Abstract

The relationship between youth and society has been the subject of study by cultural theorists for decades. Research on youth identities conventionally considered how they were defined through families, education and labour market experiences. Recently, however, the focus has turned to the ways in which young people construct their identities, founded on spaces of leisure experience, consumption and lifestyle. These dimensions are brought together in the practice of ‘lifestyle’ sports which highlight the importance of leisure as part of identity formation, performance and display, and have been linked with youth culture. In this thesis it is argued, however, that debates within youth leisure and lifestyles sports have understated the relationship between youth, sport participation and space drawing upon geographical research as part of the investigations into these claims.

Research on the geographies of youth has, however, been dominated by studies of urban settings, neglecting the role of countryside space in the performance of leisure and the formation of identity and lifestyle. Yet countryside space affords a space away from the gaze of adults and from the conflicts associated with other (urban) leisure space as well as providing opportunities to control how leisure space is shaped. As a popular youth activity that is performed in largely countryside space, mountain biking provides a case study by which to explore the distinct relationships young people develop with countryside spaces. Previous mountain biking research has tended to focus on adults and has rarely considered identity and lifestyle. This thesis employs ethnographic techniques including semi-structured interviews, mobile methods and participant observation to capture youth experiences and understandings of mountain biking.

The research reveals how youth mountain biking identities are differentiated between mountain biking disciplines based upon differences in landscape relations, riding philosophies and lifestyle values. These identities are also defined by youths in terms of their distinction from adult mountain bikers who do not share the etiquette and ethos of youth. Youth mountain bikers exploit the ‘natural’ features of countryside space and build an intimate knowledge of flora and fauna, to improve their experience of mountain biking. The research argues that the countryside is an important space for the performance of youth leisure, through processes which in turn affect the shaping of both self and space.
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Authors declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Reshaping youth

‘Young people are social actors in a social landscape. How they perceive their horizons depends on where they stand in the landscape and where their journeys take them. Where they go depends on the pathways they perceive, choose, stumble across or clear for themselves, the terrain and the elements they encounter’ (Evans, 2002:265).

In contemporary society the pathways, terrain and elements encountered by young people will increasingly involve leisure experiences as part of wider youth lifestyles. It is claimed post war youth have experienced increased and broader opportunities in employment, education, leisure and consumption (Hebdige, 1979) compared to previous generations, whilst more recent years have seen changing work and education patterns, a growth in communications technology and increased media influence, which have framed a new understanding of contemporary youth.

Some youth cultural theorists interpret contemporary youth cultures alongside theories surrounding the social spatial spheres of late modernity (e.g. Fornäs and Bolin, 1995). Conventional youth research is said to concentrate more on relationship identities and spatial activities defined through families, education and labour market experiences (Rutherford, 1998), however, as the construction of society has changed, recent attention has been given to the ways in which young people construct their lives through leisure, as traditional work based identities are superseded by identities founded on leisure experience, consumption and lifestyle (Chaney, 1996).

Although there is debate over the understanding and the extent of these changes (see White and Wyn, 2004; Roberts, 2006; Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006), some commentators have argued that symbolic ‘hybrid’ forms of consumption are crucial to understandings of contemporary youth culture (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Youth cultures constructed through leisure have been recognised by leisure researchers as key to the formation of youth tastes, preferences, and identities based on ‘using lifestyles
that incorporate their preferred uses of leisure to create their most significant, identity-conferring social positions’ (Roberts, 2006: 141). Thus research has increasingly investigated the leisure cultures associated with young people, and the processes of identity and lifestyle in the shaping of both self and space.

In addition, youth studies have placed growing importance on the autonomy of young people, where it has been argued that social scientists and policy makers have frequently neglected to acknowledge young people as active agents (Youniss and Ruth, 2002). Common understandings of youth are considered problematic through the proliferation of adult representations of young people which position them as powerless, as marginal and as homogeneous (Valentine and Holloway, 2000). It has also been argued that the definition of youth is conceptually contested for its failure to capture the dynamism and variety for which it represents (Sibley, 1995). Thus a conceptual and methodological shift has turned from the static understandings of youth to a concern to place young people at the centre of the research as active producers of their own identities and lifestyles (Panelli, 2002). This shift and accompanying debate informs this thesis, which recognises the complexity and variety of experience for those living as contemporary youth.

