

Exploring careership in outdoor education and the lives of women outdoor educators

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The last decade has seen significant interest in research associated with outdoor education and outdoor learning in the UK. However, there has been little research into the perspectives of those staff, particularly women, who make available outdoor experiences to various groups in different situations and locations. The importance of understanding the lives of educators for understanding their professional development has been much discussed in relation to the physical education profession. This article considers how the notion of careership and the use of life-history research, through illuminating how outdoor educators make their career decisions in relation to their own socio-cultural and structural contexts, can provide an insight into professional development of outdoor educators and the gendered nature of outdoor education careers.

Keywords: *Career; Decision-making; Gender; Outdoor education; Life history*

Introduction

The 'outdoors' is a complex social and cultural phenomenon that is constituted by interrelated relations and discourses within geographical and environmental contexts. Outdoor education (OE), and more recently outdoor learning, derives its meanings from a variety of perspectives (see Humberstone, 2000a; Humberstone *et al.*, 2003). As an employment area, outdoor education has a diverse range of professional development opportunities, but it is generally acknowledged within the field that it lacks a clearly defined career structure. Indeed, the concept of 'career' in relation to the outdoors is a contentious one. While outlining possible occupational career paths, Collins (1997), for example, describes careers in the outdoors in terms of living life through outdoor education and lifestyle concerns. Given this personal connection between outdoor educators and their work in outdoor education, we believe, like Goodson and Sikes (2001) in relation to the teaching profession, that professional development in outdoor education cannot be understood as divorced from the individual outdoor educators themselves. In this article, we seek to reveal something

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of the lives of two women outdoor educators: their subjective understandings of their careers, and the way in which they made their career decisions within the contexts of their lives and the changing social and political structures of outdoor education's history. In this way, we hope to gain an insight not only into the identities of these outdoor professionals, and the nature of outdoor education careers, but also into the complexities of gender relations in different 'spheres' of the outdoor profession.

The social and historical context of outdoor education

The development of outdoor education in the United Kingdom (UK) has been influenced by a number of different philosophies, legislative influences and political developments (Higgins & Morgan, 1999). Outdoor education also has a gendered background, with a historically male-dominated culture and philosophy through associations with the military and with physical competence (Humberstone *et al.*, 1998; Cook, 2001). Women were absent from early positions as outdoor leaders and their exploits in outdoor adventure were often invisible (Humberstone & Pedersen, 2001). Opportunities for women to work in outdoor education developed in the school curriculum, initially via the 1944 Education Act and subsequently with the widening of the physical education (PE) syllabus that occurred in schools in the 1950s and 1960s. The traditional entry to outdoor education, particularly for women, was via (initially single-sex) physical education colleges as such colleges began to include outdoor education as part of their training (see Parker & Meldrum, 1973). A small number of key institutions offering specific outdoor education degree courses also developed in the 1970s (Higgins & Morgan, 1999). Although many schools employed qualified teachers, and local authority centres preferred qualified teachers, Parker and Meldrum (1973) note that many outdoor centres, 'Outward Bound' schools and commercially operated centres at this time frequently employed competent mountaineers, canoeists and so forth, who did not necessarily have teaching qualifications.

Since the 1970s, the provision of outdoor education has changed rapidly, with the 1980s and 1990s bringing increasing uncertainty. Significant influences that affected the provision of outdoor education included the Educational Reform Act (ERA) in 1988 and the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). A shift in outdoor education provision occurred following the local management of schools, which meant decreased budgets for outdoor education residential provision. This resulted in the closure of many local education authority centres in the early 1990s. In order to survive, many outdoor providers diversified into more commercial markets, employing fewer full-time salaried staff while making greater use of freelance, or independent, outdoor instructors. As Humberstone (1995) and Barnes (1999) have identified, these changes affected outdoor educators, in that some became disillusioned with the increasing commercialism, which appeared to conflict with their educational philosophies.

The use of the term 'career' in relation to either the outdoors or outdoor education is a relatively recent one—appearing only in the last decade in university and college

prospectuses, where there is a proliferation of degree courses in the broad area of outdoor studies (see Humberstone & Mannerings, 2004)—and often used in relation to the diverse opportunities within the broad notion of an ‘outdoor industry’. Collins (1997) identified three different occupational areas: outdoor education, development training and outdoor recreation, whereas Martin (2001) developed a more sophisticated ‘map’ of the outdoor sector, highlighting common characteristics and processes between the sectors. Schools, field study centres and local authority outdoor centres may provide opportunities for work in outdoor education, while organisations such as Outward Bound or the Brathay Hall Trust provide opportunities for work within development training. Social, youth and community work are areas which also utilise the skills of the outdoor practitioner.¹ Commercial companies such as PGL (a UK holiday company specialising in outdoor activities), or national outdoor centres such as Plas y Brenin or Glenmore Lodge are examples of outdoor organisations providing opportunities within outdoor recreation.

