practices and give them meaning (Bourdieu, 1992). The habitus is both a “structured structure”—the effect of the actions of, and our interactions with, others—and a “structuring structure”—it suggests and constrains our future actions (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53). As I have explained elsewhere, the snowboarding habitus develops through practical engagement with snowboarding culture, and the longer one spends immersed in the snowboarding field the more ingrained this habitus becomes (Thorpe, 2009a). It is during this systematic cultural apprenticeship that the “practical transmission” of boarding “knowledge” via instructors’ and peers’ comments, observation, and magazines and films become embodied (Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 123).

The socially constructed habitus of many core boarders is also generative, that is, it is a primary influence on their snowboarding practices. For example, choices of equipment, terrain ridden, the style of riding, approaches to risk and injury, and relationships and interactions with other groups and individuals on the mountain are made on the “basis of practically oriented dispositions that have already been inscribed in the body and subsequently take place without overtly direct conscious awareness of the principles that guide them” (Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 126). Snowboarding culture is, therefore, a productive locus of a particular habitus that gives rise to, as Bourdieu (1971) says, “patterns of thought which organize reality by directing and organizing thinking about reality” (p. 194). Importantly, habitus not only helps reveal how the snowboarding culture is embodied but also how taken-for-granted social inequalities are embedded in everyday practices. Yet habitus is a complex and multilayered concept, and Bourdieu was not always clear about the intersection between habitus and gender.

Throughout his work, Bourdieu took cognizance of the fact that men and women use and manage their bodies in very different ways in most cultures. Yet it wasn’t until late in his career that he attempted to explain how this type of learning, which affects men’s
and women’s perceptions of their bodies and selves, does not occur at the cognitive level but at the bodily level (Burkitt, 1999). In other words, Bourdieu was concerned with how gendered norms, and particularly gender inequality, becomes embodied. The concept of habitus is central here. Gendered habitus broadly refers to the “social construction of masculinity and femininity that shapes the body, defines how the body is perceived, forms the body’s habits and possibilities for expression, and thus determines the individual’s identity—via the body—as masculine or feminine” (Krais, 2006, p. 121). According to Bourdieu (1997), gender is an “absolutely fundamental dimension of the habitus that, like the sharps and clefs in music, modifies all the social qualities that are connected to the fundamental social factors” (translated by Krais, 2006, p. 128). Put slightly differently, the gender specificity of habitus is among the fundamental elements of a person’s identity primarily because it “touches the individual in an aspect of his/her self that is generally seen as ‘pure nature’: the body” (Krais, 2006, p. 121). Indeed, it is with this bodily reference that gender differentiation becomes “deeply and firmly” anchored in the habitus (Krais, 2006, p. 121).

The notion of habitus illuminates the “entrenched dimensions” of embodied experiences and, in particular, male and female snowboarders’ “deep-seated, often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped” (McNay, 1999, p. 103). Indeed, many male and female snowboarders’ alike have embodied assumptions that displays of physical prowess, including finely honed combinations of skill, muscular strength, aggression, toughness, and courage are desirable or “natural” male traits. According to one male snowboarder interviewee, “Guys are always going to be better. Girls are girls . . . they are always weaker, the average girl is scared to even put on a snowboard and go down the hill” (Tom, personal communication, August 2004). As alluded to in the following comment, the weight of past experiences or, rather, the gendered habitus instilled from childhood also influences the way some female snowboarders think about their bodies:

We are girls . . . we still have that feminine aspect. I think it’s really hard to overcome that, and you feel like you still have to be a lady. But in order to ride this stuff, you need to have serious balls . . . sometimes it’s just so hard to get over that negative way of thinking . . . sometimes you just can’t do it. (Moriah, personal communication, November 2005)

As Moriah’s comments suggest, gendered habitus comprises a “layer of embodied experience that is not immediately amenable to self-fashioning” (McNay, 1999, p. 103; also see Thorpe, 2009a).

The concept of habitus draws our attention to the ways in which gendered values and expectations are imprinted on our bodies, but there is little room for change, or resisting gender norms, in Bourdieu’s original work. In his liberal adaptation of Bourdieu’s conceptual schema, however, Coles (2009) argues that habitus can be a useful heuristic device for explaining individual differences in how men perform
masculinity in fields; “masculinity as an unconscious strategy forms part of the habitus of men that is both transposable and malleable to given situations to form practical dispositions and actions to everyday situations” (p. 39). As suggested above, the masculine behaviors practiced and performed by men are influenced by their position in a particular social field (e.g., work, sport, family, and school), which includes their relationship to others and the resources they have available to them (e.g., symbolic capital, physical capital, economic capital) as well as their embodied knowledge of the rules and stakes within the field. According to Coles (2009), habitus can facilitate insights into how men use masculinity (e.g., posture, gait, gestures, speech, etc) as a “resourceful strategy,” to negotiate space, and access to capital, within particular fields (p. 38).

