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# 'My mum just wants me out of the house': the leisure lifestyles of white-working class adolescents

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# 'My mum just wants me out of the house': the leisure lifestyles of white-working class adolescents

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## ABSTRACT

The sports participation rates of British adults remain strongly influenced by their social class background, with those from the bottom of the social class hierarchy significantly less likely to take part in sport and/or active leisure. These trends are closely linked to the types of active leisure participation that adults engage in as young people, with those from working-class backgrounds more likely to engage in a narrower range of class-related activities in their youth, a trend that has been shown to constrain the likelihood of them participating into adulthood. One of the influences on this outcome is the way in which parental influence comes to impact upon the ways that young people from working-class family's approach and engage in activities during their leisure time. In order to explore this influence, this paper examines the leisure lifestyles of white, working-class adolescent males via the use of group interviews in an attempt to explain their current and future participation of working-class male adolescents in sport and active leisure. The study utilised responses from 47 participants in Years 10 and 11 across eight focus group interviews as part of a semi-ethnographical multi-method design in a predominantly white, working-class mainstream secondary school. The results found that the participants spent significant amounts of their leisure time engaged in class-related, recreational activities within the local area alongside their peers. Linked to this was the apparent lack of formal guidance and support from their parents in relation the participants' regular involvement in organised sporting activities. The behaviours and attitudes of these participants meant that the majority of the participants were neither inclined nor 'set up' to participate in the types and range of activities that may well have kept them active into and through adulthood.

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## Introduction

Despite the constraining influence of the pandemic on many active leisure opportunities in recent years and the impact of longer-term funding cutbacks over the last decade, general rates of physical activity across the adult population in Britain have remained relatively constant for some time (Sport England, 2021). Indeed, prior to the COVID-19 enforced lockdowns, data had shown an increase in the overall activity levels of British adults, as well as a decrease in the number of adults deemed to be 'inactive' (Sport England, 2021). The relationship between social class and sports practice is widely documented and when

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contemporary data is examined more closely it remains the case that those from the higher social class groupings are more likely to be regularly involved in 'active leisure' (Sport England, 2021; Stuij, 2013) than those in the lower social class groups. More specifically, recent evidence states that those from the higher social class groups in British society (NS-SEC 1–2–71%) are almost 20% more likely to be physically active than those from the working-classes (NS-SEC 5–7 52%) (Sport England, 2021) with similar trends also evident across Europe (Mutz et al., 2021) due to differences in the leisure profiles between these groups.

Although these adults' leisure practices are often closely related to their current material and social circumstances (Shildrick & MacDonald, 2006), evidence consistently states that inequalities in participation during adulthood remain closely linked to the types and levels of activity that these adults establish during their youth (Birchwood et al., 2008) and maybe even early childhood (Roberts, 2016; Wheeler et al., 2019). Strongly influenced by the attitudes and actions of their parents/family during their formative years, what young people 'choose' to do in their leisure time remains strongly influenced by their social class background (Roberts, 2012). More specifically, seminal studies have shown that the 'sporting breadth' of youths (Engstrom, 2008) – or 'sporting repertoires' as termed by Roberts and Brodie (1992), significantly impacts upon exercise habits in adulthood. This outcome is particularly important when one considers that it is those young people from the middle and upper social classes that are more likely to develop the types of leisure/sporting repertoires that are conducive to lifelong participation compared to those from working-class groups (Wheeler, 2018b; Wheeler et al., 2019). Ultimately, therefore, young working-class people are more likely to develop the types of narrow, class-related sporting/leisure interests and profiles that stand to limit 'their ability to acquire the skills or dispositions that make for diverse or lasting leisure biographies' (Wheeler, 2018a, p. 341) because it is during this time that they 'develop the skills, tastes, and interests on which they base the rest of their leisure lives' (Roberts, 2012, p. 327).

One of the main influences on this outcome is the fact that young people from the working-classes are more likely to participate in unorganised activities, outdoors and away from the supervision of adults. Not only has this type of leisure 'activity' been shown to be significant in the lives of these working-class males (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005), but such areas provide a sense of belonging (Robinson, 2009), an opportunity to construct and strengthen their own identities away from the relative constraints of the home (Roberts, 2016; Stuij, 2013) and the chance to make 'decisions on what they want to do, when they want to do it, and when they want to stop it' (Robinson, 2009, p. 504). In contrast, young people from higher social class groups are more likely to take part in structured and organised activities (Stuij, 2013) as part of a more consistent weekly routine that is often created and facilitated directly by parents from an early age.

Secondly, it is evident that video gaming takes up more of young males' leisure time than ever before (Wang et al., 2012) and subsequently impacts directly on the leisure profiles of contemporary youth. When viewed in relation to social class more specifically, young males from working-class families are much more likely to engage in video gaming for longer periods, unsupervised by adults, and involving games that are more likely to involve masculine themes/characters, communal sports and action-based video gaming (Andrews, 2008), with such video gaming more likely to form part of a wider leisure portfolio amongst the middle-class youth (Vincent & Maxwell, 2016).