The Workforce Development Plan for the outdoors was developed by the UK National Training Organisation for Sport, Recreation and Allied Occupations to better understand the outdoor sector (SPRITO, 2001). It identified similar strands of occupational career development and attempted to outline hierarchical development within these dimensions. These strands, however, are in some ways artificially constructed and can be misleading in terms of suggesting clear progression routes. Furthermore, Barnes (1999) identified high rates of staff turnover in the early years of career development in outdoor organisations, and there are issues such as poor pay and long hours that have pervaded the sector. An increasing emphasis on health and safety, following national media coverage of disasters such as the incident in 1993 when four canoeists died at Lyme Bay, has meant a continuing demand for outdoor leaders to hold governing body qualifications. This has engendered ongoing debates amongst outdoor professionals concerning the ‘professionalisation’ of the outdoors, including the relative merits of technical (‘hard’) skills versus personal, educational (‘soft’) skills,² and the need for professional accreditation and clearer entry routes.³ In this context, a study that illuminates the career decision-making of two women outdoor educators following significantly different career paths can provide insights that may contribute to a greater understanding of professional development in the outdoor sector, while highlighting contradictory gender identities and relations in the ‘field’.

Understanding career decision-making

The most common approach to career decision-making has come from the discipline of psychology, where approaches have tended to be developmental, reinforcement-based, or personality-focused (Osipow, 1990). One problem with such approaches is that they typically fail to account for, or underplay, the significance of the social and cultural milieu within which career decisions are made. Although socio-psychological models of career decision-making have incorporated such influences (Astin, 1984; Chao & Malik, 1988), these models tend to separate out individual,

organisational and structural influences, rather than considering the process of career decision-making itself or the processes through which interrelationships between these elements occur.

In an attempt to bridge theories of career decision-making that separate individuals and external structures, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1996, 1997) presented a sociological model of 'careership', drawing on the conceptual tools of Bourdieu (1984) and the notion of identity and lifestyle choices used by Giddens (1991). We suggest that this approach may have considerable value for understanding the career decision-making of education professionals. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that careership involves three interrelated dimensions: first, the decision-making is 'pragmatically rational', and located in the habitus of the person making the decision. That is, career decisions are derived from what Bourdieu (1984) describes as individual dispositions that arise through ongoing life experiences and interactions with others in a particular social arena. They are not purely technical decisions, but are partly emotional, and are made in relation to the range of opportunities that a person perceives as available and possible, their 'horizon for action' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 34). An individual's 'horizon for action' is influenced both by the available 'structures of opportunity' and the individual's own habitus. That is, what an individual views as potentially and available arises from what they know of the employment market and also from their own predispositions. For example, a woman may perceive that the opportunity to be an expedition guide is not within her 'horizon for action', partly because of her awareness of the role as predominantly a male preserve and the limited number of positions that are available, but also from her own perceptions of whether she can see herself in that kind of position, arising from her life-history experiences and, we would add, gendered self-perceptions.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) further suggest that career decisions are formulated through interactions with others in the 'field', related to the unequal resources that different 'players' in the field possess. Here, Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'field' refers to a set of structural relations in which different stakeholders are engaged, who have differing resources of power, or capital. The outdoor field could therefore be taken to refer to the outdoor industry, which as shown previously has a tradition of male dominance, with stakeholders for career decisions including, but not restricted to, employers and colleagues.

Thirdly, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p. 33–40), career decisions are located within turning points and routines of experience that make up the life course. The notion of turning points as the punctuations in a career is common within the perspective of the subjective career, where 'career' is akin to a journey of personal identity (Nicholson & West, 1989). This subjective approach to understanding careers and career progression has been much developed within educational research, particularly in exploring the lives and occupational socialisation of physical education teachers (e.g. Sikes *et al.*, 1985; Sikes, 1988; Templin & Schempp, 1991; Sparkes & Templin, 1992; Armour, 1997; Dowling-Naess, 1998). Within educational research, the notion of 'critical incidents' has a similar meaning to that of turning points, in that it describes key times when changes to identity may occur.

From this perspective, the twists and turning points of occupational careers may be viewed as major and minor shifts and developments in occupational identity over the life course. Whereas careership is viewed as an ongoing process, times of re-evaluating professional identity (such as turning points or 'critical incidents') can be understood as occasions when career decisions are likely to be made. As Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) note, the transformations in identity that occur at turning points may be minor or they may be more clearly defined. What is not explored in their conceptualisation of careership is the significance of gender and gender relations and how these are implicated in the process.