In the snowboarding field, for example, some top male snowboarders attempt to convert symbolic capital into economic capital by constructing marketable snowboarding identities that draw on their gender and masculinity as a unique source of capital. In an interview with *Snowboarder* magazine, professional snowboarder Romain DeMarchi reveals that he has a “bad boy image” for being “a hard-core partier” and admits he has been arrested four-times. Interestingly, DeMarchi is very aware of the economic value of a distinctly hypermasculine image:

People say, “Ah, Romain’s the wild guy, he’s going to go out and rage his ass off and be a f—ker and a dickhead!” But you know, who cares if these things are said? People label me as crazy, and it’s good for me. It sells, so the sponsors use it and the magazines use it. (Bridges 2004, p. 101)18

For a few top snowboarders, particularly those that recognize and are prepared to capitalize on their characteristics of distinction (e.g., DeMarchi), accumulation of symbolic capital and masculine capital merges with the accumulation of economic capital. In contrast to Bourdieu’s original work, Coles (2009) interpretation of masculine habitus recognizes men’s agency as central to understanding their capital accumulating strategies. Although approaching Bourdieu’s work from a slightly different perspective, feminist scholars have also asked whether Bourdieu’s work gives any chance for explaining agency and reflexive awareness.19

According to McNay (1999), while Bourdieu is “undoubtedly right to stress the ingrained nature of gender norms,” his lack of a sustained consideration of gendered habitus in relation to the field means he “significantly underestimates the ambiguities and dissonances that exist in the way that men and women occupy masculine and feminine positions” in contemporary society (p. 107). In so doing, he is inattentive to the “internally complex nature of subjectivity” (McNay, 2000, p. 72) as well as the impact of particular social changes on how men and women “inhabit, experience, move across, change and are changed by new and emerging social fields, as well as by gender relations within existing fields” (Kenway & McLeod, 2004, p. 535). Despite such oversights, some feminist scholars have identified potential in the concepts of field and habitus for understanding how reflexive awareness might arise with regard to women’s gender identities. In particular, McNay (1999) has drawn out these
implications to show that gender reflexivity, or the questioning of conventional notions of femininity, does not arise from exposure to, and identification with, a greater array of alternative images of femininity but rather from “tensions inherent in the concrete negotiation of increasing conflictual female roles,” which occurs when women move between various social fields (e.g., family, work, sport; p. 111; also see Adams, 2006; Hills, 2006; McNay, 2000). Experiencing the tensions between different fields can, according to Adams (2006), “create dissonance and an awareness of ‘objective’ gender relations in these fields”: the “lucidity of the excluded” can in turn generate resistance and negotiation (p. 518). Bourdieu makes a similar argument when not discussing gender:

> It is difficult to control the first inclination of habitus, but reflexive analysis, which teaches that we are the ones who endow the situation with part of the potency it has over us, allows us to alter our perception of the situation and thereby our reaction to it. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 136)

As I explain elsewhere, feminist syntheses of gender, habitus, and the relational concept of field yield “a framework in which to conceptualize the uneven and non-systematic ways in which subordination and autonomy are realized in women’s lives” (McNay, 1999, p. 113), including their sport, physical culture, and snowboarding experiences (see Thorpe, 2009a). Here I build on this work to argue that the gender–field–habitus complex also has much to offer scholars interested in men, masculinities, and male gender reflexivity.

**Field Crossing, Gender Reflexivity, and Male Physical Culture**

As men move across social fields, some are alerted to variations in norms and practices in different fields, which in some cases can lead to increased critical reflexivity regarding gender behaviors and values in particular fields, and/or problematic aspects of their own masculine habitus. My research on snowboarding reveals that, as men move between various fields (e.g., snowboarding, home and family, education, workforce, different sport cultures) and change positions within fields (e.g., grommet, core boarder, professional, retired athlete, ex–core participant, weekend warrior; son, brother, husband, father), some experience conflicts between different concepts of order and ways of behaving that generate “questions as to the ‘naturalness’ of established gender practices” (Krais, 2006, p. 131).

