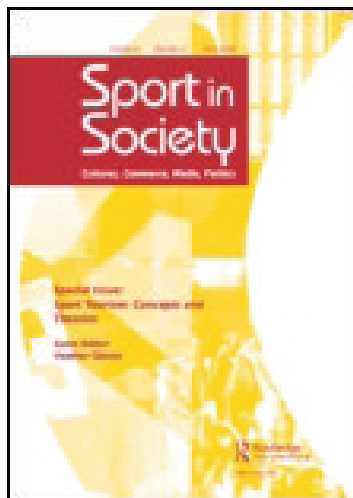


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Fast-girls, babes and the invisible girls. Gender relations in snowboarding

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The purpose of this essay is to examine gender relations in snowboarding through conceptions and experiences articulated by female participants. The main objective is to focus on relations between female and male snowboarders as well as relations between different groups of females. The empirical investigation was conducted in conjunction with a workshop organized by the Norwegian Snowboard Federation. Methods employed were participant observation and personal interviews. The results reveal male domination in different snowboarding contexts during practice and competition. Moreover, the analysis revealed different femininities among the female snowboarders, characterized within the subculture as the Babes, Fast-girls, and the Invisible Girls. The results are discussed in relation to perspectives on subculture and Bourdieu's conceptions of field, capital and masculine domination.

Compared to the classic ski tradition which is rooted in historical rural culture, snowboarding sprang from a modern urban culture. Snowboarders came from the generation that gave us break-dancing and skateboarding, but snowboarding can also be traced back to the surfing culture of the 1960s.¹ From originally being considered a sport subculture, snowboarding has developed to become more or less accepted as a competitive and legitimate sport in recent years, its inclusion in the Olympic Games programme being evidence of this. The development of snowboarding has led to major changes to the sport itself and the culture surrounding it. Snowboarding is not a homogenous culture as it attracts participants with a wide range of motives for joining the sport, with varying skill levels, representing a number of lifestyle images.²

Snowboarding has been dominated by males as well as by masculine connotations.³ This may be explained in terms of sport as traditionally being a male domain,⁴ and the relationship of snowboarding to alternative youth cultures, where masculinity in style and behaviour generally excel.⁵ Along with surfing and skateboarding, snowboarding developed in a different social context relative to modern organized sports, and its informal structure has an impact on the participants' position and status in the culture.

Investigations of alternative sports have examined subcultural characteristics and the insider-outsider dimension has been given particular attention in descriptions of the 'core' members' prestige versus more peripheral participants.⁶ In terms of gender relations, previous research has predominantly explored female athletes' position in male-dominated contexts.⁷ The present study will examine gender relations in snowboarding by focusing upon relationships between female and male snowboarders, and relationships

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between different groups of female snowboarders. Former research has mainly focused on informal snowboarding. This study will highlight participation in both informal and organized snowboarding.

The study is based on a workshop for female snowboarders organized by the Norwegian Snowboard Federation (NSBF). Education about gender issues (under-representation in snowboarding in general and specific activities contexts, explanatory factors and suggestions for change) is a central part of the NSBF's working programme and where one sub-group, PowderPuff Girls, is working on the recruitment of girls and women to snowboarding. They also work on promoting female participation at various levels in the organization. The intention behind the workshop was to discuss strategies to better the conditions for females in NSBF, in general terms and with regard to competitions, based on the participants' experiences from various snowboarding contexts.

In analytical terms, snowboarding may be understood as a field, a social arena where the agents involved share a certain number of fundamental interests. The structure of the field is a state of power relations among the agents who are struggling for domination as well as definition of which forms of capital are most valued.⁸ To the present study Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *capital* and *masculine domination* are considered useful tools in order to analyse the participants' experiences and agency in the field. Initially, snowboarding will be contextualized in relation to sport subcultures – also known as 'alternative sports'.

Snowboarding – a mainstreaming alternative sport?

Snowboarding, along with a wide range of physical activities commonly referred to as alternative sports, contrasts with traditional sports in various ways. In sociological terms, alternative sports are 'activities that either ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and to mainstream sport values'.⁹ Definitions of what Rinehart¹⁰ conceptualizes as 'mainstream sports' tend to emphasize 'institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion' and 'participants motivated by internal and external rewards'.¹¹ The most striking distinction between the two forms relates to institutionalizing and competitiveness, which reflect the informal structure of the alternative sports as well as repudiation of competitiveness. The latter has an impact on motivational aspects, as internal motivation is often celebrated above external motivation which is normally associated with hierarchical merit and performance records. On the contrary, the 'alternative sports' drew upon the new leisure movement's philosophy emphasizing anti-competition, cooperation and self-expression,¹² characterized by experimenting with activities that require motor skills, creativity or risk taking, with emphasis on fun and personal growth.¹³

Terms like *subculture* and *counter-culture* were commonly used to describe the alternative sports in the 1970s and 1980s to illustrate their peripheral positions and ideological distance from mainstream sports.¹⁴ The playful and expressive qualities of these *sub-* and *counter-*cultures were accentuated in the contrast between them and dominant sports which, it was held, lacked such characteristics and seemed overly rationalized, technologized and bureaucratized.¹⁵ The adoption of the term 'subculture' is associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham and the studies of spectacular, resistive youth groups in the 1970s which focused on specific activities, values and subcultural styles (music, hairstyle, language) that distinguished certain groups of youth from the wider culture.¹⁶ In recent years scholars have questioned the relevance of the concept of subculture, among others Muggleton who argues that with the development of fragmented and plural styles the aspects of domination and resistance

are diminishing. Further; 'the very concept of subculture is becoming less applicable in postmodernity, for it only maintains its specificity with something to define it against'.¹⁷