Many career decisions, however, may arise through chance circumstances or are affected by outside factors as well as by previous experiences with others in the workplace. To gain further understanding of career turning points, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p. 39) suggest that they may be divided into three types: structural, self-initiated, or forced. Structural turning points are the result of external structures of career institutions. They occur, for example, at the end of schooling, further or higher education, or at retirement. These are times when individuals are required to make decisions about their future (and there may be a greater or lesser preparation for such decisions). Self-initiated turning points occur when an individual is primarily responsible for a change or transformation in identity, but not as required by any particular structural system. Other turning points may be described as 'forced', in that they may be precipitated by a sudden outside event, such as an accident or injury, 'and/or by the actions of others' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 39). For example, compulsory redundancy is likely to have affected many outdoor educators employed in local education authority (LEA) outdoor centres in the UK in the early 1990s (Humberstone, 1995). The impact of these turning points on individual career decisions will differ among individuals according to their different perspectives and reactions to events and experiences and the contexts in which they occur.

Although there is a body of research that focuses on career transitions, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that an analysis of turning points cannot be divorced from the 'routine' or everyday experiences that come before and after them, which we suggest may be influenced by structural gender relations in the outdoors field. Experiences can be positive or they can be contradictory, undermining an individual's previous career decision and leading to an identity change. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) identify three other types of routine experiences: socialising, evolutionary and dislocating. Socialising routines are similar to confirmatory ones, but involve 'confirming an identity that was not originally desired' (p. 40). Evolutionary routes are more gradual and subtle shifts in identity, as a person grows out of an identity or feels the need to move on from a previous social position. Dislocating routines, however, occur when an individual finds himself or herself in a position where they feel a 'lack of fit' and desire to return to a previous identity. Sparkes and Smith's (2002) account of athletes who experienced a major injury resulting in disability and could not come to terms with their new identity is an example of a dislocating routine.

The analytical framework of Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) is intuitively appealing for exploring the complexity of outdoor careers. An advantage of this approach is that it can be applied to the careers of both women and men. Feminist adaptations of Bourdieu's work and the relationship between habitus and field, such as McCall (1992) and McNay (1999), also allow for the exploration of gender in career decision-making. One issue is that Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) study focused solely on the transition from school to work. Hence any suggestion that careership explains career decision-making across the life span has not been empirically explored. Indeed, a review by Osipow (1990) identified that more attention needs to be paid to what happens to individuals after their entry into the workforce. A study by Pigden (2000) applied the notion of careership to explore the career decisions of undergraduates going into employment for the first time, but found difficulties in interpreting the nature of turning points according to Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) classification. We argue that understanding the nature of career decisions for women is not only important for career guidance and education professionals as they strive to support individuals and organisations in an increasingly changing context of work, but also of significance in developing conceptual frameworks that take account of conflicting gender and work relations. The extent to which Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) conceptualisation of careership is a useful framework for this purpose is unclear, but it can form a sound starting point. In this study, we examine the utility of careership for understanding the twists and turning points of the careers of two women outdoor professionals.

Gaining life histories

The life histories in this article derive from in-depth interviews with two women outdoor professionals. The life history is a methodology based within the qualitative paradigm and involves telling or recounting a string of events, the unfolding history of a person's experiences (Denzin, 1978). The life history is usually an account of one person's life—here we examine two separate lives—and can be described as partial, topical or complete (Denzin, 1989). The life histories in this study are viewed as 'topical', in that they were concerned with the participants' lives in relation to the topic of their outdoor career. According to Denzin (1989), the life-history method rests on the collection and analysis of stories that speak to turning points in people's lives. The life history can also provide insights into a person's identity and sense of self; and how these change over time (Dowling-Naess, 2001). This was consistent with our aim in understanding more about women's professional identities, and for our focus on career transitions and turning points.

Sparkes (1993) also advocates the use of the life history to highlight the gendered nature of teaching careers. We considered this appropriate for this research, given that outdoor education has been identified as a male domain (for example, see Allin, 2000; Humberstone, 2000b; Carter, 2000). Because of the recognition that lives are typically recounted as narratives, or stories of lives, the term 'life story' has been used

interchangeably with 'life history' (Atkinson, 1998). The term 'life story' is used increasingly in research that focuses on unravelling the storylines, scripts and characters within individual narratives (see Sparkes, 2002). Goodson and Sikes (2001) differentiate the life history from the life story, suggesting that the transforming of a life story into a life history involves locating the life as constructed within its social and historical context, and supplying frameworks for understanding the story. Here we provide such a framework, and attempt to locate the life story within the changing context of outdoor careers and the wider contexts of individual lives. Although we have reconstructed some sense of order in our representation of the lives of the two women outdoor educators we interviewed, we recognise that, as lived, lives and careers are both complex and ambiguous.