While men continue to out-number women on the slopes, snowboarding is a gender-integrated activity with male and female boarders participating alongside one another; they share the slopes, chairlifts, terrain parks, and half-pipes. For some male participants, entering the snowboarding field and observing female displays of physical prowess, skill, aggression, and courage can prompt them to adjust their perceptions of female capabilities and, in some cases, reflect on gender relations in other sport and social fields. After many years playing the heavily male-dominated sport of
rugby, Nick enjoys sharing the snowboarding experience with his female friends: “I think it’s great when we can all ride together. There aren’t many sports or pastimes where you can do that and have that much fun” (personal communication, April 2004). Similarly, Ste’en believes,

Of all the sports that I am aware of, snowboarding is the one where girls can compete on a level with the men, so the excuse is gone, you can’t say we are all on different levels because I’ve seen girls snowboard better than guys. (personal communication, September 2005)

Based on his observations of women’s physical prowess on the mountain, as well as gender inequalities in the snowboarding media, Ste’en, as the editor of New Zealand Snowboarder magazine, makes a conscious effort to “remind the photographers to get good images of girls” (personal communication, September 2005; Thorpe, 2008b).

As male snowboarders transition out of the snowboarding fratriarchy and adopt new positions—often with more adult responsibilities—in other fields with different gender norms and expectations (e.g., husband, father, home-owner, salaried employee, employer), some reflect critically on elements of the hypermasculine habitus embodied by young men (and some women) during their participation in the snowboarding fratriarchy (e.g., abusive behavior; reckless and short-term approaches to risk, pain, and injury; hyperheterosexuality; sexism; homophobia). Canadian ex–core snowboarder, Kelsey, for example, described how he was “obsessed with all things snowboarding” during his teenage years but on graduating from university and getting a full-time job in an urban metropolis, his snowboarding experiences changed:

Now I live and work in the city . . . and can only get to the mountains in the weekends . . . but I’m always struck by how rude and obnoxious some of the young guys are. I hate it when I see the young guys who think they’re too cool . . . to wear a helmet . . . to apologize to an older man or woman whose skis they just ran over . . . not to spit on people from chairs . . . to ride an older board that’s not a brand name, too cool . . . geez, I could go on. Snowboarding rocks, but the majority of people in it suck! I know the punky, rebellious, “I don’t give a damn” attitude has been around since day one, but now I really hate it. (personal communication, September 2004)

Moreover, as the following comment illustrates, when male ex–core boarders start experiencing the physical consequences of their previous snowboarding participation, some begin questioning the fratriarchal value system that rewards risk taking, and pain and injury tolerance:

All of my mates knew me as the guy that would hit the big jumps first and fast . . . But now, I regret the inch diameter mass of bone growing on my shoulder . . . the twinge in my neck I get if I stay in a certain position for too long . . . the headaches from one too many smacks on the brain. When I go to the mountain
these days, I am much more contemplative about risk. I don’t feel like I have to prove myself to anyone. I definitely think more about the consequences. (Andy, personal communication, November 2006)

Similarly, when injury forced professional snowboarder Todd Richards to take a step back from the field of competitive snowboarding for the first time in 15 years, it enabled him to look differently at his priorities and motivations for snowboarding. Prior to his injury, he was driven to “make more money” and “stay ahead of the other guys,” but through a long rehabilitation process and many months away from the sport, he “began to understand how important my family was in a whole new way” (Richards, 2003, p. 277). For some professional and core male snowboarders, adopting new positions in the field of the family (e.g., husband, father) prompts critical reflection on fratriarchal norms and values regarding priorities (e.g., time, money) and approaches to risk as well as their relationships with friends, women, and family members (e.g., dismissal of the “bros before ho’s” mentality dominant within the fratriarchy). For example, when asked to offer some advice to other “rad dads,” that is “young dads who still want to get their shred on,” professional snowboarder and father of twin girls, Louie Fountain, stated matter-of-factly: “Put your family first. Snowboarding will fade and die away” (Huffman, 2006, para. 3).

For some snowboarders, movement out of the core of the snowboarding field and into other social fields (e.g., workforce) can also prompt critical reflection on practices of marginalization and degradation observed within the fratriarchy as well as their role in such situations:

Snowboarders seem to think of themselves as open minded and accepting of difference, but in my experience there is a staunchness towards anything that doesn’t comply with the stereotypical snowboarder who is a hyperactive, heterosexual, amateur stuntman, fashion conscious, party boy. I’ll admit . . . I used to buy into this image . . . there were probably a few occasions where I said or did things that could be interpreted as . . . sexist or homophobic. There were heaps of situations where other guys said really rude stuff to women or guys that looked gay . . . You know, like yelling stuff off the lifts . . . and I didn’t try to stop them. But now I try to speak up more when I see or hear that sort of thing. There is no way that sort of behavior would be accepted at my workplace, so why should it be okay on the mountain? (Nick, personal communication, March 2008)

Some male ex–core snowboarders also explain how riding with their partners and female friends has alerted them to some of the cultural and societal gender norms limiting female participation:

I enjoy hanging out with my girl in every context and snowboarding is no different. We just love riding together and sharing the whole experience. I try to be supportive and listen to her when she wants to head in a different direction or take a break . . . But I see more competitive males, particularly some of the
young guys, giving their girlfriends grief for not keeping up, in both appearances and literally. (Dave, personal communication, November 2006)

As these brief examples suggest, some men are critical of the maleness of the snowboarding culture, and particularly the hypermasculine practices and performances celebrated within the fratriarchy. But, with only some men reflecting on problematic aspects of the masculine snowboarding habitus, it is interesting to consider who is likely to do so.