The term *alternative sports* relates to a variety of sport activities also described as *extreme*, *action-sports*, *whiz*, *postmodern* or *lifestyle sports*. Plural conceptions reflect diverse forms of practice as well as the meaning the participants put into it. Rinehart discusses naming, categories and features of these sports in relation to mainstream sports (organization, competitions etc.).¹⁸ Several of these sports are commonly associated to X Games and high risk is generally considered a factor in extreme sports, although not necessarily in alternative sports. Wheaton uses the term 'lifestyle sports', 'as it is an expression adopted by the members of the cultures themselves, and one that encapsulates these cultures and their identities, signalling the importance of the socio-historical context in which these activities emerged, took shape and exist'.¹⁹

Midol and Broyer refer to 'whiz sport', which stems from 1970s France. The culture of whiz snow sports (associated with the use of new objects like mono-skis and boards) appeared in the wake of a conflict between skiers and coaches in the French Ski Federation where opposing interests between the individuals involved revolved around divergent notions of training. Some skiers argued for more playful practices and promoted the concept of *fun* that should be experienced in the here and now.²⁰ According to Midol, the whiz sports emphasize speed, fluidity, entertainment and freedom linked to the imaginary notion of *kick*, which stands for new sensations, a sense of harmony, of risk, and a taste for the extreme.²¹

Alternative sports like skateboarding, windsurfing and snowboarding expanded dramatically in the late 1980s. Researchers observed that these sports were disproportionately created by young white males. Messner explains this development as a reaction towards the growing number of black athletes in many traditional sports, such as basketball and baseball, particularly in the USA. In the context of race and class relations African-American boys are predominantly located in a narrow range of sports, while white middle-class boys have resources to a much wider range of sports opportunities and choices. According to Messner the myth of black physical superiority, which is played out most publicly in key men's sports, has led some young white males to find their niche in alternative sports that enable them to express, perform and embody white athletic masculinities.²²

While females have gained greater access to alternative sports in recent years, they are still a minority, similar to what we find in a wide range of sport disciplines. Data from the National Sporting Goods Association in the United States indicate one quarter of US snowboarders to be girls or women.²³ The annual report from the Norwegian Snowboard Federation for 2005 shows that 28% of its members were females, in comparison to 15% in 1997.²⁴ A possible explanation of the increase in membership may be PowderPuff Girls and NSBF's engagement in recruiting female snowboarders to the federation.

Snowboarding has been examined most extensively in academic circles in the last decade. Some authors have attempted to trace its roots and history.²⁵ Others have addressed specific topics in the development of snowboarding, such as variations between skiers and snowboarders in style of dress and bodily presentation, equipment and language,²⁶ and the mainstreaming of snowboarding in terms of consumer capitalism. It is argued that although snowboarding provides consumer capitalism with a new source of styles and images to exploit, its marked-driven popularity also enables snowboarders to create social spaces in which they retain many of the unique philosophies of alternative sports, such as cooperation, fun and freedom.²⁷ Furthermore, studies have analysed snowboarding status and style,²⁸ media representations of snowboarding in print

(snow)board magazines²⁹ and the connection between magazine publishers and snowboarders.³⁰ Moreover, snowboarding has been examined along with other board sports; namely skateboarding and surfing.³¹ Norwegian studies have examined snowboarding in relation to youth culture. Christensen conducted an ethnographic study of snowboarders' resident at a resort during the snowboarding season.³² Sisjord has studied changes in the snowboarding culture based on two samples (1996 and 2003) with particular attention to gender issues.³³

Gender issues are furthermore raised by Anderson who focuses on the social practices used by male snowboarders to construct masculinities relating to clothing styles (street punks, skaters and gangster), risk-taking, violence and aggression which refer to fights in the lift lines or situations outside the snowboarding contexts.³⁴ Thorpe discusses females' positions and opportunities in snowboarding, painting contrasting pictures of female snowboarders – one of social progress, the other of social constraint. The findings are discussed in the light of liberal and radical feminist theories while concluding that liberal feminism in snowboarding has the potential to radically alter gender relations.³⁵

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and masculine domination

In order to analyse gender relations in snowboarding, Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *capital* and *masculine domination* will be useful tools. The dynamics revealed in studies of alternative sports, the outsider-insider relationship being one example, offer many points of resemblance to Bourdieu's conception of fields which he explains as sites of confrontations between agents with specific interests linked to their position in the field. In every field, he suggests, exists a struggle between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier, and the dominant agent who strives to defend the monopoly and keep out competition. The dominant agents' interest lie in conserving what is produced in the field, and in so doing to conserve themselves.³⁶

In analytic terms, a field may be described as a network of objective relations between power relations between positions. These positions are 'objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present or potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital)'.³⁷ To explain internal field dynamics, Bourdieu makes an analogy with games; it follows rules or regularities that are not explicit and codified. Central to the dynamics in fields are *stakes* which, for the most part, are the product of the competition between players. Players are taken in by the game. They oppose each other, to the extent that they concur in their field belief in the game and its stakes. Players agree that the play is worth playing, and this agreement is the basis for their competition. Each field possesses a basic law, *nomos*, or specific principles for belief and constitution to which the agents are 'being caught up in the game, in the *illusio* understood as a fundamental belief in the interest of the game and value of the stakes which is inherent in that membership'.³⁸

According to Bourdieu every established order tends to produce the naturalization of its own arbitrariness.³⁹ The mechanisms tending to produce this effect are the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents' aspirations, out of which arises the sense of limits that is the correspondence between the social structures and the mental structures, which is the basis of adherence to the established order and power relations. This situation produces *doxa*, the world of traditions experienced as a 'natural world' and taken for granted. The basis of specific power or authority characteristic of a field is inclined to conservation strategies, those which in the fields of production of cultural goods tend to defend *orthodoxy*. *Heterodoxy*, to the contrary, relates to a critical break with *doxa*.⁴⁰