The participants in the interviews were two women working in different areas of the outdoor industry. They were initially interviewed in relation to two different studies: one a PhD study exploring women's careers in outdoor education by Lindon, the second exploring the experiences of women working in the outdoors by Barbara. The interviews were conducted in the interviewees' place of work and home respectively and lasted approximately two hours. In this, therefore, they were shorter, more focused biographies than might typically be the basis for a life history. Both women were initially located and approached through personal contacts. We felt this was important for gaining access and facilitating the desire for the women themselves to want to tell us their stories (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). As the gaining of life stories can be stifled by too rigid an interview schedule, we constructed the interviews in an open manner. For Linda Allin, this involved beginning the interview with an invitation to 'start by telling me a bit about your family background and go from there', and for Barbara Humberstone, asking about current work and then asking about family. We adopted an active listening approach, in order to be able to follow up experiences that were viewed as important to the interviewee, rather than those imposed by ourselves. The life history is a representation of a life as recounted within a particular researcher-researched relationship, for a particular purpose (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). That is, the life history is a shared construction, and highly dependent upon the personal dynamics of the interview situation. Both authors of this article are women who have had experience of working in outdoor education. Barbara had also worked briefly at a centre where her interviewee had worked. This influenced our ability to gain rapport within the interview process, as we could share our own experiences (Oakley, 1981), and helped in building a trusting relationship.

The two lives that form the basis for this paper were chosen as a consequence of the women interviewed having worked in two different fields of the outdoor industry and having experienced very different lives and career transitions. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and significant turning points and experiences around the transitions in interviewees' lives were identified and explored. The first respondent, 'Sally', was given the opportunity to view the transcript. However, it was not possible to contact the second respondent, 'Tessa', who appeared to have moved abroad. Respondents were provided with pseudonyms for the purpose of the study in order to protect their anonymity, and similarly any identifying contextual detail is omitted and

names altered. The first respondent, Sally, also had the opportunity to read the story derived from her interview and the subsequent analysis, and responded that she identified with this portrayal of her life. Her response lends support to the credibility of the interpretation and analysis provided. The respondents are described as they were at the time of interview.

Sally and Tessa

Sally was in her early 40s, had worked in outdoor education for about 20 years and had competed to a high level in her own outdoor activity. At the time of the research she worked in higher education, though she described herself more as a teacher and outdoor practitioner than an academic. Tessa was in her mid-30s and had worked in outdoor education for about 12 years. Unlike Sally, Tessa had not been involved in conventional sport, disliking PE at school, although she grew up in the country and was keen on horse-riding, owning her own horse for a time. Tessa left school at 18 and worked in an office. At the time of the research she was skipper of a 76-foot ketch, taking mainly young people for sailing residential experiences.

Entering the field

Sally

Sally was brought up in the countryside, where she 'always played out in the fields and in the woods and down at the farm and was a real tomboy for the whole of [my] childhood', as she played mainly with her brother and male friends. It was through such activities, particularly during her primary school years, that Sally recalled developing early physical strength, which underpinned her later enjoyment of sport and outdoor activities at a single-sex grammar school. Sally saw herself at this time as 'a good student', and in terms of her career decisions, had a family who 'were delighted that I was going to be a teacher'.

My PE teacher suggested there was a course at [an outdoor centre], so me and my pal, who I used to go walking with, booked on this course at [the centre] —14-year-olds. We did a taster of everything, sailing, canoeing, and fell in love with the instructors—as you do—and I suppose that was another little factor telling me this was really good. I was fairly able at it, being strong, but I also enjoyed the physical challenge of it, aside from the sporting things I did at school. And having signed up to do PE at [a college] we had a visiting student at [the] school in the PE department, she was on placement for her teaching career. And she said well why don't you come round with me and have a look round the college? And I thought 'oh thank you' and I went along and in that visit I talked to some of the girls who were doing this outdoor course and it sounded *brilliant*. And so from that point I changed course, before I'd even started, I changed course to actually do the outdoor course. (Sally)

Sally's initial entry to outdoor education employment can be interpreted through Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) notions of 'horizons for action' occurring in relation