Research on youth leisure has investigated the geographies of young people recognising, in part, the complexities of the experience of leisure in youth and revealing a relationship with leisure space played out through a dynamic between conflict and control (see Malone, 2001; Matthews et al., 2000b). Public space is produced as adult space and young people struggle to find spaces they are able to ‘carve out for themselves’ (Skelton and Valentine, 1998:7). The literature is, however, dominated by urban leisure experiences and youth leisure in the countryside is less well explored. This thesis, therefore, builds on key debates over understandings of youth and their experiences of leisure, identity and lifestyle but also addresses the neglect of countryside leisure space within these theorisations, investigating the use of countryside space as part of youth mountain biking lifestyles.

This chapter introduces the key political and theoretical debates and contexts that influence the research aims of the project. They are considered in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3 but are introduced here so that readers are clearly aware of the research aims before considering the detailed theoretical and conceptual debate.
Discussions begin with a brief overview of current (youth) leisure lifestyles and spatialities in sections 1.2 and 1.3. These sections introduce and contextualise a more detailed discussion of youth lifestyles and identities in the following chapters which emphasise how changes in youth leisure need to be understood in terms of identities and lifestyles. In sections 1.4 and 1.5 the chapter introduces ‘the countryside’ as the leisure space under investigation exploring the political agenda which seeks to stimulate visits to the countryside and how young people’s relationship with countryside recreation has been theorised through their absence. In section 1.6 mountain biking in youth is briefly introduced as the activity under investigation.

The terms and concepts central to the tenets of the thesis, and referred to throughout, are briefly outlined, debated and clarified in the following section 1.2 and also in section 1.5. In section 1.2 the terms ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ are discussed acknowledging the changing nature of youth as a social construct and in section 1.5 the terms ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ or ‘countryside’ spaces are also considered outlining the problems of employing a bounded division of space, where for young people these remain less distinct.

This research was funded by Forest Research as part of a wider political agenda, and, therefore, following the discussions of youth mountain biking in section 1.6, section 1.7 outlines how this influenced the research through a healthy lifestyles agenda and delves further into the intricacies of the thesis, introducing the research setting and extracting the key debates that are the focus of the research. Section 1.8 presents the research aims which stemmed from these contextual discussions, and closes the chapter with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.2 Framing youth

It is important to consider the debates surrounding the definition of youth as a category of social division which have focussed on three key issues: age, conceptual categorisation and transition.

First, the separation of youth or adolescence simply through membership of a certain age range has led to the treatment of a hugely diverse group as a unitary whole. Early theorists considered adolescence to span from 14 to 24 years of age (Hall, 1904), whereas more contemporary understandings place adolescence between 10 or 11 years
and ending at 18 or 19 years of age (e.g. World Health Organisation, 1989). The UK government, considers adolescence is between ages 13 – 19 years old (Department for Education and Skills, 2005) and key leisure writer Roberts (2006), suggests that ‘youth’ can extend well past the age of 20.

Age related definitions of youth are also evident as part of public policy. In particular, the government, partly for health reasons, has identified a target to increase physical activity and sport participation in disadvantaged groups (Department for Culture Media and Sport and Strategy Unit, 2002). One of these target groups is young people, particularly as participation in physical activity falls dramatically after the age of 16, whilst concurrently it is believed that ‘early’ physical activity experiences are important factors for influencing adult physical activity (Thompson et al., 2005).

The signification of what it is to be young in terms of age is surrounded by increasing uncertainty and the cramming together of such a wide span of individuals can be problematic if analysts are unclear in their understandings of the sub-categories used to divide up the young. The blurring of boundaries between childhood, adolescence and adulthood have made it difficult to pin down in terms of age who classifies as being in the stage of youth and therefore Roberts (2006:128) would argue ‘age has become a less useful predictor’ for categorising youth.

The second issue associated with the definition of youth is the difficulties associated with youth as being distinct, yet relational to adults or children. As children are often conceptually categorised in opposition to adults, young people it is claimed, are polarised in an ambiguous state of existence between adults and children (Sibley, 1995; Valentine, 2001). Representations of youth particularly within the media create youth identities which perpetuate marginalisation and disempowerment through prevailing adult commentaries on youth, whilst failing to acknowledge the diversity of youth experiences (Valentine, 1996a). For example, dominant social constructions in the media also tend to identify young people as a cause or a consequence of particular anti social problems (Griffin, 1997; Valentine, 2004). It has also been argued that the conceptual categorisation of youth as neither adult nor child has meant ‘youth’ are associated with moral panics over activities such as binge drinking or inactive lifestyles, that are in fact also heavily associated with adults (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Valentine et al., 2008) In these moral panics young people are paradoxically
positioned as either the deviant perpetrator or the innocent victim at risk (Griffin, 1993). Thus it is argued that youth is not a simple conceptual category (Valentine 2001). It is important to understand youth as distinct from adults and from children and as an experience in its own right. Young people’s experiences of space are mediated as part of their relationships with adults and children. This research, therefore, adopts a conceptual approach to youth which is based on the definitions of youth put forward by the participants in the project. Their experiences of ‘youth’ are often expressed in relation to but distinct from adults, children or youths of different ages to themselves. This conceptual position reflects the voices of young people taking part in the research, rather than accepting adult conceptualisations of youth.