The ability to reflexively analyze gender norms in snowboarding culture tends to depend on the individual’s gendered habitus instilled during childhood, their lived experiences and position in the snowboarding field, and the opportunities available for them to move across social fields (e.g., work, education, home, sport, leisure; see Thorpe, 2009a). For example, it appears that young core male participants in the snowboarding fratriarchy—whose work, accommodation, friendships, and travel experiences are typically organized around snowboarding—tend to do the least amount of field crossing, which may help explain why they often demonstrate limited critical reflection in relation to problematic aspects of the hypermasculine snowboarding habitus. But, as demonstrated in the examples above, on leaving the “fratriarchal” group—either temporarily or permanently due to the pursuit of professional or educational opportunities, injury, marriage, parenthood, or any other reason—and entering “other” fields (e.g., work, higher education, sport, leisure, parenthood, long-term relationship), some men are prompted to reflect critically on various aspects of the hypermasculine snowboarding identity (e.g., celebration of risk and injury, social and physical coercion, marginalization of women, and “other” men via homophobic and sexist discourses and practices) which, in some instances, leads to behavioral changes (e.g., “I try to be supportive and listen to her”) and subtle practices of resistance (e.g., “I remind photographers to get good images of girls”; “Now I try to speak up more”). Of course, the presence of reflexivity does not automatically translate into masculine identity transformation. In some circumstances, “our capacity for reflexive thought can leave us recognizing but unable to do anything about our lack of freedom” (Craib, 1992, p. 150; see also Adams, 2006; Brooks & Wee, 2008). Even when men experience a disjunction between habitus and field leading to gender reflexivity, these alterations do not necessarily work to “undermine gender, or masculine domination” (Chambers, 2005, p. 343). Moreover, as men leave the snowboarding fratriarchy and enter into new fields and adopt new social roles, certain aspects of gender relations may be destabilized, yet other aspects may be further entrenched (McNay, 1999).

The contemporary snowboarding field simultaneously celebrates and reinforces a hypermasculine fratriarchal snowboarding identity and provides space for alternative masculinities; it is a contradictory social context of ongoing sexism and greater opportunities for men and women to share the snowboarding experience and lifestyle. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that young male boarders passively embody the hypermasculine snowboarding habitus during their enculturation into the field and
only begin to critically reflect on their gendered experiences on exiting, or moving to a different position (e.g., weekend warrior, “rad dad”), within the field. Rather, core male snowboarders frequently encounter differences and problems within the field, which encourage some of them to engage in day-to-day negotiations of gender identity and sexual politics. According to Brooks and Wee (2008), when theorizing critical reflexivity and gender identity transformation, we need to recognize that there is a continuum from relatively minor daily conflicts within fields, to more serious experiences of dissonance as individuals cross and enter new fields. Arguably, Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of “regulated liberties”—small exercises of power that arise in the context of the existing social order, but which resignify it in some way—can help us capture some of the ambiguities, dissonances, and subtle negotiations of power experienced by men in social fields, including the snowboarding culture.

Some core male boarders perform regulated liberties by engaging in subtle practices that challenge the legitimate meaning and use of the male (and female) snowboarding body from within the field. For example, during the early 2000s, some core male snowboarders wore outerwear, clothing, and equipment in traditionally “feminine” colors (e.g., pastel pinks and blues, bright pink, etc.), and in so doing were playing with traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, and assumed heterosexuality (see Figure 1). In the words of a committed female snowboarder, “It is really acceptable for boys to be ‘super feminine’ these days. I mean . . . all my snowboarder boy friends are way more gossipy than me. They are wearing pink and fur, and they love going shopping too” (Moriah, personal communication, 2005; also see Wheaton, 2000).