to two structural transitions: the end of school and her training. However, it is clear that her orientation towards the outdoors began much earlier, from what Bourdieu would identify as her early habitus, developed through experiences both at home and during her school years. In describing herself as a tomboy, Sally's story also reveals her acknowledgement of the gendered labels associated with developing a strong physical identity and her possible development of what McCall (1992) would identify as a more masculine-gendered disposition through her experiences in a male-dominated environment. Enjoyment of sport and physical activity featured strongly in Sally's early identity. This may be seen as similar to physical education teachers (see Armour & Jones, 1998), in that her enjoyment of sport and outdoor activities was significant in her initial decision to become a physical education teacher. Going to a single-sex school provided her with a strong physical identity and her particular opportunities on leaving were also structured by socio-historical factors, for both PE and OE at this time were single-sex institutions. The significance of her attending a single-sex school and college of education cannot be fully determined, but much research has shown that single-sex environments are good for building women's confidence in their physical abilities and provide the context in which women can be power-brokers (Scruton, 1993). In terms of her career decisions, the development of significance of other stakeholders in the field as well as the role of serendipity was also evident. That is, Sally's PE teacher encouraged her attendance at an outdoor centre, which confirmed her physical identity in the outdoor arena, and her attendance at an open day where she was introduced to outdoor education was organised by her school. Furthermore, Sally's entry to outdoor education rather than physical education training arose partly through a chance interaction with a woman already within the outdoor field.

Sally described her experiences on the outdoor education teacher-training course as 'wonderful times'. On leaving there, she applied for her first job in a local authority outdoor centre. However, she soon became dissatisfied.

I don't think I was very good at it to be honest at that time ... because I got disillusioned that these school kids who would come along just weren't enthusiastic about it ... I mean this was the great outdoors. I mean I was young and naïve and I thought wow this was great and they were 'oh do we have to go further?' So all the time I was having to motivate them, which I wasn't used to, and that wore me down a bit ... The decision to leave was I think, my naivety in that I thought 'god this is so tedious having to motivate these kids all the time' and I hadn't expected that to be part of my job. I was so enthusiastic about everything that I couldn't understand why everyone wasn't. (Sally)

It becomes clear that Sally, on leaving the college, seemed to experience a disjuncture, or 'contradictory routine' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), due to the conflict between her own physical and outdoor identity and the apparent apathy of her pupils. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the job ultimately led to the decision to continue her chosen career, but not in the same location. At this point in her career, it seems that Sally's preferred identity was associated more with outdoor

activities than teaching, and after two years she left the post to work and travel abroad.

Tessa

Like Sally, Tessa grew up in a rural setting. Her only outdoor interest at this time, however, was riding horses. Initially she wanted to work with horses but was discouraged by her parents. She was not encouraged to go into further education but rather to get a job. This she did but became very dissatisfied.

I wanted to go into maybe looking after horses, my parents remarked, 'don't be stupid, there's no money in that, you'll be finished when you're 21. You won't be employed again'. So sort of persuaded me to go and do office work. So I did that for five years and rented my own flat and sold my horse ... was at a bit of a loss as to what to do. So I got involved, when I was playing badminton, with a guy who used to run [the local outdoor organisation] Support Group and they used to fund-raise to send youngsters on outdoor courses for personal development, and the nearest centre was in North Wales. So I got involved with doing that and doing fund-raising and sponsored events and eventually they sent me on a course. I decided when I was on that course that I could do this for a living. (Tessa)

Attending an outdoor course run by an international provider was the key turning point in Tessa's life in terms of entry to outdoor education. She no longer saw herself working in an office but working in the outdoor industry. As she became more dissatisfied with her office job (a 'contradictory routine'), Tessa began joining various outdoor clubs, getting as much experience as she could, mountaineering and kayaking. After about a year of sending 'begging letters' to outdoor organisations, she was offered a nine-month seasonal contract with an international provider and quit her secure office job to make this significant change in her life, entering a new and very different career path.

Tessa's story so far, like that of Sally, suggests the significant influence of interactions with others at a structural transition. Although the interviewees were not explicit, both of these interactions may have had gendered underpinnings and speak to the power relations between different stakeholders involved in career decision-making, in that both teaching and office/secretarial work are viewed as traditionally acceptable female occupations. Tessa's initial identification with the outdoors was later reconfirmed via a 'socialising routine' towards the outdoors, as positive experiences and opportunities led to her decision to continue in this direction. Interaction with the outdoor organisation may have re-opened her 'horizon for action' in relation to the outdoors (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

Tessa, nevertheless, in this new field, felt somewhat dislocated because of her lack of experience in working in the outdoor industry. She explained:

[it] was my first year of doing outdoor pursuits I felt lacking in knowledge and there were a lot of people there very, very experienced, I felt a little bit excluded in some ways because I hadn't got the experience, a lot of people had been there

for like 10 years. I'd come in not knowing anything and nearly worked myself into an early grave wanting to do stuff, I needed to stop and that sort of thing, it was the sort of job where I wanted to get promoted but didn't have the experience to do that so never really progressed when I was there, just experience-wise really. (Tessa)