As a result of these participation trends and social processes, therefore, the aim of the study was to examine the leisure and sporting lifestyles of adolescent working-class males in an attempt to explain the enduring participation anomalies that exist between adults from different social class groups. In doing so the word 'lads' is consistently used to describe the group directly involved in this study due to the influence of the seminal work of Paul Willis (1977) on this research and the fact that the term 'lads' reflects the term commonly used to describe adolescent males in the local area.

## Classed parenting

One of the main reasons for the emergence of these trends relates to the ways in which family culture and parental influence disposes young people to participate in particular types and amounts of sport and active leisure (Birchwood et al., 2008; Wheeler et al., 2019) due to the proactive sporting ‘development’ of children by their families (Wheeler, 2014).

Even though being seen to be a ‘pro-active parent’ now ‘pervades all aspects of society’ (Suijsa, 2006, p. 72), parenting remains infused with classed behaviours, values, actions and dispositions (Vincent, 2012). For middle-class parents in particular, social competition and anxieties caused by the perceived risk of parental ‘failure’ (Vincent & Maxwell, 2016) leads many middle-class parents to engage in a search for distinction that reflects the classed practices of the home (Vincent & Ball, 2007) via regular engagement in a broad range of structured and supervised activities that are purposely aimed at increasing the likelihood of them becoming (and remaining) active participants in these activities (Dagkas & Quarmby, 2012; Evans & Davies, 2010; Lareau, 2003). Ultimately, therefore, this leads to a highly structured and committed parenting approach – a process originally termed ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau, 2003). In contrast, research suggests that working-class families are more likely to be reliant on a process of accomplishment of natural ‘growth’ (Lareau, 2003) – or ‘essential assistance’ (Wheeler, 2018a) – where parents rely on their children developing and thriving via a more ‘relaxed’ and spontaneous parenting process. This approach relates more to parents viewing their role as needing to do ‘what they need to do’ in order to keep their children ‘up’ with their peers, and out of trouble (Wheeler, 2018a, p. 340). Whilst many parents have a strong desire to do their best for their children, many working-class parents are often ill informed or poorly motivated on how to achieve this (Allen, 2011) or may find themselves constrained in the sort of activities available to their children as a result of cost and/or accessibility in the local area (Vincent & Maxwell, 2016). As an extension to this, children from working-class families are more likely to experience a relatively large amount of unstructured leisure time to spend on informal sports activities and freedom to enjoy a greater degree of autonomy in their leisure lives, with higher proportions of their free time spent ‘hanging out’ with peers and friends (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005) away from parental control, and engaged in unstructured and informal activities (Lareau, 2003; Stuij, 2013).

## A Bourdieusian approach to social class and leisure

Key theoretical concepts from the work of Pierre Bourdieu were also utilised throughout the study. As Bourdieu put special emphasis on class-determined habitus and the social consequences of capital portfolios (Lenartowicz, 2016) in relation to sport tastes and practices (Bourdieu, 1984) his work emerges as ‘very attractive’ (Lenartowicz, 2016, p. 221) when exploring links between social and cultural systems and differences in family leisure consumption. As a result, the concepts of habitus and capital portfolios – made up from ‘ownership’ of various forms of capital – formed the basis of the theoretical underpinning in the study. The term habitus is used by Bourdieu to describe how the life-long social conditions to which people are exposed as part of a specific social class-related upbringing come to manifest in a person’s actions, appearance, ways of moving and talking, ideals, beliefs, attitudes, tastes and inclinations (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990). The development of these individual ‘tastes’, choices and lifestyles leads to a person’s habitus emerging as a corporeal physical embodiment (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994) of their long-term, class-related, social experiences and relationships. Ultimately, therefore, if we are to understand and explain people’s orientations generally (Shilling, 1993) as well as class-related preferences more specifically (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013) one must acknowledge the fact that when ‘people [are] subject to similar experiences’ (Wacquant, 2006, p. 221) they also come to share a correspondingly similar habitus (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013; Stuij, 2013). In relation to influence of family members more specifically, the term ‘family habitus’ (Vincent et al., 2012) is used to describe a ‘deeply ingrained system of perspectives,

experiences and predispositions that family members share' (Reay, 1998, p. 527) that comes to impact on 'the way we do things' such as parenting styles and leisure profiles (Vincent et al., 2012, p. 342) – an issue that becomes important when we consider that early childhood influences and experiences not only impact upon their socio-cultural involvement with sports clubs and their members (Jakobsson et al., 2012; Stuij, 2013) but the extent to which young working-class males can feel a 'sense of place' in certain sports/leisure environments (football) whilst contrastingly feeling that other activities (sailing) are 'not for the likes of them' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471).