The third area of debate over youth as a social group surrounds transition. Chapter 2 shows that the notion of transition has been influential on how youth is theorised (Shildrick and Macdonald 2006). Recent research has argued that many youths experience delays in reaching what are considered the ‘traditional’ markers of adulthood. For example, delays in family and marriage commitments, extended dependency on parents, extended education and greater access to a wide range of leisure and disposable income has led to fewer individuals becoming adults in ways that are normatively understood (Mortimer and Larson, 2002). Rather, the experience of youth is varied, complex and ‘disorderly’ (Rindfuss et al., 1987) and the trajectory of youth will not correspond with that of their parents. Not all young people are equipped with the social, cultural or economic capital to navigate equally through life choices and examining the experiences of youth according to classical transitional markers such as educational achievement or economic dependency discounts the individual negotiation of wider processes of identity and lifestyle in youth. It is argued that it is too simplistic to view adolescents as a homogeneous group going through a process of transition within society as they cover a wide maturity range (Hendry, 1981) and opportunities and access to leisure, employment and education are disparate. It is claimed that contemporary youth is lived according to a variety of different experiences rather than through processes recognised as part of the transition approach (Cohen, 1997).

These three debates over age, conceptual categorisation and transition have led to a complex discussion surrounding the use of ‘youth’ and ‘adolescent’ as a tool for social division (Sibley, 1995). This thesis addresses the problems by using the terms ‘youth’
and ‘young people’, adopted to refer to those individuals experiencing what they defined as ‘youth’ or ‘adolescence’ in order to move beyond problematic existing constructions based on outsider or adult interpretations of youth. This thesis also conceptualises youth as defined by a wide age range and participants were aged from 13 years and, following Roberts (2006), acknowledging the prolonging of youth, included those up to 25 years of age. Age, however, is accepted as a fluid category and it was important to recognise the variation that occurs between ages amongst youth, similar to Bell et al. (2003) who found that use of woodland space varied significantly between young people according to their age. The young people taking part in the research distinguished between younger and older youth mountain bikers in their accounts. Younger youth were complexly defined but for participants aged 14 – 16 years, mountain bikers around 10 or 12 years of age were included in this group, whereas for older riders aged 18 and over, those under 16 years old were also part of this group. This thesis highlights the age differences occurring within youth as a central component of the experience of mountain biking lifestyles (see section 7.3.3).

In addition, the research responds to the debate over the distinctions between children, youths and adults by examining not only how young people see themselves as distinct from children or adults but also by studying how young people will often compare and relate their experiences of leisure to those of adults, children and younger or older youth.

In summary, therefore, the conceptual definition of youth used in the thesis is partly based on a wide age category of 13-25 and but also reflects how the research participants chose to define what it is to be a youth. This conceptual approach required a reflexive methodology which acknowledges the perspective of the researcher whilst empowering the researched to actively engage in the processes and parameters of research. Mobile research methods and unstructured participant observation were used to unearth the intricacies of narratives, emotions and feelings attached to countryside leisure spaces. This departure from more traditional research methods allows an understanding of youth within this research as fluid and fluctuating between and within individuals’ experiences.
1.3 Youth lifestyles and leisure space

The changing nature of youth culture in relation to leisure has been much debated and recent writings have stressed the need to consider lifestyles and identities (e.g. Miles, 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Academic writings concerned with these issues are considered in detail in Chapter 2 but youth identities and lifestyles and their interactions with leisure have also been of recent political concern.