The analogy of games also includes trump cards, which are master cards whose force varies depending on the game and the field. Some cards are valid across various fields. These are fundamental species of *capital*, 'but their relative value as trump cards is determined by each field and even by the successive states of the same field'.⁴¹ *Capital* is an essential concept in Bourdieu's works. In one of his early books, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), the concept of capital is elaborated in order to explain spatial representation of socially significant cultural practices.⁴² The social space is constituted according to three main dimensions: the relative composition of capital (economic and cultural), the total volume of the two forms of capital, and changes in these properties over time. Economic capital relates to economy and material resources, while cultural capital exists in three forms – embodied, objectified or institutionalized. In addition, Bourdieu introduces the concept of social capital, which is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, reflecting a network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Symbolic capital is the form that the former species of capital takes when it is grasped through perceptions that recognize the specific logic of its possession and accumulation.⁴³

Bourdieu expands the conceptions of power and domination to gender relations. Basic to *masculine domination* is the androcentric representation of biological reproduction and the divisions constitutive of the social order. The social relations of domination and exploitation instituted between the sexes are embedded in different classes of *habitus*, according to distinctions that are reducible to the male-female opposition.⁴⁴ According to Bourdieu, both men and women remain unaware of the logic of the relationship of domination which constitutes the males as dominant and females as dominated. The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant, thus making them appear as natural, and which can lead to a kind of systematic self-depreciation and adherence to a demeaning image of women. Bourdieu introduces the concept of *symbolic violence* to explain how the dominated adopts the cognitive instruments from the dominant when the schemes she applies in order to perceive and appreciate herself or to perceive and appreciate the dominant, are the product of the embodiment of the classifications of which her social being is the product.⁴⁵

Research methods and organization of data

The investigation was conducted in conjunction with a one-day workshop organized by NSBF in October 2004. The workshop attracted 15 participants, including three men: two from the NSBF administration who, together with the PowderPuff Girls organized the workshop, and one snowboarding judge invited to discuss females' participation in snowboarding competitions. Due to my former research on gender and snowboarding I was invited to give a speech as an introduction to the workshop. After that I participated in the workshop as an overt participant observer, during plenary sessions and group discussions.⁴⁶ Issues concerning barriers to females in snowboarding during practice and competitions were discussed, as were strategies to recruit and educate women as snowboarding instructors and judges for competitions.

Field notes written immediately after the workshop served as a source of information as well as a background for developing the interview guide. During the week after the workshop six of the participants were interviewed. These were females in the age range 18 to 28, selected from those who were regarded as representative and able to elaborate on female snowboarders' experiences. For this reason, the three men were excluded as were two participants without personal experience in active snowboarding (mothers of female

snowboarders and representatives from a snowboarding club). Among the ten remaining participants, the selection was based on diversity related to snowboarding background as well as availability. Two of the interviewees had experience in national snowboarding competitions and were certified snowboarding instructors; two were certified snowboarding instructors; and the remaining two had no such experience but planned to become certified instructors.

The topics of the interviews concerned personal experiences and perceptions of opportunities and obstructions to female participation in snowboarding in general, and in the NSBF. Furthermore, the participants' perceptions of various groups of snowboarders' status and position in the snowboarding culture were elaborated upon, since this came up in the workshop, particularly in discussions of how to reach different groups of females and get them more involved in the activities. The formal interviews lasted about an hour on average and were transcribed for analysis. The transcriptions were coded into main categories and associated sub-categories and cross-case analysed.⁴⁷

Based on the data analysis, two main topics emerged that guided the data presentation and discussion. The first addresses relationships between female and male snowboarders, the second relationships between different types of female participants which will be presented according to the following socially constructed, subcultural typologies of femininity: the *Babes*, the *Fast-girls* and the *Invisible Girls*.

Female–male relationships

It seemed to be a common perception among the workshop participants that compared to males, females have a more passive attitude and easily adopt the role of spectator, in particular in male-dominated contexts. This was discussed in the interviews with expressions like 'boys are so much more dominating', 'girls worry about making a fool of themselves', and 'boys are more ready to drop in, so the girls are just sitting there'. The latter observation refers to 'drop-in' at the Half-pipe, which along with the Big Jump⁴⁸ was felt by respondents to be more challenging for females than males. Although male snowboarders might also be reserved in similar situations, as it emerged in the discussions at the workshop, a general impression was that females – understood as a category – more easily withdraw in a context with spectators.

Like skateboarding, snowboarding developed within a flexible and informal context where the participants controlled the activity: they were the experts. Without any rules or coaches to guide the activity, the athletes created their own tricks and games and decided when and where to perform them.⁴⁹ Consequently, snowboarding may be more demanding with regard to self-positioning than traditional organized sports characterized by a higher degree of organization and gender segregation. Peer socialization is a central part of the snowboarders' development in watching other riders' tricks and style expressions, and the results from the present study – both in workshop discussions and the interviews – indicate that males 'naturally' take the expert's role. The interviewees referred to both female and male peers' influence in acquiring tricks and skill improvement, whereas males supposedly only looked to male peers, or as one of the interviewees said: 'I don't think the boys would say it out loudly if they compared themselves with girls'. The results reflect male domination as well as the dynamics in alternative sports – or sport subcultures. According to Bourdieu, masculine domination remains both a symbolic feature and a practical product of everyday life.⁵⁰ Males' superior position reflects power relations which produces *doxa*, the world of traditions experienced as a 'natural world' and taken for granted.⁵¹ In terms of subcultures in general terms, Thornton, inspired by Bourdieu,

suggests that the ‘core’ – which normally means males – commonly enjoy a great deal of respect, not only because their high volume of subculture capital, but also from their role in defining and creating it.⁵² During the interviews, several spoke about longstanding members as the ‘core’ basically composing male snowboarders. It should, however, be noted that the participants were hesitant to define snowboarding as a subculture, but also to define it a sport. As one of them said: ‘It’s different from sports in traditional terms. We prefer just “snowboarding”, or we call ourselves snowboarders.’ The quotation associates with discussions of the relevance of terms like subculture because with the development of fragmented and plural styles, the aspects of domination and resistance are diminishing.⁵³ Plural conceptions of alternative sports reflect diverse forms of practice as well as the meaning the participants put into it.⁵⁴