Bourdieu's concept of capital also emerges as significant when examining the leisure lifestyles and 'choices' between young people across social class groups. Bourdieu's definition of capital is wide ranging and not only includes material things such as financial income and property, but also 'untouchable' and culturally significant attributes that are 'transformed and exchanged within complex networks and across different fields' (Calhoun & Jenkins, 1994, p. 102). In this sense, therefore, for Bourdieu, power and dominance derive not only from the possession of material resources such as property or cash in the form of economic capital, but also from possession of cultural and social resources such as qualifications, friends, occupations and interests (Crossley, 2012). Although a person's financial wealth (economic capital) can impact on what individuals can afford to do, a person's social class cannot be solely determined by the possession of economic capital (Crossley, 2012). Therefore, social capital emerges as a key concept for Bourdieu (1984) that refers to a person's 'investment' in social relationships with other people and the way in which people can draw upon these social ties with other people, often for their own gain (e.g. childcare, club membership, university places) or to 'open doors' for their children. In addition to this, cultural capital also emerges as significant and relates to an individual's skills, knowledge, values and actions that they 'acquire' (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) as part of early socialisation experiences within particular social networks. Significantly, these social relationships and experiences strongly influence (amongst other things) what individuals enjoy doing, eating, and participating in during their leisure time as well as the extent to which people are able and/or willing to seek out activities deemed to be of higher social stature (art, classical music) (Bourdieu, 1984). Ultimately in relation to these two concepts (and the focus of this paper), the term 'sporting capital' is often used to describe the 'possession' of appropriate skills, knowledge and social contacts that allows for the 'successful' participation in a suitable sporting arena as a result of a feeling of 'belongingness' (Jakobsson et al., 2012) – a process that leads to young people from different social class groups being drawn towards or driven away from certain sporting and leisure activities (Stuij, 2013).

## Methods

This paper is drawn from a multi-method, semi-ethnographical, qualitative study that took place in a 'typical' white, working-class mainstream secondary academy (state funded but otherwise largely independent schools) situated in the North of England (Ayrefield Community School) conducted over a non-continuous 14-month period. By initially utilising the help of a gatekeeper to gain access to the academy, written approval was received from the Academy Principal leading to ethical approval being sought and gained from the University Ethics Board. Akin to other studies of this type (Yin, 2009), a range of covert and overt observations formed the initial stage of data collection that increasingly involved the use of guided conversations with students and staff. Following on from this, focus group interviews were utilised with a range of Y10 and Y11 male pupils ('lads') from top, middle, and bottom academic groups as well as all members of the male PE department with the data presented here primarily based on their anonymised responses. Despite the fact that specific social demographic data was not collected on individual pupils or their families, available data linked to the school and the surrounding area was analysed to ensure the suitability of the purposively selected case as a 'typical', white, working-class school and that there was subsequently

a strong likelihood that all pupils will have been exposed (to lesser and greater degrees) to the relationships and expectations linked to a typical, white, 'working-class' community.

Out of the 965 pupils on roll at Ayrefield Community School (ACS), only 1% of students considered their first language to be other than English and 'most pupils were white British with a distinct lack of pupils from ethnic minorities on roll' (Ofsted, 2014, p. 5). 45% of all pupils in Y11 at ACS were officially defined as being 'disadvantaged', and half (49.4%) of all pupils had been eligible for free school meals in the last six years. In addition, Ofsted (2014, p. 7) stated that 'the school had faced challenges in the recruitment and retention of teachers' (Ofsted, 2014, p. 7) which appeared to be indicative of both the reputation of the school and the behaviour and attainment of some pupils. More broadly, ACS was situated in the northern village of Ayrefield (pseudonym) which was deemed suitably 'deprived' to meet the criteria of the study. It was ranked 1,141 for social deprivation out of a possible 32,482 lower super output areas (LSOA) areas nationally (ONS, 2014). Nearly a quarter of all residents in Ayrefield had no formal qualifications, and twice the national average of residents were in 'bad' or 'very bad' health. Further to this, nearly two thirds of all households in the area were defined as deprived in either one or two of the four indicators of deprivation (e.g. one adult unemployed or no inhabitant has a level two qualification) (ONS, 2014). 11.5% of current residents had either never worked or were classed as being long-term unemployed and over twice the national average (NA) of adults were currently claiming key working age benefits (36% - NA 15%) with almost three-times that number on incapacity benefit (20% - NA 7%). There was also a strong prevalence of 'white' people living in Ayrefield with 1,330 of the 1,389 total residents classing themselves as white-British. Overall, therefore, as the wider study sought to focus upon a 'typical', white, working-class school mainstream secondary data on Ayrefield relating to indices of social deprivation, occupation trends, and the ethnic make-up of residents was deemed sufficient to use ACS as suitably 'typical' case.

Initially, observation and guided conversation notes were made using broad overarching themes (i.e. football lessons, changing rooms) with these observation notes becoming more structured and focused in relation to issues emerging (i.e. football lessons – swearing) as well as those involved (PE staff – changing rooms) as the study progressed. Although initially influenced largely by personal interpretations this process of 'pouring through the data' led to a more focused 'analytical path' beginning to emerge' (Yin, 2009: 136–137) that led to even more specifically focused lesson observations and influenced the nature of questions utilised in focus groups.