Some core male snowboarders also challenge the male valuation system within the field by expressing feminist sentiments in their support of their female peers and occasionally publicly question their exclusion from magazines, videos, events, and the industry. For example, one male correspondent wrote to Transworld Snowboarding complaining about the lack of attention given to women in snowboarding: “And why the hell hasn’t Forum put a woman on their team? I am offended when people discriminate against women” (“Letters,” 2002, p. 28). Danny Burrows (2005), editor of OnBoard European Snowboarding Magazine and self-proclaimed “manimist/feminist,” also publicly protested gender disparities in the snowboarding culture:

Sponsorship deals for girls are minimal in comparison to those of guys. They always draw the short straw when it comes to combined contests—either having to ride in the dark or once the boys have trashed everything. And even when all goes in their favor and they are riding well, they’re served up the ultimate sexist insult: “Damn, you ride like a guy.” We boys might think this is a compliment, but in reality it suggests that all boys ride better than most girls, which is just not true. There are plenty of boys out there who ride like complete pansies (not intentionally being anti-pansy here) and a hell of a lot of girls who have nuts of nickel whether that be on the rails, in the pipe, or getting face shots [powder] in the backcountry. See, even the expression for being brave or good, “having balls,” is sexist. (p. 15)
Some men are actively challenging assumptions regarding the position of women within the snowboarding field. Such questioning seems particularly strong among those men who have witnessed their daughters, sisters, girlfriends, and friends experiencing sexism (in its various guises) in the snowboarding field, and those who have learned different gender norms, values, and expectations in other social fields (e.g., family, education).

The key point here is that these embodied practices “cannot be understood through binaries of domination and resistance, but rather involve more complex processes of investment and negotiation” (McNay, 2000, p. 58). While the various regulated liberties performed by male snowboarders (e.g., embracing traditionally

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**Figure 1.** This image, featured in the September 2002 issue of *Transworld Snowboarding* magazine, illustrates how some fratriarchal male snowboarders are engaging in “regulated liberties” within the snowboarding field by playing with traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, as well as assumed heterosexuality. This particular (heterosexual) male snowboarder’s equipment is pink and purple, traditionally “feminine” colors, he sports extensive tattooing on his arms, and he wears a T-shirt that reads: “Don’t assume I’m straight.” Source: www.embryrucker.com (Image used with permission of photographer Embry Rucker).
defined feminine activities such as shopping and “gossiping,” writing to magazine editors to protest gender inequalities, wearing pink and fur, publicly questioning women’s exclusion from events or unequal prize monies, challenging perpetrators of sexist or homophobic language or practices on the mountain or in the media) may suggest gender instability within the snowboarding field, they do not guarantee reflexivity or gender identity transformation. In sum, a feminist turn to Bourdieu suggests that masculine reflexivity in physical cultures, such as snowboarding, is “uneven and discontinuous,” potentially arising as a result of mobility between social fields and, to a lesser extent, as a result of the requirements to reconcile the dissonant experiences that this invokes within fields (regulated liberties) (Kenway & McLeod, 2004; McNay, 1999, 2000; Thorpe, 2009a).

Bourdieu, Masculinities, and Physical Culture: Some Final Thoughts

In this article, I have argued that, in contrast to R. W. Connell’s outdated concepts of hegemonic masculinity and gender order, recent feminist engagements with Bourdieu’s conceptual schema may help us “ask new questions” about men and masculinities in sport and physical cultures in the early 21st century. Adopting a gendered reading of Bourdieu’s concept of field, I began by describing four different masculinities—the grommets, the bros, the real men, and the old guys—within the global snowboarding field. The legitimate masculine practices and performances, valued forms of capital, and gender relations differ between these groups. The bros—typically young, White, middle- and upper-class males—continue to hold a dominant position at the core of the culture and thus have the most power to define the latest snowboarding styles and tastes. But the snowboarding field is a site of struggles where various agents (e.g., grommets, old guys, gay boarders, and women) attempt to negotiate, transform, and preserve the legitimate meanings and use of the boarding body. Simply put, the rules structuring the snowboarding culture, and the gender relations within it, are not fixed but inherently contested by those within the field.

In sum, masculinities in the contemporary snowboarding culture are multiple and dynamic; they differ over space, time, and context, and are rooted in the cultural and social moment. The concept of field, in conjunction with habitus and capital, can help explain how men experience snowboarding differently depending on their positions within the field, their (overt and tacit) knowledge of the rules and stakes within the field, and their ability (and willingness) to accrue culturally valued forms of capital (i.e., symbolic, physical, social, cultural, hypermasculine capital). Moreover, men’s snowboarding identities, behaviors, and interactions (with other men and women) often change as they age and enter new life stages and gain (or lose) access to particular forms of capital (e.g., physical, symbolic, masculine, economic). The movement of male snowboarders between and within overlapping social fields, and from different generational milieu, further complicates gender relations in the snowboarding field.
the second part of this article, I drew on a gendered reading of Bourdieu’s habitus–field complex to explain how men’s movement across, and within, social fields can prompt critical reflection on masculine practices and performances within the snowboarding culture as well as gender norms and values in other social fields (e.g., family, work).