The assumption of males’ superior position in snowboarding – as *doxa* – was elaborated upon in discussions at the workshop and by the interviewees, in particular with respect to debates about strategies to encourage females to participate at the Half-pipe and Big Jumps. The reasons behind females’ reservation were explained by gender differences in ‘snowboarding self-esteem’. This presumably also related to male perceptions of female riders, as one of the interviewees said: ‘Many boys are like this: it’s so boring to watch girls at the pipe, it’s sooo boring.’ Moreover, discussions focused upon snowboarding facilities that besides being constrained by size also may impact evaluations of the females’ performance, as one of the interviewees expressed:

They use the same facilities, the same pipe, and that’s a Monster-pipe. So you can imagine; a girl with half of the weight of a boy makes quite different preconditions, which makes the level quite different. It appears to be bad, even if it’s a good performance for a girl, will she always come short, visually, compared to the boys, who are flying up in the air, over the edge.

In Bourdieu’s conceptualization, the quotation indicates that females fall short in *physical capital*, which refers to development of bodies and bodily expressions recognized as possessing value in social fields based on power, status and distinctive symbolic forms.⁵⁵ The quotation reveals the viewpoint that females are not able to reach the height of the males, to fly up in the air over the edge, which makes the tricks appear more spectacular and more highly valued. The fact that women and men are offered the same facilities in competitions was raised at the workshop from two perspectives. One referred to justification of females’ abilities to perform well which they likely would do in a smaller pipe or at smaller jumps. It was stated that only a small proportion of females compete, particularly in Big Jump, because only a few dare to try, and if they do, they can hardly perform their best tricks due to the challenge of just managing the jump. The other perspective referred to the risk of injury, in particular in Big Jumps. Therefore, the workshop participants debated possibilities of differentiation in size of the jumps, admitting, however, that it might be a hard task to negotiate with resort owners in that regard. When the topic was elaborated in the interviews, some referred to resort owners wishing to offer the ‘best and biggest Jumps’; others mentioned organizers searching for spectacular events and publicity.

An overall impression from discussions at the workshop and the interviews was that female snowboarders – as a category – in the culture are perceived as ‘second class snowboarders’, as one of them phrased it, in particular when it comes to snowboarding contests. The interviewees with experience of competitions regretted the speakers’ minor interest in female snowboarders, where the speakers (speakers are always men) commonly gave less comments to females than to male riders. A few of them mentioned that the speaker neglected them or gave disrespectful comments. One of them said: ‘It’s no fun

when the speaker is more focused on how your trousers fit you, than on your tricks.’ The results indicate that females are not taken seriously or indirectly defined as ‘the other’.⁵⁶ Other narratives referred to competitions for women being held after the males’ final had finished, or they told about prizes which could be men’s snowboard boots or T-shirts, extra large size.

A vital part of the PowderPuff Girls’ work is to encourage females to undertake proactive snowboarding and to make themselves more visible in different contexts, to increase the females’ capital; physical, symbolic and (sub)cultural capital, in order to make them more fit to meet the requirements of the field.⁵⁷ The discussions at the workshop aimed at brainstorming ideas and discussing concrete plans and strategies for implementation. Women-only sessions with instruction had already been arranged by PowderPuff Girls, with positive results. Such events, it was argued, limits the participants’ barriers to take part – whether it should be at the Half-pipe, jumps or rails – and consequently, strengthen their opportunity to develop snowboarding skills and increase their physical capital in the sport. Furthermore, the necessity of educating female instructors and judges was emphasized, because ‘the girls need role models’ and ‘we have to take more responsibility in developing the sport and the overall culture’, it was phrased. The predominant goal is snowboarding on gender-equal terms, which means a break with doxa – ‘taken for granted’ assumptions of males’ superior position.⁵⁸ To change the competition format in terms of resort facilities, and the speakers’ disrespect for female snowboarders, are probably the most challenging issues. Another issue to deal with is tied to recruitment of females, to which behaviour and attitudes to snowboarding play a major role.

Different typologies of femininities

Results from the interviews show that the snowboarders’ perceptions of themselves and other female riders reflect different typologies of femininity. Based on the interviewees’ descriptions of themselves and other riders, the results are divided into three main typologies: Fast-girls, Babes and the Invisible Girls. Some of the interviewees used these concepts while others made expressions which may be interpreted into these typologies. Fast-girls appear to be a characteristic encompassing snowboarding performance and approved attitudes towards the sport. Babes relate to those ‘hanging around’ and who ‘pretend to be a snowboarder’. The third category commonly referred to was female snowboarders who were aloof from the more active riders and are labelled the Invisible Girls. The Invisible Girls probably comprised the majority of female snowboarders and the target group for the PowderPuff Girls in promoting women snowboarders. However, the Fast-girls and the Babes were obviously the most distinctive groups, as this quotation illustrates:

When establishing the PowderPuff Girls we decided to have a closer look at the snowboarding context to sort out how to promote women’s snowboarding. And we realized that it’s pretty much a boy’s sport, and it’s kind of, what should I say, discriminating, may be very strong words, but you find attitudes like, if you aren’t a babe or one of the boys, then you count for nothing.

The quotation reveals stereotyping as a signifying practice which, according to Hall, reduces people to a few, simple and essential characteristics.⁵⁹ Hall explains stereotyping as a strategy of ‘splitting’; it divides between the acceptable and the unacceptable, and it excludes or expels everything which does not fit. Stereotyping is part of the maintenance of a social and symbolic order, and tends to occur where there are inequalities of power.