### *The lads' groups*

Isolated from their peers in all lessons but core PE, the top set were part of mixed-sex groups that were working towards GCSE qualifications. The majority had strong aspirations to complete A levels at post-16 further education college before attending university. The middle sets were completing a higher proportion of BTEC qualifications and middle tier GCSE entries as part of a mixed-sex, isolated group (except for core PE). The majority of pupils in this group demonstrated aspirations to attend the local FE college in order to enrol on a wide range of both 'academic' and vocational' courses. The bottom sets were single-sex groups who were following a range of foundation qualifications at school as well as vocational qualifications at the local FE college three mornings a week. The majority of male pupils in these groups were intent on following on with their trade-based vocational qualifications or finding paid employment via a work-based apprenticeship.

Following the completion of each focus group interview, the process of thematic analysis was applied to all focus groups transcripts where key themes were distinguished and subsequently extracted from the data using specific labels to tag comments in order to do so (Bryman, 2012). Due to the fact that initial data analysis had taken place during observations, several existing labels were subsequently applied to the focus group transcripts (e.g. CG – playing football at the cage after school) whilst other codes were also generated and applied to the focus group transcripts for issues



that had yet to emerge in the study (e.g. SVG – social video gaming/internet link up) with ‘key passages’ and relevant points from across the focus groups considered and ultimately selected for inclusion. Throughout the entire process, the researcher’s positionality was acknowledged and considered as a result of his former employment as secondary school PE teacher at a local school as well as being a former resident of Ayrefield.

## Findings

### General leisure activities

Despite the often-significant differences that existed between the attainment groups at ACS in relation to academic attainment, educational engagement, and relationships with staff, the key theme to emerge from the data regarding their leisure time was the commonality that existed in relation to *what* the lads did, *when* and with *whom*. The most common ‘leisure pursuit’ mentioned by the pupils across all groups was the strong tendency to, and preference for, simply ‘hanging out’. In relation to questions linked to time spent away from school, responses such as *‘I go home, have a few games on the Xbox, get changed, go out’* (James – Y11 Top Set – Group 1) and the following response were very common from lads across all groups:

Interviewer: What else would you do?

Bailey: Hanging about. Sit outside the shop. Sit in the bus stop . . . we know where everyone knocks about [hangs out] so just walk around until we drop on [find] somebody.

(Y11 Bottom Set – Group 1)

As an extension to this, there was also some acknowledgement among the lads that this may seem like a rather restrictive and potentially boring way to spend time, especially when viewed through the lens of an outsider. However, responses such as *‘I know it does sound a bit crap just wandering around or sat abart [about] but for some reason it’s not’* (Leon – Y11 Top Set – Group 1) and *‘Not sure why but it’s mint [great]. Just doing what we want and having a laugh’* (Stephen – Y10 Middle Set – Group 2) were consistent and common from lads in all groups. It was also evident in some instances that spending such significant periods away from adult control and influence allowed the lads to feel empowered:

Interviewer: Why do you seem to enjoy hanging out so much do you think?

Ryan: Not sure really but I do like to be out and away from home and school. Weekends especially because we can go where we want.

(Y11 – Middle Set – Group 1)

In this regard, it was evident that the very nature of leaving the family home to ‘hang out’ with friends around Ayrefield made up a significant part of these working-class lads’ lives (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005) and that all lads took a great deal from the opportunity to make ‘decisions on what they want to do, when they want to do it, and when they want to stop it’ (Robinson, 2009, p. 504) away from the controlling influence of parents.

In addition to the dominance of ‘hanging out with friends’ as part of the lads’ leisure time, the playing of video games also made up a significant proportion of what they chose to do in their free time:



Interviewer: What about Xbox and Facebook and all that then?

Finley: Yeah, you get in from school, do your work, and then go on the Xbox.

Jacob: I used to sit on the Xbox for about 10 hours a day. Used to get in at half two and play the Xbox until half ten.

(Y10 Middle Set – Group 1)

Interestingly, it did not seem that the playing of video games was engaged in as an alternative to 'hanging out' with friends, but rather supplemented time spent outside: *'You know when you've been out there's nothing else to do about 9 o'clock . . . have a game on FIFA'* (Craig – Y10 Bottom Set – Group 1) or if the weather was deemed to be too poor for the lads to spend long periods outdoors *'Well, when it was winter and it was freezing, I just played FIFA all day in the house'* (Shane – Y10 Bottom Set – Group 1).

Far from being a recreational individual pursuit, however, video gaming was clearly a highly competitive and social element of their leisure time. Socially it enabled the lads to stay in contact after school or after they had returned from being out *'After you've been out it's something because you can still talk to your mates as well'* (Ryan Y10 Middle Set – Group 2) with clarity consistently provided from the lads about the way they integrated whilst playing from the isolation of their own homes:

Sam: Yeah, it's usually on FIFA [talking on-line]. My mum is always telling me to be quiet or asking me who I'm talking to.