Allin (2000, 2003) describes how issues surrounding competence and physicality arise for women in the outdoors and how women's perceptions of their outdoor competence can delay their entry to an outdoor education career. Here, it may be suggested that, in contrast to Sally, who had a strong sense of her own competence, Tessa's lack of early sporting habitus or physical identity (and subsequent dislike of PE at school) may have affected her feelings of discomfort in relation to others (predominantly male) in the outdoor field. However, Tessa went on to gain experience and skills learning to sail. She also discovered, much to her chagrin, that the outdoor world was not immune from broader societal influences. The parent organisation of her employer had to respond to the economic climate that had emerged under the Tory government in the UK and had to take measures to become more economically viable. She and some of the staff experienced this change in ethos negatively, similar to the findings of Barnes (1999), and this 'contradictory routine' led to her decision to leave and go abroad to another centre run by the same organisation. She explained:

It's different cultures... a lot of people when I left [the centre] were disillusioned with the fact that it was going to this new corporate image and restructuring, a lot of the old school ... a lot of the old ethos was going so a lot of people disappeared off to different centres to try and regain some of the old ethos, all very much as it used to run ... years ago. (Tessa)

Tessa's short excursion to an overseas centre was not, however, what she expected. The culture was far from friendly, with an overbearing boss who was 'very rude to all his staff'. This led to a 'forced transition' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) when, on explaining the need for the addition of a safety aspect to the abseil,⁴ the boss became angry and told her to go. She returned to England still determined to work in the outdoor field.

Negotiating the field

Tessa

On returning to the UK, Tessa gained yet another job as a seasonal instructor, but this time at a large local authority centre. Tessa found this very different from her first teaching experience in the outdoor field, which had been focused on personal development through the activities. This time she felt it was 'very much taking school kids and then just giving them a taster for a couple of hours'.

Nevertheless, she continued to work at the centre developing some of the activities and gaining more experience, and was promoted to a fixed-term contract, rather than

seasonal work. However, after three years her contract was not renewed. This she saw as a significant turning point.

I think it was the best thing that could have happened really because I needed to move on and not getting my contract [renewed] gave me the kick up the ass to get on with something else. (Tessa)

This phase of her story may represent an 'evolutionary routine', in that there was a gradual shift in identity for Tessa that may or may not have led to a turning point. It may be, for example, that her changing work context in terms of promotion mediated against an earlier decision to change. The 'forced transition' of her contract not being renewed seems to have been a needed change, but one that occurred in a more major way and earlier than it might have done otherwise. Here, Tessa was self-reflexive in suggesting that the outside force brought an underlying mismatch between her habitus and the field to a conscious level.

Tessa then spent three summers as a sailing instructor at a different, smaller local authority centre, where clients ranged from school pupils to adults, and from young people with learning difficulties to undergraduate students gaining qualifications to teach sailing. In this culture she proceeded to develop her own career further, focusing upon sailing and enjoying the sense of responsibility offered to her.

I really enjoyed the three years I did there ... You had a group for the week to teach them to sail ... they [the centre] trusted you. You felt as though if you worked hard, it was noticed and you'd get a promotion there, after a year they encouraged me to do courses [such as yacht master]. (Tessa)

For Tessa, it appears that her developing professional identity related to increasing responsibility (and perhaps competence), building relations and a sense of her own personal development in physical skills and qualifications, something that appeared to be missing in the previous environments. Tessa experienced here a 'confirmatory routine', and she was happy to continue in this vein, for the time being.

Sally

After leaving the 'disjuncture' of her first job at an outdoor centre, Sally travelled for three years and then returned to the UK, partly to focus on competing in her outdoor activity. She took up a peripatetic appointment in the outdoors until dissatisfaction with a lack of recognition for her teaching status, combined with not quite reaching her desired level in her outdoor activity, led her to look for an alternative job. This job she loved, as it was 'working with motivated and enthusiastic adults'.

And one of the main reasons I took, the job at [the centre], was I decided that, you know, what am I doing [here] when I'm not even recognised as a teacher? —was to go and do something else, not teaching. Well, I know [working at the national outdoor centre] is teaching, but you didn't have to be a teacher to be there ... Apart from that was that they were asking for an orienteer/mountaineer, which was

made for me ... 'cause that was my original entry into the outdoors, through climbing and walking. (Sally)

Sally constructed this significant transition in terms of a 'last-minute' decision, where she had seen the position advertised, thought 'that sounds like me' and wrote to the director, saying 'look, I'm just the person for this job'. Following this, the director had phoned to ask her to go for an interview.

In this major transition, Sally seems to be reinvesting in a previously preferred identity, relating to her physical identity as an outdoor performer. In analyzing the transition itself, however, it can be seen that it was precipitated by an undermining of her identity as a teacher, through the lack of official recognition of teaching status in the previous post. Her obtaining the position was influenced by her interactions with the director, and his power in relation to the position advertised. Following this transition, Sally experienced a 'confirmatory routine' that served to reinforce the career decision she had made (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). When asked further about the process of obtaining this job, Sally described how she knew the centre was looking for a female and that 'they were all females on interview'. Hence, the significance of her gender was also a key factor that gave her additional capital in the outdoor field.