In the following, the relationship between the three typologies of femininity will be discussed. It should be noted, however, that none of the interviewees placed themselves among the Babes, so descriptions of Babes are based solely on the interviewees' perceptions of other female snowboarders. Moreover, the results show that stereotyping does not reflect virtually distinct boundaries. Consequently, the Invisible Girls may include riders of both stereotypes. For example, an individual labelled a Babe by the interviewees might not perceive herself as a Babe. Further, far from all interviewees were explicit in placing themselves as Fast-girls or Invisible Girls. Yet the typologies may serve as applicable tools in describing different groups of female snowboarders' positions in the field of snowboarding. The rest of this essay will follow the stereotypes revealed in the quotation above: the Babes, the Fast-girls (one of the boys), and the Invisible Girls (women who count for nothing).

Babes

The data analysis reveals two main dimensions in the interviewees' descriptions of the Babes, one reflecting the insider-outsider dimension in the culture, the other referring to the Babes' behaviour in relation to male riders. The 'outsider' Babes appear to visit the resorts and seek snowboarders as a reference group. The interviewees commented on these females' behaviour and style in different ways. Several spoke in terms of 'hanging around, smoking and snowboard occasionally'; others also focused on the snowboarding equipment as illustrated here:

And then you have those who snowboard just a little, they have a board, hang around, they think it's cool. It's just to have something to do on Sundays, feel that they belong somewhere. And often they have the most cool clothes, because they want to look cool. And they have the real gear, no question. They want to make it clear that they are snowboarding.

The quotation features an 'outsider' in the snowboarding, obviously having the real gear, however, not much appreciated by the 'insiders', which parallels former studies on sport subcultures.⁶⁰ One of the interviewees was worried about male snowboarders' respect for female riders in general due to the mentioned behaviour, as it came out here: 'It's a pity, 'cause the girls who hang around there and smoke might adversely affect the boys' respect for the girls, when they see a lot of girls around not snowboarding.' The quotation may be understood in the light of the PowderPuff Girls' efforts in promoting female snowboarding where general acceptance for females in the culture as well as activating the 'passive' and 'invisible' participants is a definite goal. Gaining respect is indisputably connected to 'appropriate' snowboarding behaviour and attitudes towards the sport. Therefore, female snowboarders' passive behaviour may reinforce assumptions of females as 'the other'.⁶¹ Being an 'outsider', or in Bourdieu's terms, those least endowed with capital, are inclined towards subversion strategies which results in sustaining orthodoxy in the field instead of heterodoxy which could contribute to a break with doxa.⁶²

The other dimension of Babes revealed in the interviews points to female-male relationships, as one said: 'the girls who tend to be there on the boy's terms, mostly to get attention, join the after-ski and go partying'. This may be due to the girls' interest in male snowboarders, but it may also be explained by the males' attitudes towards females. One interviewee pictured boys who would be happy to have girls around at the weekend or joining the parties, but they were less interested in socializing on the slopes. Another expressed:

I don't think babes are a result of the boys' attitudes. My impression is that the girls cast themselves in that role. But of course, you find those who like to talk of girls that way, that's quite natural.

Interpretation of the quotations above reveals an interplay between males' and females' behaviour reflecting symbolic violence which, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant, is the violence exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity, when 'social agents engage by the mere fact of taking the world for granted, of accepting the world as it is, and of finding it natural because *their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world.*'⁶³ According to Bourdieu,⁶⁴ the social relation of domination is constructed through the fundamental principle of division between the active male and the passive female, and because this principle may create and direct desire – males desire for possession and females desire for masculine domination. With reference to the quotation 'the girls cast themselves in that role' it is reasonable to suggest that these women are active agents in their own subordination.

The results, however, indicate that the PowderPuff Girls disparaged the Babes. The interviews also showed that the term 'babe' has undergone semantic change during recent years, or that the active snowboarders have become more aware of its use. The forerunner of the PowderPuff Girls, a small group of female snowboarders in NSBF, initially labelled themselves 'Babes on Board' but the name was changed to PowderPuff Girls when the group expanded after a few years because, as one of the founders said:

You know, it has negative connotations, the girls didn't want to be called babes. But, kind of, it's another concept when we think of babes, 'cause you're allowed to be concerned with how you look – and snowboarder, that's ok. It's not like when you are out on the mountain you can't wear make-up, or have to look masculine. You can be smart and wear cool boarding gear, combine being stylish with being an active snowboarder and included in the snowboarding milieu. It doesn't mean that you have simply to do things the 'male' way. But, certainly, the term babe is insulting if it's used to refer to the passive and smoking females.

The narrative conveys interesting reflections on female snowboarders and femininities. The first and the last sentence state that the term 'babe' has negative connotations. Simultaneously, she emphasizes feminine attributes as positively considered among her peers while disconnecting female snowboarding and masculinity. Moreover, the former 'Babes on Boards' did not associate the term 'babe' in accordance with current interpretations encompassing insulting connotations. As suggested by Rinehart, the term 'babe' is nowadays not perceived as politically correct because it infers that women are objects rather than subjects, and the term implies female athletes as infantilized adults within a male-dominated sport culture.⁶⁵

The interviewees' characteristics of the Babes, relating to Hall's explanation of stereotyping which divides between the acceptable and the unacceptable, may also shed light upon the change of the name 'Babes on Boards' to 'PowderPuff Girls'.⁶⁶ According to the interviewees, the name PowderPuff Girls is derived from 'Powerpuff Girls', an animated television series showing young girls as active and capable heroines.⁶⁷ The pun of 'PowderPuff' relates to powder snow, which is perceived as the ultimate riding conditions by advanced snowboarders. However, in semantic terms powder puff might also connote 'make up', and thereby a sign of the feminine *and* athletic, capable female snowboarders, as explained in the former quotation. Although possible semantic ambiguities might appear, the PowderPuff Girls emphasize promoting 'proactive snowboarding' among females, which may lead to a profound transformation of the subjective and objective experience of the body. Instead of being a body for others it becomes a body for oneself, the passive body becomes an active and acting body.⁶⁸