Callum: Same. She can't understand what's going on really. She thinks I'm just shouting at the game and the TV, but we're taking to each other.

(Y11 Top Set – Group 1)

Indeed, in some games it was not only group interaction that formed a significant aspect of gameplay but a collective and competitive social collaboration between friends on-line:

Craig: Yeah, we've got Procalls (on FIFA) so we make our own teams like AFC Ayefield and teams like that. I'll go up front or play in midfield and play other lads from all over the world and that.

(Y10 Bottom Set – Group 1)

Overall, therefore, there was clear evidence to suggest that the playing of interactive, on-line games (such as FIFA) from the relative isolation of their own homes was not only an extension of the time that they spent 'hanging out' in Ayrefield, but a very real opportunity for the lads (often across different academic groups) to organise themselves and compete as a collective group – often against perceived 'outsiders'.

In relation to the lads' involvement in more 'traditional' sporting activities and despite some mention of lads having played some competitive, class-related team sports (such as football and rugby league) in the past, the vast majority of lads' responses indicated that they 'used to' participate in organised, competitive sports when they were younger with teams situated in their village. Reasons for no longer being involved were consistently linked to an apparent lack of desire to commit to the structure of training and matches *'It's just too much messing about isn't it [playing for a team]. All that getting to training and matches is a right pain. Half of the time I'd have to walk or get a lift because my dad's at work and I just couldn't*

*be arsed'* (Bailey – Y11 Bottom Set – Group 1) or that the availability of suitable teams in the local areas were limited:

Interviewer: Do any of you play for teams or anything like that outside of school?

Lads: Silence.

Corey: No. They all folded.

Shane: Ayrefield and District, Ayrefield Dragons, they packed in.

Interviewer: What about going to find a team that's not in Ayrefield, is that an option or...?

Karl: What, with lads we don't know?

(Y11 Bottom Set Group 1).

Instead, the only real sporting activity that the lads engaged in regularly in addition to sporadic involvement in coarse fishing was the playing of recreational games of football with friends and peers. When asked, the following responses were very common across all sets

Interviewer: What would you say that you did most when you weren't at school?

Eddie: Football.

Jason: Football.

Joseph: Football.

Cooper: Football.

(Y10 Top Set – Group 1)

And in relation to the game of football more generally, it was also clear that all aspects of the game had long been a significant feature of their lives, with comments such as '*it's something [football] that we've grown up learning and thinking about*' (Finley – Y10 Middle Set – Group 1) and the following focus group response indicative of the majority:

Reece: It's the easiest thing to do [play football], it's cheap, it's one of the cheapest things to do and everybody enjoys it.

**Shaun:** I think because everybody in your family does it from round here and you grow up with it.

(Y11 Top Set Group 2)

Overall, therefore, despite the differing attitudes and actions demonstrated by the lads during the school day, the range and types of activities that the lads engaged in during their leisure time was consistent in that hanging out, video gaming and recreational games of football were common. The fact that these activities could be deemed as ‘typically’ working-class activities added to the fact that the lads from Ayrefield had evidently been exposed to the types of ‘long, slow social processes’ (Bourdieu, 1984: p83) and organising forces and principles (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) that had led them to develop very similar attitudes, behaviours, and tastes (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013; Stuij, 2013) in relation to what they chose to do in their leisure time. As such, the preference of these lads to take part in a narrow range of class appropriate activities and ‘hanging out’ with friends away from the supervision of adults emerged as a ‘conscious manifestation’ of their habitus (Shilling, 1993, p. 129) and a corporeal physical embodiment of their long-term, class-related, social experiences and relationships (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). The life-long social conditions to which the lads from Ayrefield had been exposed as part of their specific social class-related upbringing, therefore, had come to manifest itself in their very similar tastes and inclinations (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013) that subsequently led to very similar experiences (Wacquant, 2006) based on ‘choices’ made during their leisure time.

### **Parental participation and support**

Generally, responses suggested that parents were relatively content with the lads spending long periods out with friends, unsupervised, and engaged in unstructured social activities. In this regard, the following responses were typical:

**Callum:** As long as I’m out of the house and back for when my mum tells me then I can do what I like really. I’ve got my phone if she needs me and some money if I get hungry.

**Lewis:** Yeah, same. She says she prefers me out of the house so I’m not making a mess and she can watch the tele [TV]. I’m generally not far away anyway so it’s alright.

(Y11 Top Set Group 1)  
and

**Interviewer:** Are your mum and dad keen to know where you are when you go out?

**Regan:** Not really and I’ve got my phone anyway if they need me.

**Craig:** My mum usually leaves me a quid [pound coin] for when I get in from school so I can go to the Asda [supermarket] next to the Cage for something.

(Y10 Bottom Set – Group 1)

As an extension to this, there was also no clear evidence that parents of the lads were concerned with the length of time spent engaged in video gaming with responses suggesting a degree of apathy from parents alongside a degree of contentment that their sons were safe at home. In this regard, not only was there evidence that parents were happy that their sons were safe ‘*My mum says that at least she knows where I am when I’m on my Xbox instead of roaming the streets*’ (Karl – Year 10 –

Bottom Set – Group 1), but also that there was a sense of apathy or expectation that video gaming is just ‘what kids nowadays do’:

Interviewer: Would you say that your parents are fairly happy being up in your bedroom for all that time?