Government strategies relating to young people have identified a place for youth leisure activities in addressing issues of social behaviour, inequality and health. Particular emphasis has been placed upon the benefits to health associated with active leisure activities and policy seeks to improve public health by creating a ‘culture’ of physical activity (Department for Culture Media and Sport and Strategy Unit, 2002). This holistic approach to health policy reflects debates within the literature which have argued for a consideration of youth leisure lifestyles ‘in the round’ (Smith et al., 2004). There is growing recognition of the potential role of leisure activities which appeal to youth identities and lifestyles in contributing to the new activity agenda. Tomlinson et al. (2005) have argued that there is an absence of academic or policy related research which has addressed the ramifications of lifestyle sports participation for national policy agendas, particularly when engaging young people in these sports could have an impact:

‘...given the continuing decline in curriculum physical activity at school and the often limited availability of non-school sports activities, regular participation in lifestyle sports between the ages of 15 and 24 could be highly significant in terms of Government targets’ (Tomlinson et al., 2005:34).

Youth lifestyles and leisure cultures are, therefore, an area of significant academic and political interest and form the basis of this thesis. As Chapters 2, 3 and 4 make clear, however, contemporary youth leisure writing needs to be extended by addressing the complex interactions between lifestyle, identity and space.

For Shields (1992) contemporary culture has seen a synthesis of leisure and consumption where leisure (and consumption) spaces provide the stage for the performance and enactment of lifestyles and young people are developing complex and multifaceted relationships with leisure spaces. In addition, the expansion of communications and media technologies has created new forms of social connections.
within virtual spaces (Hellenga, 2002). Bennett (2005), for example, has claimed new medias have opened up spaces for individual and collective creativity particularly amongst the young. Mobile phones have freed individuals to form social bonds away from the home (Henderson et al., 2007) whilst the internet as ‘cyberspace’ has facilitated new globalised networks, youth cultural formations (St John, 2003) and the flow of global youth culture (Best and Kellner, 2001).

Concurrently, young people are spending less time outdoors during free time than previously, and are said to exist in an ‘increasingly physically restricted environment’ (Riddoch and McKenna, 2005:196). Young people have become more individual in their expressions of themselves, yet their spatial boundaries are highly problematic. The Youth Review (Make Space, 2007) has argued that because of a lack of safe space, young people are becoming detached from local communities. New relationships with street spaces (mainly urban and suburban) have formed with many young people citing ‘hanging around’ as a primary leisure activity (Make Space, 2007:75), however, these activities are performed within spaces that are policed or regulated by others and has often been associated with negative and chaotic behaviour and conflicts with the interests of other groups.

These debates have stressed the importance of considering spaces in studies of youth leisure, lifestyles and cultures. Crucially young people’s leisure opportunities are dependent upon the spaces available for leisure, with outdoor spaces for some becoming less accessible. Studies from a marketing perspective such as the Henley Centre (2005:9) have argued that ‘both sport and outdoor recreation share the difficulty of engaging young people in a world of intense media and indoors entertainment’. In general, however, there is growing recognition of the importance of outdoor leisure for health and social reasons but academic research focussing on leisure, lifestyle and identity formation in youth involving outdoor spaces has been largely focused on urban, suburban or commercial spaces.

1.4 The countryside as leisure space

Many of the discussions of leisure in the countryside have focussed on the adult population as a whole, with only limited attention given to specific social groups such as black and ethnic minority groups, disabled people and young people (Countryside
Young people’s participation in leisure visits to the countryside, for example, has been omitted from government visitor surveys which only include ‘adults’ over 16 years of age (Natural England, 2006) yet did reveal trends for older youth aged between 16 and 24 years.

According to the England Leisure Day Visits survey, in 2002-03 62% of adults reported visiting the countryside and these were quantified as 1.3 billion visits accounting for almost one quarter of all leisure visits (Countryside Agency, 2004). In 2005, trips had reduced by 41% to 0.77 billion visits per year, with 59% of adults reporting a trip to the countryside in the previous year, (Natural England, 2006). Of those taking trips to the countryside in 2005, only 9% were between 16 and 24 years of age whereas those over 45 years represented 56% of visitors (Natural England, 2006). Accurately quantifying and recording visitor numbers to the countryside in general can, however, be hugely problematic (see Willis and Benson, 1989; Benson and Willis, 1992). Leisure day visits data from 2002/3 is potentially influenced by the foot and mouth outbreak (see Sharpley and Craven, 2001), and must be considered as an overriding factor in the decline in visitor numbers.

Nevertheless, fifty years ago natural settings in the countryside were popular locations for leisure and recreation for much of the population; however, visitor numbers are now in decline (Countryside Agency, 2005). The countryside must compete within a heavily filled leisure arena and as the changing demography of the family has seen young people become more independent, they may be less inclined to visit countryside spaces as part of family, school or organised visits.