Fast-girls

The typology Fast-girls refers to female snowboarders who apparently experience inclusion in male-dominated contexts or are considered to be ‘one of the boys’ which, according to the stereotyping mentioned before, seems to connote acceptable snowboarding behaviour.⁶⁹ Several of the interviewees spoke about themselves and other riders in terms of ‘fast-girls’ or ‘tom-boys’ which indicates appropriate behaviour according to (male) snowboarding standards. As such, speed and skills on the board are desired qualities. However, it was emphasized that to have ‘guts’ and the right attitude towards snowboarding was required as well. The interviewees’ narratives reveal situations where the riders decisively felt confidence in their athletic skills, also in relation to male counterparts as illustrated here:

I have been riding quite a lot with male friends and I feel kind of status by doing well. It’s fun to impress the guys. In snowboarding, the males try to support you, but you must dare yourself.

The quotation reveals two dimensions: one reflecting confidence with her riding qualifications that may even impress male snowboarders: the other to group communication when positive feedback arises out of the action of showing guts. One can argue that she operates within the *nomos* of the field, with a sense for the game. She demonstrates commitment to the game by showing the will and ambitions to participate in snowboarding. She is caught up in the *illusio* being produced by the game, which depends on the actions and reactions of the agents in their struggle to maintain or improve their position in the field.⁷⁰ The interviewee indicates that she is not facing male oppression. Rather, she is confronted by the prospect of trying to perform to male standards. The finding also parallels previous studies on alternative sports. According to Thorpe,⁷¹ the male-dominated boarding cultures seem to accept those female participants who are able to behave, dress and speak like ‘one of the guys’. With reference to several studies on what she calls lifestyle sports, Wheaton suggests that such sports present opportunities for more transgressive embodied social identities compared to traditional sports, in some cases a ‘broadening of boundaries’.⁷² From the narrative above it is reasonable to suggest that this also happens in snowboarding, as the rider appears to expand her snowboarding qualifications according to the males’ standards while experiencing support from the males.

Other participants in the study emphasized the benefits of having male friends in order to get into snowboarding and gain acceptance in the milieu. A few of them spoke of themselves as ‘tom-boys’, particularly the younger interviewees (two teenagers, and one in her early 20s):

If you are a tom-boy, the kind that always have had male friends and joined them, then it’s much easier. Ann [her friend] and I have always been part of that group, and we are welcome. It’s not as if we are excluded because we are girls.

The quotation indicates that having male friends makes it easier to be included in snowboarding. Furthermore, the perception of being a ‘tom-boy’ is assumedly considered as positive by her own use of the term, which corresponds to other empirical findings. A comparative study of female soccer players from several European countries found a similar tendency. The results from the Norwegian players showed that the term ‘tom-boy’ was experienced positively by the participants.⁷³ Another participant clearly said that she felt accepted by male counterparts, largely due to her snowboarding attitudes and qualifications, but she did not associate herself with the term ‘tom-boy’: ‘My own experience, and I am not a tom-boy, but more like, I usually have a lot of male friends, and

feel comfortable with both male and female riders, without being that kind of tom-boy.’ Similar to the former quotation, this snowboarder also had a lot of male friends, but she distinguished herself clearly from the ‘tom-boy’ label. This may be understood in relation to age as well as semantic awareness concerning the conception. The latter was one of the ‘oldest’ in the sample, and one of those who argued that ‘fast-girl’ was a more suitable term to use. Some of the interviewees had the opinion that ‘tom-boy’ was a more accepted label for younger girls, before puberty, and therefore less relevant for females of their own age. Another argument against employing the term ‘tom-boy’ was that it might be stereotyping with connotations to gender, whereas the term ‘Fast-girls’ incorporates a dynamic aspect assumed to associate with the activity rather than gender.

The results show that the typology Fast-girls includes a variety of femininities as expressed by the interviewees. Nevertheless, some predominant features appear: snowboarding qualifications, dedication to the activity and acceptance in male-dominated contexts. It seems reasonable to suggest that the Fast-girls applied *succession strategies*, which refer to strategies employed by agents struggling for acceptance and competition for power.⁷⁴ The agents’ strategies depend on ‘their position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capital, and on the perception that they have of the field depending on the point of view they take *on* the field as a view taken from a point *in* the field’.⁷⁵ The results parallel findings reported by Kay and Laberge from a study of women in adventure racing, where women attempt to improve their position in the field hierarchy by pursuing succession strategies to accumulate physical capital in the form of toughness.⁷⁶

The invisible girls

The third typology, the Invisible Girls, covers a wide range of riders, from ‘weekend warriors’ to individuals who supposedly are seeking closer contact with more advanced riders, among whom snowboarding competitions might be a possible prospect. Apparently, the Invisible Girls were less proactive than the Fast-girls in staging themselves, an issue that was also raised at the workshop. How can this group be encouraged to undertake more active participation and make themselves more visible in snowboarding contexts? In crowded contexts, particularly when dominated by males, the Invisible Girls tend to withdraw, a fact that was explained by the girls’ fear of failure and being reluctant to have other riders’ attention. One of them said: ‘And should you fail, you also lose self-confidence’.

Snowboarding is much about ‘showmanship’ – the riders are watched, judged and possibly admired by bystanders, who are frequently peer-groups of riders. As mentioned before, the Half-pipe and Big Jumps were experienced as more challenging than free-riding on the slopes. The interviewees’ narratives conveyed various descriptions of how females handled different snowboarding situations. Some referred to themselves. However, most observations featured other riders, as this example illustrates:

Many just enjoy watching. But, for sure, they are afraid of failing at the jump, because they chose to ride beside it. They may have experienced abusive language from someone that prevents them from trying.