Dane : My dad is always saying get outside and get some fresh air but he never really does anything about it. Never forces me to go outside. I heard him say to his mate the other week that at least I’m getting my money’s worth out of my PlayStation and that all other kids are doing the same [video gaming].

(Y11 Bottom Set – Group 2)

With regards to lads engaging in ‘active play’ with parents, any participation was erratic, spontaneous, and usually took place very close to home. Examples included the golf driving range a couple of miles away *‘I’ve gone to the golf (driving range) a couple of times. Do you know when you’ve got nothing to do, just go up to the golf range and hit a few balls* (Levi – Y11 Bottom Set – Group 1) or coarse fishing at the pond situated in extremely close proximity to the school *‘I sometimes go fishing with my dad* (Brad – Y11 Middle Set – Group 1).

For the majority of the other lads, however, there was no evidence from responses that their parents currently participated in any regular form of physical activity or indeed had done in the past with the following response being fairly typical:

Mark: My mum and dad are lazy.

Paul: My mum and dad are always at work.

...

Chris: (They just) Sit down.

Interviewer: Do any of your parents actively play sport or take you to practices or clubs?

Chris: My mum used to play darts.

(Y10 Top Set Group 2)

Not only was there was there no direct mention of the lads’ being ‘actively encouraged’ to become involved in organised sport, there was also no real indication that lads involved in the study took part in any form of regular and/or organised physical activity as part of the family unit either:

Interviewer: And do you ever do anything like go for a walk together?

Ollie: I’d get terrored [verbally chastised] if somebody saw me. Plus, they [mum and dad] know I wouldn’t go anyway.

(Y10 Middle Set Group 1)

And

Interviewer: Has there ever been a time when your parents have taken you somewhere to get involved in something? Maybe some classes or lessons in another sport?

Brad: Like what? I don't know what you mean?

Interviewer: Like tennis or basketball or cricket?

Brad: Cricket? Why?

(Y11 Middle Set – Group 1)

Overall, therefore, whilst a process of passive parental modelling appeared to have generated an engagement in a narrow range of suitable working-class sports, it was clear that these lads had not been party to the heavy, strategic, and highly structured investment or 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2003) that many middle-class parents have been shown to engage in order to adequately and effectively 'resource' their children (Birchwood et al., 2008; Evans & Davies, 2010; Wheeler, 2014). Indeed, with evidence of only spontaneous involvement from male family members, there was no evidence that parents of the lads saw participation in sports clubs/initiatives as an everyday 'task' to be incorporated into their everyday routines, as has been found among middle-classes families (Stuij, 2013; Wheeler, 2014; Wheeler & Green, 2014). Indeed, the 'family habitus' (Vincent et al., 2012) present in most families in Ayrefield evidently generated the types of perspectives, experiences and predispositions (Reay, 1998) that came to impact strongly on the limited range of more 'typical' working-class leisure activities that the lads engaged in (Vincent et al., 2012, p. 342) as well as the 'sense of place' that these lads felt when engaged in activities such as hanging-out, recreational football, and video gaming.

Alarming in some cases, there was indeed evidence that some parents had demonstrated a more direct, negative impact on their sons' engagement in organised sport and active leisure which in some instances, was related to the time commitment and logistics of attending training and matches:

Shane: Yeah, it's getting there (matches).

Levi: Especially when you 'ant got nobody to take you.

Interviewer: Would your mum and dad not take you?

Shane: It just depends what day it us, is because they're all at work.

Corey: Yeah, they're at work.

(Y11 Bottom Set – Group 1)

Or indeed somewhat alarming accounts of parents appearing either unwilling or unable to support the regular involvement of their sons in organised, competitive sports:

Wayne: I played for a football team but I quit because I couldn't get to all the games and that because my dad's always golfing and drinking so ...

(Y10 – Bottom Set – Group 2)

As an extension to this, when some of the lads had mentioned their previous regular involvement in some sports in Ayrefield being curtailed by external opportunities in the local area, it was apparent that whilst dads in particular were disappointed, they had not actively sought out other local teams in order to continue participation or encouraged their sons' involvement in alternative activities beyond Ayrefield. The following responses were relatively common:

Sam: When the Dragons packed in, my dad was a bit gutted to be honest. I think he liked me playing with my mates.

Callum: My dad did too but I think he also liked having a laugh and that at games with your dad (laughs).

Interviewer: Did he ever mention you going to play for another team.

Sam: No not really.

(Y11 Top Set – Group 1)

And

Interviewer: You said earlier that you were pretty good at football. Did he not encourage to keep playing when you wanted to stop?

Bailey: He did say that I might regret it, but I think he liked the lays in as well on a Sunday morning.