The countryside has become the ‘context’ and the ‘object’ of experience for multiple forms of countryside leisure, as Glyptis (1991:xi) has recognised ‘the countryside, then is no single or static resource, nor does countryside recreation take any one form’. Sharpley (2005:25) has claimed that within the context of the countryside, leisure can refer to anything ‘from a (specific) recreational activity to developing an understanding of, and harmony with, our natural surroundings’. Results from The Leisure Day Visits Survey (Natural England, 2006) have shown the most popular leisure activities in the countryside included eating out, hill walking and rambling, visiting friends, taking part in sports or active pursuits, hobbies or special interests and cycling and mountain
biking, thus countryside recreation is notoriously difficult to define (Glyptis, 1991; Sharpley, 2005).

Addressing the decline in countryside leisure visits through a discourse of social exclusion, countryside agencies are implementing diversity and equality policies to ensure equal access to natural landscapes, The Rural White Paper (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2000) has identified people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, disabled people, young people (especially girls), people who live in inner cities, women, older people and people on low income all make limited use of the countryside and green outdoor spaces. Resource management agencies have responded by formulating approaches to connect people with nature underpinned by the principles of social inclusion (e.g. Inland Waterways Amenity Council, 2001; Slee et al., 2001; Stone, 2002; Countryside Agency, 2005).

Previous academic research into the demands and constraints to countryside recreation has also recognised the inequalities in accessing the countryside and reflected the theoretical assumptions of rural geographies which have recognised the construction of the countryside as white, heterosexual, (Bell and Valentine, 1995) and middle class (Cloke et al., 1995). Despite the desire to promote outdoor recreation it has been argued that youth leisure practices in particular have continued to have been ‘othered’ especially in cultural constructions of the rural (Crouch, 1997). As illustrated later in Chapters 3 and 4, the link between countryside leisure activities and young people’s leisure lifestyles and identities has not yet been adequately captured within academic research.

The absence of young people from countryside leisure activities has been discussed within some government policies (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2000; OPENSpace, 2003). Defra’s Rural White Paper acknowledged participation in countryside recreation is unequal and adopted a ‘recreation for all’ approach to stimulate visits to the countryside, and pledged that ‘by 2005, we will carry out a full diversity review of how we can encourage more people with disabilities, more people from the ethnic minorities, more people from the inner cities, and more young people to visit the countryside and participate in country activities’ (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2000:138). Of these target
groups it has been claimed that young people remain the least researched (Ward Thompson, 2004).

The subsequent Diversity Review (OPENSpace, 2003) used individual interviews and focus groups to elicit the views of both users and non users of the countryside. Young people aged 14-20 years old were included in the study although the authors focussed on the experiences of young people from inner city areas and, therefore, the report does not offer a spectrum of youth experiences of the countryside. Nevertheless, the report revealed the most significant barriers for young people accessing the countryside were tastes and preferences, and young people were often looking for a more active engagement with the countryside (OPENSpace, 2003). Slee et al. (2001) have suggested that concern over young people’s absence is reasoned in three ways. First, their absence is theorised as part of a cyclical nature of exclusion where exclusion ‘is partly about learned behaviour from those who engender inappropriate forms of leisure (the moral underclass discourse)” (Slee et al., 2001:17). Second, as part of labour market changes, it is claimed young people may be excluded because of a rise in unemployment and inactivity for 16-24 year olds (Slee et al., 2001). The third reason for under participation by young people is that it results from a particular ‘stage in lifecycle’ and thus assumes that consumers will eventually mature and consider the countryside as a viable leisure destination (Slee et al., 2001:18). The continuing relevance of lifecycle or transitional approaches to understanding contemporary youth was, however, dismissed in section 1.2 (also see section 2.1).

Although offering no further explanation of why youth is excluded from a desire to engage with the countryside, The Diversity Review (OPENspace, 2003) and Slee et al.’s (2001) research raises questions over why some young people choose to access countryside spaces whilst others express a distinct dislike. Adventurous activities have provided a means to experience the countryside in youth for many years and continue to represent an important lifestyle choice for some contemporary youth (Rohde and Kendle, 2004). It has been claimed that where young people do engage in such forms of countryside leisure, it is often high adrenaline activities that transcend to wider lifestyle patterns rather than traditional countryside activities (Henley Centre, 2005). As is shown in Chapter 3, however, studies have failed to acknowledge the performance of identity and lifestyle through countryside leisure. Although the research by Slee et al. (2001) and The Diversity Review (OPENSpace, 2003)
identified a range of barriers to young people’s participation in countryside recreation, as is discussed later in Chapter 3, it has failed to fully explore the processes that structure these barriers, or how these barriers are overcome.