The quotation provides examples of withdrawal in terms of watching or riding beside the jump. Another aspect of the quotation relates to unpleasant comments which may be experienced as embarrassing and cause withdrawal. Others told about females choosing to ride alone, together with a friend or two, or selecting slopes with few people around.

The Half-pipe and Big Jumps obviously represent a considerable challenge for participation, as one said: 'There are a few females who ride the pipes and jumps. It is demanding, probably the most challenging barrier is that you must dare to try.' A few argued that participation as a single female was almost impossible, so at least two or more should come together, because 'like in Half-pipe, it's difficult to get into it if you come alone. That can be a hard task.'

The results reflect gender socialization which is comparable with other mixed-gender contexts, for example in school situations where the boys seem to be more comfortable with self-exposure and naturally find their place in the centre of attention. In particular, when the exposure is tied to physical performance, the girls tend to withdraw more often.⁷⁷ The informal structure of snowboarding represents an additional constraint for females compared to (school) events organized by people of authority. The step from being an invisible agent to participation on equal terms with more advanced riders, predominantly males, is apparently a considerable barrier:

In my opinion, there is a threshold for girls to become part of that milieu. But I think that is created inside the girls' heads more than in the environment. Because, my impression is that the milieu is very open and inclusive, in particular groups where people ride a lot.

The quotation is double-edged in terms of inclusiveness. She admitted a threshold for participation while simultaneously saying that her impression was of openness and inclusiveness. It is reasonable to interpret the participants' positions as an 'insider' who assumedly had experienced openness 'in particular among people who ride a lot'. The threshold for newcomers which she explained to be 'created inside the girls' head' relates to Bourdieu's notion of *doxa*.⁷⁸ *Doxa* refers to naturalization and arbitrariness in established social orders, in which the mechanisms tend to produce dialectics of the objective chances, out of which arises the sense of limits, i.e. the correspondence between the social and mental structures, which is the basis of adherence to the established order and power relations. The insiders have apparently overcome the barriers for inclusion and participation and become 'part of that milieu'. To overcome barriers was even more striking in snowboarding competitions, although competitions are separate male and female events. As mentioned before, the question of promoting females' participation in such events was discussed at the workshop and several of the interviewees elaborated on the issue, as this quotation illustrates:

It's difficult to get girls involved in competitions. But it varies with the set-up whether the girls dare. The fast-girls just dare, they don't bother what it's like, they just make it. But mostly it's sort of 'I am not good enough'.

The differences between the Fast-Girls (they don't care what it's like) and the Invisible Girls (thinking they are not good enough) reveals the participants' 'sense for the game' with regard to competition. One may suggest that the Fast-girls are caught up in the game, in the *illusio*, understood as a fundamental belief in the interest of the game, acting according to the *nomos* by accepting the viewpoint that is constitutive of the field.⁷⁹ Snowboarding contests offer opportunities for the agents to oppose each other by demonstrating physical capital and riding skills. The Invisible Girls, by contrast, stay away from the competition, assumedly by not having a sense of the game or by recognition of not meeting the requirements of the field in terms of adequate capital.⁸⁰

Concluding remarks

Although the proportion of females in snowboarding has increased during recent years, they still constitute a minority. The masculine domination combined with the informal structure of the sport makes female snowboarders less visible than males in the sport context, particularly in mixed gender groups. The awareness of the current situation led female snowboarders in NSBF to found PowderPuff Girls, with the aim of promoting female snowboarding, inside and outside the federation. Central issues at the workshop were related to education of women as instructors and judges, snowboard competition formats, and strategies for more proactive snowboarding among females. According to the discussions at the workshop and the interview respondents, fewer females participate at the Half-pipe and Big Jump in general and in competitions. Male snowboarders as a category are widely considered to be superior to female snowboarders, which in Bourdieu's terms relates to *doxa*, the naturalized and 'taken for granted' perceptions of power relations.⁸¹ The 'core' snowboarders, basically composed of male riders, were deemed to be at the forefront of developing athletic expressions, style and jargon, due to their higher volume of subculture- and physical capital and their role in defining and creating it.⁸²

Various typologies of femininity were identified: Babes, Fast-girls and the Invisible Girls. The typologies arose from the participants' characteristics of different groups of female riders. Apparently, the Babes were attracted to snowboarding by male riders, or through attaining snowboarders as a reference group. The involvement of the Fast-girls and the Invisible Girls, on the contrary, was activity-driven. Moreover, the Fast-girls seemed to be more or less accepted and recognized by male riders when socializing at the slopes, the Half-pipe and Big Jumps. The Invisible Girls, probably the largest group, comprised a variety of riders seemingly remaining aloof from the more advanced and visible snowboarders. The female snowboarders assumedly employed different strategies of position-taking, the Babes' acting associated with subversion strategies and the Fast-girls' succession strategies,⁸³ whereas the Invisible Girls became invisible in position-taking.

The female snowboarders' multiple experiences represent different levels of performance and aspirations connected to the activity, reflecting snowboarding as an emerging, legitimate sport developed from a sport subculture. More research is needed, however, to gain a better understanding of the complexity of female snowboarders' experiences, opportunities and constraints in informal as well as organized, competitive snowboarding. Male snowboarders' perspectives and attitudes toward female riders might as well complement the picture of snowboarding in mixed gender contexts.

Notes

¹ Reichenfeld and Bruechert, *Snowboarding*

² Howe, *(Sick) a Cultural History of Snowboarding*.

³ Anderson, 'Snowboarding'; Coulter-Parker, 'Going over board.'; Lowenthal, 'Snowboarding'.

⁴ Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*.

⁵ Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture*.

⁶ Anderson, 'Snowboarding'; Beal, 'Disqualifying the Official'; Donnelly and Young, 'The Construction and Confirmation of Identity'; Pearson, *The Surfing Subcultures*; Wheaton, "Just do it".