Building on the theoretical aperture presented here, future research is needed that continues to explore the possibilities offered by Bourdieu’s conceptual schema for developing theorizing of gender in sport and physical culture. Such projects might fruitfully draw on feminist texts and use a range of sociological literature with other central foci (e.g., the body, physicality, identity, agency, reflexivity) that is contemporizing Bourdieu’s original work (e.g., Mouzelis, 2007; Shilling, 2004; Sweetman, 2003), to ask: What field- and cross-field related ambiguities and dissonances do men in contemporary sport and physical cultures experience? How do they negotiate these tensions? What reflexive possibilities are available to them and what is the impact of the pre-reflexive aspects of their identities on their capacity to take up such opportunities within particular sports fields? How do men from different generations and social, cultural, and political contexts experience and negotiate tensions within, and across, various fields? In contrast to research that continues to draw on hegemonic masculinity and gender order, future research that puts the gender–habitus–field complex “to work empirically” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 95, italics in original) has the potential to help us reveal more nuanced conceptualizations of gendered subjectivity, power relations, and transformations in contemporary sport and physical cultures.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Douglas Booth, Richard Pringle, Robert Rinehart, Toni Bruce, Pirkko Markula, Belinda Wheaton, and José Borrello for their helpful comments and suggestions in developing the ideas presented in this article. Thanks also to CL Cole for her editorial assistance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed that they received the following support for their research and/or authorship of this article: The author is grateful for a research grant provided by the University of Waikato, School of Education, and support from the Leverhulme Trust, which helped fund some of the fieldwork and writing of this article.

Notes

1. Interestingly, the weight of logic and evidence offered by this new generation of gender scholars compelled Connell to “reshape” her position (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 845). She agrees that the concept of hegemonic masculinity requires reformulation in
four main areas: (a) a more complex model of gender hierarchy, emphasizing the agency of women; (b) explicit recognition of the geography of masculine configurations, emphasizing the interplay among local, regional, and global levels; (c) a more specific treatment of embodiment in contexts of privilege and power; and (d) a stronger emphasis on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, recognizing internal contradictions and the possibilities of movement toward gender democracy. She offers a selection of research suggestions for each of these issues. Yet, these modifications failed to satisfy some of Connell’s critics who proclaimed their arguments leveled against Connell’s original conceptual schema continued to hold true. Rather than helping to capture the complexities of gendered power relations in the 21st century, Connell’s recommendations for reformulation appear to extend the shelf life of a problematic conceptual schema.

2. Examples of seminal work include Messner (1987, 1992), Messner and Sabo (1990), and Sabo and Panepinto (1990).

3. Critical scholars of physical culture have, however, readily employed Bourdieu’s concepts to shed light on various aspects of the body and embodied practices, and social differentiation, in an array of sport and exercise fields (e.g., Crossley, 2004; Kay & Laberge, 2002; Smith Maguire, 2002; Wacquant, 1995). I refer readers seeking a succinct and critical introduction to Bourdieu’s original work to Jenkins (2002). For an insightful discussion of the applicability of Bourdieu’s conceptual schema for sports studies, see Booth and Loy (1999) or Tomlinson (2002).

4. According to a recent study conducted by the United States National Sporting Goods Association, only 11% of American snowboarders are members of racial/ethnic minority groups; 3.6% Asian, 2.3% Hispanic/Spanish/Latino, 1.6% African American, 1.1% Native American, and 2.4% Other (see Thorpe, 2007a). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to offer a more detailed discussion of race and ethnicity in snowboarding, the Whiteness of the sport cannot be ignored (see Thorpe, 2009b). Lance, a 55-year-old Black American, describes feeling like “a duck out of water” while on a snowboarding trip with a group of colleagues because he didn’t have the “right equipment” or the embodied knowledge that would enable him to contribute to snowboarding-related conversations (cited in Hua, 2006, para. 9). Despite the Whiteness of the snow culture, some non-White participants are attempting to negotiate space within the field by forming social groups (e.g., Black Avalanche), teams (e.g., First Nations Snowboard Team, a Canadian organization with recreational and high performance streams that seek to support Aboriginal competitive snowboarders and qualified snowboard instructors), and organizations (e.g., Alpino, an organization founded in Colorado that strives to get more people of color to the mountains for both recreation and work).

5. According to Transworld Snowboarding, 44.3% of American snowboarders have a household income of US$75,000 a year or more (Hard Numbers, 2005, p. 58), which is higher than the medium income of US$42,228 (DeNavas-Walt & Cleveland, 2002).

6. During the 1990s and early 2000s, I held many roles in the snowboarding field (i.e., novice, weekend warrior, core boarder, semiprofessional athlete, snowboard instructor, event organizer, terrain-park employee, and journalist).

7. Participants ranged from 18 to 56 years of age and included novice snowboarders, weekend warriors, core boarders, professional athletes, an Olympic judge, snowboarding journalists,
photographers, film makers, magazine editors, snowboard company owners, snowboard shop employees and owners, snowboard instructors and coaches, and event organizers and judges. To accommodate the nomadic existence of many snowboarders, I also distributed follow-up interviews via email to 35 participants living or travelling in various countries.