(Y11 Bottom Set – Group 1)

Therefore, whilst acknowledging the lack of proactive, structured parenting from parents in this study, a lack of available economic capital did not appear to be acting as a constraining influence on what the lads were able or willing to engaged in during their free time. Instead, a significant issue pertained to the fact that parents did not appear to possess the interests, experience, knowledge and social contacts in the form of relevant and valid social and cultural capital portfolios required to introduce their sons to 'other' activities – even if the desire had existed from the lads themselves. Put more simply, these parents demonstrated little ability (or desire) to utilise social relationships, contacts and ties (Bourdieu, 1984) to actively introduce their sons to a wide range of organised activities to supplement their existing leisure portfolios that were evidently dominated by hanging out, video gaming and recreational football – a proactive process and investment that would have formed a key feature in many middle-class family environments. Ultimately, therefore, the early socialising experiences to which the lads from Ayrefield were exposed had constrained the lads' opportunity to acquire the range and types of skills, knowledge, values, and actions (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Roberts, 2001) and limited the sporting habitus of their children in

relation what they were able to perform and engage in (Bourdieu, 1984; Pot et al., 2014; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013; Wheeler, 2012). This meant that the attitudes, actions, and social contacts of parents/families had severely restricted the range and types of activities to which their sons could realistically become ‘involved’ (Jakobsson et al., 2012; Stuij, 2013). Ultimately, this led to the lads from Ayrefield viewing a significant majority of leisure options as ‘not for the likes of us’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471) preferring instead to engage in recreational participation of more suitable sporting activities where the sporting field involves a habitus and set of values that matched their own (Stuij, 2015) across the more suitable social contexts of informal, recreational leisure activities (Jakobsson et al., 2012) in the immediate locality. This not to say that all parents were consciously limiting opportunities or actively denying access to a wider range of leisure activities. However, it was evident that the majority of parents seemed content that the lads were spending time with friends in the local area, were relatively active and safe, and ‘keeping out of trouble’ between sleeping, eating meals and attending school – a environment that appeared to complement and even facilitate the leisure preferences of the lads themselves.

### The Cage

Given the constraining influence of their socially constructed habitus, capital portfolios and exposure to certain parenting approaches with regards to their leisure profiles, it is perhaps not surprising that certain sites in the village emerged as optimum opportunities for these adolescent males to engaged in several of their leisure preferences all at once. In this regard, it was the two, council-funded, ‘free’ sports cages in Ayrefield that provided the ideal venue for the lads from Ayrefield to hang out with friends in their immediate locality and play recreational games of football for long periods away from the external control of adults. Termed ‘The Cage’ and mentioned positively at least once in all focus group interviews conducted, not only was it evident that this site was accessed regularly *‘I go to The Cage nearly every day’* (Archie Y11 Middle Set – Group 1) and:

Interviewer: ... On average how many nights would you go to The Cage?

Regan: Five nights.

Craig: Like, seven nights.

(Y10 Bottom Set – Group 1)

It was also clear that this site was extremely important to them in the sense that it was seen very much as ‘theirs’ - *‘It’s weird really. You go down there and it’s just us lot from Ayrefield. Different year groups and that and even some of the younger ones’* (Sam – Y11 Top Set – Group 1) and *‘It’s just us, lads from Ayrefield. No real reason for anybody else to be there really is there?’* (Lee – Y10 Bottom Set 1).

In relation to what the lads did at ‘The Cage’, whilst there were some comments that suggested ‘meet ups’ at The Cage were arranged via text or social media *‘We’ll just text and say do you want to come down to the The Cage’* (Finley Y10 Middle Set – Group 1) the vast majority of comments from lads across all three groups highlighted clearly that they viewed ‘The Cages’ as sites to meet and socialise with peers and that the playing of football was very much a secondary activity to be engaged in recreationally.

Not only was this linked to spontaneous, but often informal games based on who was present *‘We normally just have a game of knock our Wem (Wembley)’* (Simon – Y11 Top Set Group 1) but



later in the evening or at weekends especially ‘The Cages’ were used as sites to meet up and socialise with peers, friends and sometimes even members of the opposite sex *‘We’ll stop sometimes and have a drink and that when we get knackered. The lasses sometimes come down to hang about too. They don’t really watch but some lads show off anyway, don’t they’* (Noel – Y10 Top Set – Group 2).

In relation to the prominence and significance of ‘The Cages’ in the lads’ lives, therefore, it was evident that parents had largely ‘moved into the background’ and that their interactions with peers had become a more important and frequent (Neely & Holt, 2016) feature of their leisure lifestyles. Not only was this strongly influenced by the preferences and social resources of their friends who shared very similar interests and participation trends and preferences (Dagkas & Stathi, 2007; Roberts, 2012), but clearly, the site of ‘The Cage’ was a place where relationships could be formed and status could be gained – a social process that evidently led to strong feelings of excitement, enjoyment and belonging (Robinson, 2009) for the vast majority of lads whilst there.