Many young people who are involved in lifestyle sports develop significant relationships with countryside space; however, these connections remain only briefly explored. As Chapter 3 shows, there is little research which focuses on young people’s use of countryside space for leisure and this captures little understanding of youth identities and lifestyles in the countryside. Furthermore, youth leisure and cultural studies have paid little attention to the countryside by comparison to other urban and suburban outdoor and indoor spaces of youth. This thesis challenges the presiding position of urban and suburban space within studies of youth leisure geographies presenting the findings of research which has explored how countryside spaces afford the spatial expression of youth identities and the performance of youth lifestyles.

O’Brien and Weldon (2007) maintained there is a need to connect young people with the countryside and increase their confidence in using and enjoying woodlands. Research into outdoor leisure has often sought to examine the benefits of connections with nature and the countryside for the wider population. In addition, academic and policy research has seen experiences of nature as a key dimension in making countryside leisure meaningful and, therefore, attitudes towards nature represent an important avenue of enquiry in the case of young people. As is shown in Chapters 3 and 4, however, research into the role of nature in outdoor recreation has been largely focussed on how humans’ impact on the natural resource rather than the influence the natural resource may have on people (Henderson and Bialeschki, 2005). This thesis argues for a shift in focus to an understanding of youth connections with countryside space particularly through new forms of active lifestyle sports, and mountain biking is the focus of the thesis.

1.5 Clarifying the countryside and (re)presenting the rural
Like the debates over the countryside, the construction of nature and ‘the rural’ is heavily contested (see Hoggart, 1988; Davis and Ridge, 1997; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Franklin, 2002). The countryside presented in this research is less concerned with rural areas defined by population density and lived space, but rather with the
spaces socially constructed by young people as ‘natural’, ‘non built-up’ or ‘countryside’.

This thesis acknowledges a rural / urban division occurring in the theorisation of youth leisure, identity and lifestyle, where geographical researchers have employed this binary to distinguish between the urban and the rural child, (Jones, 1997; McCormack, 2002; Nairn et al., 2003; Valentine et al., 2008). In addition, countryside leisure engagements remain absent from many accounts exploring youth lifestyles where it is usually only considered as part of the experiences of rural residents. Valentine (2001), however, has challenged dualistic geographical theorisation for assuming neat boundaries between spaces where instead they remain blurred and complex and Crouch (1993; 1997) has argued that the cultural interpretation of the rural has become ‘dislodged’ from the urban.

Rather than acting as a critique of the validity of these spaces in opposition of each other, this thesis recognises there are multiple notions of rurality (Halfacree, 1993) (and urbanity). It has been claimed, for example, that most leisure practices involving natural environments occur beyond or in opposition to the urban and Sharpley (2005:2-3) asserted that in recreational terms the countryside refers to ‘all land touching or beyond larger towns and cities’. Macnaghten and Urry (2001), however, have argued that the use of objects such as mountain bikes sensuously extends ‘human’ capacities and deconstructs simple dichotomies of what is natural and unnatural, what is countryside and what is urban, and what are subjects and what are supposedly ‘objects’. Instead spaces are defined by both real and imagined boundaries, where individuals’ experiences of a particular place possess a distinctiveness understood by those who use and interact within the space (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997).

This thesis, rather than advocating a crude spatial separation, has acknowledged how young people construct their own knowledge about the places in which they live (Sibley, 1991; Nairn et al., 2003) and, importantly, that spaces are understood through use rather than through definition. Therefore, whilst rural geographies have concentrated on the experience of young people who reside in rural space, this thesis has considered the experience of the countryside as leisure as opposed to lived space. The thesis refers to the countryside regardless of where leisure participants live, but
‘rural’ was sometimes used by participants to refer to experiences of living in countryside space.