The final turning points

Sally

Sally stayed for five years in her instructing role and enjoyed extending her own skills and working with motivated adults. She then changed tack to work in higher education, after her colleagues brought an employment opportunity to her attention. In reflecting on her decision, she explained:

By the end of my time I had probably worked on all the courses I was going to work on [at the national centre] ... so I had done that now. Not that I wasn't keen to continue doing it [her current employment], but all the time I feel that I want to try and improve myself and perhaps moving to a career in Higher Education might be a progression from that ... and then this job came up, and when the job came up [a female colleague] said 'oh [Sally] you want to apply for that' ... so I thought there's no harm in applying ... and I did hear, I did think, that they were looking for a female lecturer ... Not that I was trying to put that across—I would hope that if I did get the job it would be because of merit and not that I was female ... and at the interview I said 'look, I'm not an academic, I'm a practitioner, I enjoy teaching, I'm good at it'. (Sally)

Sally was offered and accepted the post in higher education. An 'evolutionary routine' was occurring in terms of Sally wanting a change. As Sally gradually outgrew the career identity of instructor, there followed a 'self-initiated transition' into teaching-focused employment. She described subsequent discomfort with the new academic position, however, suggesting that a possible 'dislocating routine' was in progress, as she perhaps was living with an identity she did not feel comfortable with.

Indeed, it was proposed that, at the time of research, Sally may have been hankering after her outdoor instructor identity (see Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). At the time of interview, she still did not feel entirely comfortable in her occupational position, feeling bogged down with paperwork, a lack of recognition for time spent away from home and day-to-day issues. It remained to be seen whether Sally became socialised into her new role or whether her discomfort led to a further turning point in her career.

In relation to this last career move and to the previous transition, the influence of gender is apparent and contradictory. For Sally, transitions occurred during the time when the outdoor field had become aware of the underrepresentation of women and the need to appoint more women into instructing and outdoor teaching posts. In exploring the relationship between capital and field, McCall (1992) has suggested that, even though women may gain a more masculine disposition and masculine-gendered capital through experiences in a male-dominated environment, they cannot escape the consequences of their feminine-embodied cultural capital. In Sally's story, the ambiguity of her position and her awareness of her contradictory position became apparent in her uncertainty as to whether the jobs she obtained were by merit or by virtue of her embodied cultural capital as a woman. Such experiences, McCall (1992) argues, mean that women are reminded of their gendered dispositions in a male-dominated environment.

Tessa

Although Tessa did not gain a permanent post at the sailing centre, she achieved more sailing and safety boat qualifications, taking on a variety of temporary jobs during the winter period. Through her contacts at the centre and in particular her landlady, who was connected to a linked commercial sailing organisation, Tessa was offered a unique opportunity of getting on a winter training scheme for yacht skippers free of charge. This was an opportunity made available at that time through government funding for skills training.

It was like a year's training. It was the first and last one that even ran, it was a complete one off, so it came along at the right time, I couldn't believe it, if it hadn't been for us chatting in the pub, I would never have pushed and it would never have happened. (Tessa)

What this extract reveals is, once more, the importance of serendipity and interactions with others in the outdoor field; here for providing social networks (social capital) in relation to particular career opportunities. It may also be suggested that Tessa saw this opportunity as within her 'horizon for action' as desirable and achievable in relation to her developing predispositions towards her identity as a yachswoman. Through this confirmatory experience, Tessa then continued to become the first woman skipper of a large youth sail training organisation. This had considerable responsibility, something which, at the time of interview, Tessa was very much aware of and seemed to enjoy. However, like Sally, Tessa alluded to her

anomalous position as a woman when she reflected upon crew members' perception of her as a woman skipper in the male-dominated field of sailboat skippering.⁵

It would be interesting to know people's thoughts when they get onto the boat with a female skipper. The funniest thing is that when I was first mate I had a lot of problems with males accepting me asking them to do something, they used to get very bolshy and answer back and sometimes shout at me even though I was second in command. As the skipper they don't do that because ultimately it is the skipper's responsibility so what you say goes. (Tessa)

She did not, however, see this career as a skipper lasting for long:

I think the average life of a sail training skipper is probably about three years before people burn out. People have already said to me that 'you'll burn out, you won't want to do outdoor pursuits after three or four years anyway.' (Tessa)

Tessa further suggested that being at sea and moving from place to place deterred women from continuing in this type of work: 'I think that's a lot of the reason why the people I know, women, have given up outdoors [work]'.