8. Young Australian male snowboarders, for example, are particularly notorious for their distinctive larrikin behavior. Based on his observations working at various ski resorts in North America and Australasia, one core New Zealand male snowboarder commented as follows: “Snowboarding can get really macho when a group of young guys are trying to prove themselves to each other. This can also result in danger for the public because they are out of control when they are like that. It’s a young guy thing, particularly among Aussie guys” (Nick, personal communication, April 2006). In Whistler (Canada), I also overheard local residents joke that this is the one place in the world where there is “racism against Australians” due to their drunken, obnoxious, violent, and often sexist behavior in bars and at parties; disrespect to local property (e.g., rental accommodation); and dangerous practices on the mountains (e.g., hiking out of bounds without safety equipment or knowledge of snow conditions; Field notes, November 2005). “Laddish” or hypermasculine behavior is more prevalent among some young male snowboarders, in some spaces and places, than others. Whereas some hypermasculine practices are celebrated across the global snowboarding culture (e.g., demonstrations of courage and risk taking), others are resisted within some local and regional cultures (i.e., Australian larrikinism; also see Wheaton, 2000).

9. Bourdieu is not always clear about the social or spatial boundaries of field, which can lead to problems in its operationalization (Reay, 1995). McRobbie (2009) admits finding analyses of the “intersections and flows between and across so many fields” methodologically overwhelming (p. 142). Despite recognizing the virtue in Bourdieu’s schema for “bringing together” micrological analyses of particular fields with macrosociological analyses of wider social, cultural, and political fields, she warns of the tendency to “get lost in a proliferation of fields” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 141). In the case of snowboarding, for example, is it the local (e.g., geography, climate, peer group) or global (e.g., media) conditions that most strongly influence the formation of an individual’s snowboarding habitus? On the other hand, perhaps Bourdieu’s argument that theory should provide “thinking tools” to be deployed in empirical situations rather than a clearly defined explanatory framework (Jenkins, 1992) ameliorates the confusion and leaves open a set of possibilities concerning the identification of habitus in a particular field. While the definition of the snowboarding group and field may be almost infinite, I focus on the “collective” snowboarding field or what some cultural commentators refer to as the “global snowboarding culture” (Sherowski, 2004, p. 106) to provide an introductory set of observations. However, the interaction of local and global conditions in various social and physical spaces, and their influence on the development of the individual and collective snowboarding habitus, is significant and deserves further attention.

10. It should be noted here that the concept of hegemonic masculinity was “originally formulated in tandem with the concept of hegemonic femininity—later renamed ‘emphasized femininity’ to acknowledge the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order . . . In the development of research on men and masculinities, their relationship has dropped out of focus” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848).
11. Young male surfers and skateboarders are also called *grommets*.

12. While working at a ski resort in Oregon (United States) during the 2001-2002 winter season, I witnessed the extent of these initiation rituals. At a party, I was witness to a home-made video played for the entertainment of the guests. The video featured three boys, between the ages of 11 to 13, being forced to drink excessive amounts of alcohol by a group of older male snowboarders, who were supposed to be their caregivers and coaches for the weekend. These boys were then exposed to a variety of demeaning pranks; they were stripped to their underpants, derogatory terms such as *dickhead* and *gaper* were written across their foreheads and chests in heavy-duty marker pens, they were violently pushed into cold showers, and then locked in dark rooms in separate parts of the house. Initially the boys saw the humor in the activities and seemed to be enjoying the attention the older males were paying them, but by the end of the video they appeared genuinely terrified, and two of the boys were crying hysterically and calling out for their mothers. While watching the videotape, the perpetrators of this dehumanizing and violent behavior laughed and joked, and explained how these “little spoilt brats” deserved everything they received. The majority of the partygoers also saw the humor in this hazing ritual. Despite the disturbing nature of this video, no one questioned the perpetrators’ actions.

13. For example, as a snowboarding instructor (2000-2003), I frequently taught boys, many of whom were initially surprised and/or disappointed to meet their *female* instructor. To gain their respect, it was often necessary to prove my superior physical prowess early on in the lesson. In contrast, my male counterparts automatically received the respect of their boy students.

14. The following excerpt from Todd Richards’ (2003) autobiography highlights the excessive alcohol consumption and juvenile humor and pranks at the core of the snowboarding fratriarchy during this period: “The secret was to pick the weakest animal in the herd and then patiently wait for him to drink himself to oblivion. After he passed out, someone would generally say a prayer to the effect of, ‘God help him.’ Then we would move in like hyenas, with magic markers, honey, duct tape, and anything else that was handy . . . by the time we’d finished, his entire face, eyebrows, neck, and other exposed skin would be covered in ‘non-toxic’ ink” (p. 176). This comment also identifies strong elements of the hierarchy (i.e., the “weakest animal”) that is characteristic of the snowboarding fratriarchy.