Young people’s experience of what is rural, countryside or what is urban is meditated within a wider bricolage of leisure spaces and the countryside includes a multitude of landscape types, therefore, the thesis has adopted a classification of space according to young people’s ‘ways of seeing’ (Jackson, 1989; Matthews and Limb, 1999). As Chapter 7 shows, leisure space was described by participants using terms such as urban, street, countryside, built-up or non built-up, woodland, parkland, disused quarries, council owned, private, public, managed or controlled and these divisions of space are explored within the thesis. Participants discussed living in rural or non rural areas, but their understandings of leisure space were more complex as young people construct their lives around multiple spaces.

1.6 Mountain biking

Mountain biking is an activity that appeals to young people emerging as one of the most popular extreme sports amongst 15-24 year olds (Mintel, 2003). Children aged 11-15 years cycle more than any other age group, and whilst some researchers have investigated cycling as part of the school journey, the invisibility of leisure cycling or non school cycle travel is heralded as a missed opportunity (Gill, 2005). Mountain biking research has acknowledged, in part, that the performance of mountain biking is linked to particular leisure behaviour of people generally aged over 25, displaying a particular set of values or distinction from other lifestyle groups, yet academic research has failed to link mountain biking with lifestyle and identity in youth. The mountain biking literature has revealed interesting differences in the way in which participants access and perform the sport in particular places, and theorists have hinted at an important relationship between recreationists and mountain biking leisure space (Brown and Marshall, 2007; Brown et al., 2008).

Mountain biking is often performed within countryside space; however, it is transferable to a myriad of spaces described in the section above, classified and defined according to the leisure potential of the space. The lack of restriction to one spatial type and onus on the participant to make the choice represents an opportunity to link with other theorisations of lifestyle sports in a variety of spaces, whilst still
holding relevance to the often urban theorisations and empirical studies of youth. With its focus on countryside space through mountain biking at Bedgebury, however, this thesis is primarily contributing to and extending countryside leisure research.

Both mountain bikers (see Hollenhorst et al., 1995; Dougill and Stroh, 2001) and ‘youth’ (see Bell et al., 2003; Ward Thompson et al., 2004) have, in part, been constructed through a discourse of conflict, deviance and demonisation in their relationships with countryside space. Youth mountain biking represents an important case study by which to investigate the relationship between space and control in the formation of identity and the performance of lifestyles. As a site which is formally controlled by the Forestry Commission, but which encourages the ownership and self regulation of participants, Bedgebury Forest in Kent offers a distinctive case study by which to explore these issues. This thesis investigates the use of both Bedgebury Forest and other countryside spaces by youth mountain bikers aged between 13 and 25 years old.

1.7 The research site: Bedgebury Forest

The public forest estate, managed by Forest Enterprise, is now the largest resource available for informal access and recreation in England, however, the ethics of traditional forestry have been described as ‘stoic utilitarian’ (McQuillan, 1993:191) through the concern for needs based, quantifiable outputs (as timber) and the consequent dismissal of the pleasures of recreation and conservation (McQuillan, 1993). The Forestry Commission has, however, undergone a dramatic repositioning, actively promoting the role of woodlands in contributing to people’s health and wellbeing under the principles of social, sustainable or new forestry (see O’Brien, 2001; Forestry Commission, 2002a, b).

There is increasing evidence which supports a link between the effects of nature on various aspects of human health (Frumkin, 2001; Henwood, 2001; Reynolds, 2002; Seymour, 2003; Bird, 2004; Pretty et al., 2005) in particular the health benefits of visiting woodland, trees and forest spaces (Ulrich, 1986; Hartig et al., 1996; Tabbush and O’Brien, 2003; O’Brien, 2006) and this has been influential in shaping the policy agenda. Studies have shown viewing natural landscapes is particularly beneficial to mental health through stress relief (Hartig et al., 1991; Bingley and Milligan 2007).
addition to the benefits to health, natural landscapes have been researched as symbolic and meaningful (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1998; Henwood and Pidgeon, 2001) as socially binding and as places of identity development (O'Brien, 2005a).

In 1998 the Forestry Commission released the England Forestry Strategy (1998), and subsequent Forests for Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2000) and Woodlands for Wales (Forestry Commission, 2001). Tellingly, the strategy acknowledged the role of woodlands for children and young people as ‘opportunities for adventurous play are important for young people’s health and, in an increasingly risk averse society are a useful way of teaching them about risk’ (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2007:13).

Childhood play experience involving woodlands is thought to encourage both more frequent woodland visits as young people and the recognition of woodlands as spaces of stimulation, enjoyment and relaxation (Bingley and Milligan, 2004, 2007). This early informal use of woodlands is also argued to be beneficial to the cognitive and social development of children and young people (Bell et al., 2003) whilst experiencing the natural environment in youth is claimed to hold multiple benefits for well being and future development of healthy lifestyles (Ward Thompson et al., 2006; Bingley and Milligan, 2007).