In Tessa's final turning point, it is significant that, despite a seemingly confirmatory routine, negotiations with others in the field were already affecting her perceptions and thus shaping the ongoing development of her habitus. Like Sally, Tessa had become aware of her contradictory gendered dispositions (McCall, 1992). Tessa also anticipated a kind of forced transition, due to 'burnout' and her perceptions of other women's decisions. These experiences are likely to influence her expectations of what she sees as desirable and possible future career options (i.e. her 'horizon for action').

Concluding remarks

In this article, we sought to employ Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) notion of careership to explore and understand the experiences of two women outdoor educators as they navigated their differing paths through the outdoor 'industry.' One path, Tessa's, led to an insecure job, but with considerable responsibilities as a female skipper of a 76-foot ketch, while the other, Sally's, led to a secure career as a lecturer in higher education.

In the stories of Sally and Tessa, we find support for the different elements of Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) careership model in understanding outdoor careers. In particular, there is evidence for the way in which the process of career decision-making involves ongoing interactions with significant others in the field (often by chance) and confirmation of the inseparability of turning points and routines. Sally and Tessa's stories show how, in different ways, their early experiences fostered what Bourdieu (1984) would identify as predispositions towards the outdoors. For Sally, the path towards outdoor education was initially much smoother due to her interactions with others, and confirmatory and socialising routines in this direction. Their stories also highlight the significance of the socio-historical context for opening

up particular opportunities, and the way in which Sally and Tessa made pragmatically rational career decisions, which need to be understood in relation to the power structures and the capital, particularly social capital, of stakeholders in the outdoor field. Sally and Tessa's stories also reveal the role of serendipity in entering the outdoors and their enjoyment of particular work experiences. At the same time, they reveal the economic realities of the short-term and seasonal nature of many outdoor employment opportunities, the disillusionment and disconnections that can occur, and the potential for stagnation.

In considering the model of careership, the stories also show there were relevant routines in different aspects of each woman's life, outside as well as within the working sphere, that affected their career decisions. The significance of such ongoing experiences in different 'fields' is something that is perhaps not given sufficient attention in Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) work. In addition, it is not always easy, as Pigden (2000) found, to classify particular turning points. For Sally, career transitions were largely self-initiated, while, except for her initial entrance to the field, Tessa's major turning points were notably negotiated in relation to external forces, frequently socio-economic. However, although the lack of contract renewal at the local authority centre may have been a forced transition for Tessa, she knew about this sufficiently in advance in order to make a self-initiated change. Hence it was neither completely forced, nor entirely self-initiated. Furthermore, in both lives there was not always clarity in determining a single turning-point event. In Tessa's final situation, there were also elements such as anticipation of 'burnout' and her perceptions of other women's experiences, which may mean a self-initiated transition is made without any contradictory routine experiences. Such anticipatory changes appear to be unaccounted for in Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1996, 1997) careership.

At the same time, we suggest that understanding Sally and Tessa's careers through adaptations of Bourdieu's concepts and careership can provide insights into the complexities of gender in career decision-making and the complex lives and careers of women working in a traditionally male field. The stories of Sally and Tessa show clearly how their career decision-making was always shaped to a greater or lesser extent by gender. Their stories reflected their own shifting identities and their dispositions, at diverse life stages, to resist conventional female stereotypical careers. In particular, they highlight the ambiguities of women's embodied cultural capital in the outdoor industry, and we suggest that they may provide some understanding of how women's career experiences and paths in the outdoor industry may be affected by a consciousness of their gendered dispositions.

Notes

1. See Collins (in progress), which examines the experiences of play and youth workers in relation to the outdoors. Further, there is much work in central Europe in which outdoor experience is a significant medium for social, youth and community work (Non-formal education through outdoor activities project. Available online at: www.nfe-network.org (accessed 15 March 2006)).

2. There has been much feminist critique of the use of the terms 'soft' and 'hard' skills and it is argued that these should be replaced by the terms 'interpersonal' or 'communication', and 'technical', respectively, to mitigate against the gendering of teacher/instructor competency (see, for example, Warren, K. (Ed.) (1996)).
3. A significant move toward professional accreditation for the outdoor 'workforce' has been the development from the national practitioner organisation—the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL)—of an accreditation scheme Accredited Practitioner of the Institute for Outdoor Learning (APIOL), which encourages the development of a portfolio of experiences and dialogue between and amongst practitioners and management.
4. An abseil is a means by which a climber can move quickly down a rock face using a rope and descending device.
5. Although Tessa was skippering for sail training purposes rather than racing, the processes by which hegemonic masculinities are reinforced in the competitive offshore race sailing subculture are highlighted in Bricknell's (1999) ethnography, highlighting the macho culture of some aspects of the sailing field.

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