15. The following comments from Moriah are further illustrative of some women’s critical awareness of the fratriarchal and homosocial practices of young men in snowboarding field: “Guys wanna hump guys. Boys love themselves and other boys. Really, boys don’t want to be with girls that snowboard. If you’re a girl that *really* snowboards or skateboards, then you are competition to them, and they don’t want competition. That’s why all these rumors are coming out about X being a bit kinky in her sex life and Y being a lesbian. They like girls who pretend to snowboard but if you’re a girl that actually skateboards and snowboards you’re kind of a threat to them . . . I think boys are intimidated by a girl that can actually do it” (personal communication, November 2005).

16. To support the participation of gay snowboarders, some have formed clubs and Web sites, such as Outryders (www.outryders.org) and OutBoard (www.outboard.com). The latter has almost 4,000 members in 50 American states and 27 countries.
17. Interestingly, Miller witnessed different reactions from various groups within the snowboarding field: “Alpine snowboarding doesn’t give much room for self-expression. The clock rules and whoever makes it down the hill the fastest wins. Alpine riders tend to be quite conservative. Freestylers are more free-spirited and seem to be more accepting of gays” (cited in Buzinski, 2002, para. 11).

18. In a field dominated by White participants, there has been some recognition that racial difference can be a sign of distinction and thus a source of capital for a select few male athletes. The following exchange between Marc Frank Montoya, the first Mexican American professional snowboarder, and a snowboarding journalist is insightful: “Transworld Snowboarding: Most snowboarders, back in the day, were white kids. Did people accept you back then? Montoya: I didn’t really notice. Everybody was cool with me, I think. Sticking out that way, if anything, made people want to hook me up [offer financial and product sponsorship] even more. I think it was because I came from the streets—you know, Denver—and they liked the fact that I was trying to do my thing in the mountains. Maybe that worked a little bit to my advantage” (Montoya, 2001, para. 5). Drawing on practices, styles, and tastes from other fields (e.g., hip hop, urban gangster, Latino culture), Montoya combined his cultural capital with symbolic capital—gained via demonstrations of physical prowess and courage—to create a distinctive hybrid snowboarding identity that appealed to the desires of young, White male snowboarders as well as snowboarders from “other” groups (e.g., Mexican snowboarders, New Zealand Maori snowboarders). While the snowboarding field remains largely dominated by young, White males who continue to dictate tastes, styles, and legitimate uses of the boarding body, the intersection between race, masculinity, and capital is interesting and deserves further attention (see Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2001, 2004).

19. While most criticisms of habitus invoke determinism, it is important to note that some of Bourdieu’s texts provide more space for agency and reflexivity than others. In particular, in some of his later work, especially State Nobility (1998), Bourdieu suggests that moments of disalignment and tension between habitus and field may give rise to increased reflexive awareness. For Bourdieu, habitus operates at an unconscious level unless individuals with a well-developed habitus find themselves moving across new, unfamiliar fields. It is in such moments that an individual’s habitus may become “divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and its ambivalences” resulting in “a kind of duplication, to a double perception of the self” (Bourdieu, 1999, cited in Reay, 2004, p. 436). This becomes what Bourdieu (2003) has termed a habitus clivé, a “split habitus” (cited in Krais, 2006, p. 130). For Bourdieu, reflexive awareness arises from the “negotiation of discrepancies by individuals in their movement within and across fields of social action” (McNay, 1999, p. 110; see also Powell, 2008). Bourdieu was careful to emphasize, however, that despite a proliferation of fields and an increasingly mobile population, such disjunctions between habitus and field are not common occurrences. Chambers (2005) notes that “most people tend to remain within compatible fields most of the time,” thus there is usually a fit between field and habitus (p. 340). In such circumstances, the habitus tends to be reinforced rather than challenged. Therefore, Bourdieu shows how reflexivity is not an inherently universal capacity of subjects, rather, it is a “piecemeal, discontinuous affair” (McNay, 1999, p. 110), uneven in its application, emerging only with its experience of dissonance (see Thorpe, 2009a).
20. Arguably, the movement (by some, not all, men) away from hypermasculinity in snowboarding culture is highly compatible with consumption. As Donaldson (1993) observes, changes in masculinities, particularly “the emotional liability and soft receptivity of what’s new and exciting,” are more appropriate to a consumer-oriented society than “hardness and emotional distance” (p. 652; also see E. Anderson, 2009; Wheaton, 2000).

References


Bio

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