## Discussion

Evidence presented and explored in this paper suggests that the leisure profiles of these working-class lads (Dagkas & Stathi, 2007) – dominated as they were by a narrow range of appropriate, recreational activities (Dagkas & Stathi, 2007; Engstrom, 2008) – can provide some explanation for the social class related participation differences that continue to exist in adulthood in the UK. This is seemingly because the narrow, class-related sporting/leisure interests and profiles developed as part of their working-class upbringings stood to limit ‘their ability to acquire the skills or dispositions that make for diverse or lasting leisure biographies’ (Wheeler, 2018a, p. 341) which also subsequently stands to constrain the longer-term leisure profiles and habits of these lads (as well as many working-class children like them) into adulthood.

In relation to the impact of their home lives on these participation trends, evidence suggests that parental influence on the lads’ leisure lifestyles was at best superficial and at worst highly constraining with regards to the promotion of the lads’ active involvement in the types, range and manner of sporting activities that may lead to lifelong participation in active leisure. Interestingly, however, there was no clear evidence that this lack of proactive encouragement towards a wider range of leisure pursuits and activities was being constrained by a lack of available finances or the availability of clubs and facilities in the local area. Instead, it was evident that the lads involved in the study had been engaged in a process of natural ‘growth’ (Lareau, 2003) – or ‘essential assistance’ (Wheeler, 2018a) as part of their working-class upbringing. This had resulted in these lads being exposed to a much more ‘relaxed’ and spontaneous parenting approach that had subsequently led to a level of acceptance with regards to these lads spending large amounts of unstructured leisure time spent ‘hanging out’ with peers and friends (MacDonald & Marsh, 2005) away from parental control, and engaged in unstructured and informal activities (Lareau, 2003; Stuij, 2013). The fact that these working-class parents did not possess the motivation, social contacts or cultural familiarity with alternative activities (Allen, 2011) in order to promote a wider leisure profile or sporting repertoire, stood in stark contrast to the highly structured and committed middle-class parenting approach linked to Lareau’s (2003) concept of ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau, 2003) more synonymous with middle-class families – a process that involves the regular engagement in a broad range of structured and supervised activities aimed at increasing the likelihood of them becoming (and remaining) active participants in such activities (Dagkas & Quarmby, 2012; Evans & Davies, 2010; Lareau, 2003). In short, the capital portfolios of parents and significant adults twinned with the influence of the family habitus (Vincent et al., 2012) had clearly led the lads at ACS to develop – a ‘deeply ingrained system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions’ that were very similar to that of their families (Reay, 1998, p. 527) that came to impact upon what they did, when and with whom during their ‘free’ time (Vincent et al., 2012).

Therefore, it was perhaps not surprising that ‘The Cages’ emerged as an ideal social space for the young males of Ayrefield to construct and strengthen their own identities away from the relative

constraints of the home (Roberts, 2016; Stuij, 2013) and ultimately make ‘decisions on what they want to do, when they want to do it, and when they want to stop it’ (Robinson, 2009, p. 504) during their leisure time in an environment that they very much saw as their own.

## Conclusion

The aim of the study was to examine the leisure and sporting lifestyles of young working-class males in an attempt to explain the enduring participation anomalies that exist between adults from different social class groups. Initially, a more superficial exploration in to the lads’ leisure time, does suggest that they are largely active. Despite the prevalence of on-line video gaming in the lads’ lives, this was largely interactive and competitive, and was supplemented with long periods out of the family home engaged in social interaction and recreational sporting activity. Indeed, the fact that many of the lads were otherwise occupied in the bedrooms or outdoors among friends may well have been a contributory factor behind them developing such narrow and class-related leisure profiles. In short, it did seem to be the case that being outside doing *something* and ‘out of sight – out of mind’ could be reason as to why so many young people from working-class backgrounds seemingly develop the interests and participation patterns that they do.

Although there were relatively alarming cases where the actions and attitudes of parents had stood to prevent certain types of participation, more common was the apparent lack of role modelling and the general apathy towards regular and committed active leisure participation among parents. In this regard, the view taken towards the participation of their sons linked closely to the accomplishment of ‘natural growth’ and ‘essential assistance’ approach in that they would almost inevitably be drawn towards ‘normal’ and expected activities such as football, fishing and video gaming. By extension, exposure to, and participation in most ‘other’ activities were seemingly left to the responsibility of the school and its PE department. However, studies have shown that such an expectation placed on school PE departments in working-class areas remains strongly influenced, and in many cases constrained by what the lads will and can do when they arrive at school.

Ultimately, therefore, there was very little evidence in the study that the lads’ narrow and class-related leisure and sporting profiles had the capacity to promote lifelong participation in sport and active leisure. Although they could currently be described as ‘active adolescents’, the types of activities in which they were engaged outside of school (e.g. fishing, snooker), the manner in which they participated (recreationally with friends), and their lack of exposure to structured lifestyles, meant that the majority of lads at ACS were neither inclined nor ‘set up’ to participate in the types and range of activities that may well have kept them active into adulthood.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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