⁷ Anderson, 'Snowboarding'; Beal, 'Disqualifying the Official'; Beal and Wilson, "Chicks dig Scars"; Thorpe, 'Jibbing the Gender Order'; Wheaton, "New Lads?"; Wheaton and Tomlinson, 'The Changing Gender Order in Sport?'

- ⁸ Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.
- ⁹ Rinehart, 'Arriving Sports', 506.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Coakley, *Sports in Society*, 21.
- ¹² Humphreys, 'Snowboarders'; Humphreys, "'Shredheads go Mainstream?'".
- ¹³ Donnelly, 'Sport as a Site for "Popular" Resistance'.
- ¹⁴ Pearson, *The Surfing Subcultures*; Donnelly, 'Sport as a Site for "Popular" Resistance'; Donnelly, 'Subcultures in Sport'; Donnelly and Young, 'The Construction and Confirmation of Identity'.
- ¹⁵ Donnelly, 'Sport as a Site for "Popular" Resistance'.
- ¹⁶ Hall and Jefferson, *Resistance through Rituals*; Hebdidge, *Subculture*; Brake, *Comparative Youth Cultures*.
- ¹⁷ Muggleton, 'The Post-structuralist', 199.
- ¹⁸ Rinehart, 'Arriving Sports'.
- ¹⁹ Wheaton, 'Introduction', 4.
- ²⁰ Midol and Broyer, 'Toward an Anthropological Analysis of New Sport Cultures'.
- ²¹ Midol, 'Cultural Dissents'.
- ²² Messner, *Taking the Field*.
- ²³ National Sporting Goods Association – 2001.
- ²⁴ Norwegian Snowboard Federation, *Annual Report 2004*.
- ²⁵ Howe, *(Sick) a Cultural History of Snowboarding*; Rinehart, 'Arriving Sports'; Burton, 'Snowboarding'.
- ²⁶ Heino, 'New Sports'; Humphreys, 'Snowboarders'; Thorpe, 'Embodied Boarders'.
- ²⁷ Humphreys, 'Snowboarders'; Humphreys, "'Shredheads go Mainstream?'"; Humphreys, 'Selling out Snowboarding'.
- ²⁸ Thorpe, 'Embodied Boarders'.
- ²⁹ Anderson, 'Snowboarding'; Rinehart, "'Babes" & Boards'; Wilhelmi, "'Chicks", Babes – or Real Members?'.
- ³⁰ Howe, *(Sick) a Cultural History of Snowboarding*.
- ³¹ Rinehart, "'Babes" & Boards'; Thorpe, 'Beyond "Decorative Sociology"'; Young, 'Being the "Alternative" in an Alternative Subculture'.
- ³² Christensen, 'Absolutely Snowboard'.
- ³³ Sisjord, 'Snowboarding'.
- ³⁴ Anderson, 'Snowboarding'.
- ³⁵ Thorpe, 'Jibbing the Gender Order'.
- ³⁶ Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'.
- ³⁷ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 97.
- ³⁸ Bourdieu, *Pascal Meditations*, 11.
- ³⁹ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.
- ⁴⁰ Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'.
- ⁴¹ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 98.
- ⁴² Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
- ⁴³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.
- ⁴⁴ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ I have no personal experience in snowboarding. However, I have previously made a study on snowboarding and on several occasions have been invited by NSBF to speak about gender issues in sport, with particular reference to snowboarding.
- ⁴⁷ Patton, *Qualitative Evaluations*; Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis*.
- ⁴⁸ Half-pipe is a steep galley in the snow in which the riders travel down then up the galley walls and perform aerial manoeuvres at the end of each rise as they leave the wall and are airborne. Big Jumps are jumps in which the riders make aerial manoeuvres.
- ⁴⁹ Beal, 'Disqualifying the Official'.
- ⁵⁰ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.
- ⁵¹ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.
- ⁵² Thornton, *Club Cultures*.
- ⁵³ Muggleton, 'The Post-structuralist'.
- ⁵⁴ Rinehart, 'Arriving Sports'.

- ⁵⁵ Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*.
- ⁵⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Gender*.
- ⁵⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.
- ⁵⁸ Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'.
- ⁵⁹ Hall, *Representation*.
- ⁶⁰ Anderson, 'Snowboarding'; Beal, 'Disqualifying the Official'; Donnelly and Young, 'The Construction and Confirmation of Identity'; Wheaton, "'Just do it'".
- ⁶¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Gender*.
- ⁶² Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'.
- ⁶³ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 168.
- ⁶⁴ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.
- ⁶⁵ Rinehart, "'Babes" & Boards'
- ⁶⁶ Hall, *Representation*.
- ⁶⁷ The Powerpuff Girls TV debut in 1998 was the highest rated premiere in Cartoon Network's history. For several seasons the series consistently scored the highest rating each week for the network among people from young children to adults. The Powerpuff Girls revolve around the adventures of three kindergarten girls made by the ingredients "sugar, spice and everything nice . . . accidentally added by an extra ingredient to the concoction; chemical X!" Using their ultra super powers, Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup have dedicated their lives to fighting crime and the forces of evil. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ThePowerpuffGirls>.
- ⁶⁸ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.
- ⁶⁹ Hall, *Representation*.
- ⁷⁰ Bourdieu, *Pascal Meditations*.
- ⁷¹ Thorpe, 'Beyond "Decorative Sociology'.
- ⁷² Wheaton, 'Introduction', 19.
- ⁷³ Scraton *et al.*, 'It's Still a Man's Game?'
- ⁷⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.
- ⁷⁵ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 101.
- ⁷⁶ Kay and Laberge, "'Mandatory Equipment'".
- ⁷⁷ Bjerrum Nielsen and Rudberg, *The Story about Girls and Boys*.
- ⁷⁸ Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'.
- ⁷⁹ Bourdieu, *Pascal Meditations*.
- ⁸⁰ Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.
- ⁸¹ Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'.
- ⁸² Thornton, *Club Cultures*.
- ⁸³ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; Bourdieu, 'Some Properties of Fields'.

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