Partly in response to the growing health related evidence and national government policies discussed above, the Forestry Commission formed the Active Woods campaign which seeks to promote the use of woodlands as part of a healthy and active lifestyle that is ‘naturally good for you’ (O'Brien, 2005b). It incorporates Sport England’s Active England goals to create ways of encouraging new engagements with sport and physical activity (Hall Aitken, no date) in key under-represented groups identified as women, people over 45 years of age, black and ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities and young people. This thesis is based upon a case study of a project awarded funding to support the Forestry Commission’s Active Woods initiative.

Forest Research is coordinating a three year monitoring and evaluation of the Active Woods projects and has conducted independent quantitative monitoring and visitor profiles, a summary of which is given in Chapter 5. This thesis contributes to the evaluation by providing a qualitative element to determine the features and forms of
(mountain biking) leisure engagements for young people in Bedgebury Forest, Kent which is one of the Active Woods Projects. It provides a full investigation into countryside leisure engagements for a particular under-represented group, focussing on the role of countryside leisure space in the formation of youth identities and lifestyles.

Embracing the principles of social forestry (O'Brien, 2001; Kitchen et al., 2004), Bedgebury has been transformed into a leisure destination orientated towards encouraging active lifestyles, particularly for young people. It is specifically targeting the youth market through its heavy emphasis on cross country mountain biking, racing, dirt jump and freeride, areas, for more experienced riders, as well as through coaching initiatives to encourage new youth engagements. The case study offers an opportunity to investigate youth leisure activities within a customised countryside leisure space that is seeking to develop clear links with youth culture.

Given this policy focus on woodlands and young people, the Active Woods project also provides a valuable case study to measure the role of the state in developing and influencing youth leisure spaces and how these interact with other factors shaping leisure lifestyles described above. Mountain biking at Bedgebury, therefore, provides an opportunity to investigate youth leisure in relation to countryside spaces in greater depth, exploring how young people understand, negotiate and construct space in the countryside through the performance of particular meaningful activities.

1.8 Thesis aims and structure
The broad aim of the research was to examine the role of countryside spaces in the link between leisure, lifestyle and identity formation in young people. This broad aim was achieved through three focussed aims.

1. To examine the importance of leisure space in understandings of youth identity and lifestyle.
2. To address the neglect of countryside leisure in the theorisation of youth identity and lifestyle.
3. To understand the experiences of young people rather than adults in the performance of countryside leisure and specifically of mountain biking.
The thesis is organised into eight chapters, the first four of which outline the theoretical parameters of the research and the key arguments, these arguments are synthesised in Chapter 4 and contextualised in Chapter 5. The analysis and discussion of the findings are presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter 2 presents a thorough investigation of literature focused on young people and leisure landscapes in a broad sense, drawing upon theory of subculture (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003), and identity (Willis, 1990; Epstein, 1998; Miles, 2000) to understand the construction of leisure in young people’s lives. It offers a review of social and cultural studies of youth arguing the importance of understanding how cultures are constructed in order to determine the opportunities for leisure and recreation as young people construct their leisure lifestyles. The concepts of leisure, identity and lifestyle emerge as crucial components of discussions of contemporary youth leisure culture.

Chapter 3 considers the contributions made by social and cultural geographies to understanding the ways in which young people’s identities and lifestyles have been attached to particular leisure spaces. As young people are frequently theorised through their use of urban space for leisure, this chapter discusses how young people create meaning and construct identity through leisure in urban space arguing that countryside leisure offers valid leisure opportunities but remains a neglected field of research. The chapter problematises the theorisation of youth engagements through constraints and barriers research, arguing that the literature in this area has concentrated on the constraints rather than motivations and also contests the value of investigating structured engagements with the countryside for the analysis of youth leisure lifestyles and identity instead arguing for a focus on informal, unstructured leisure activities.

Chapter 4 focuses on the theorisation of lifestyle sports in relation to youth identity and lifestyle. The focus turns to lifestyle sports as an avenue by which explore the links between consumption of leisure and youth culture by considering the contributions made through leisure studies to understand these from a lifestyle perspective. Before exploring the case of mountain biking, the chapter addresses the original interests and objectives for the thesis synthesising the literature and highlighting the key debates, resolving a more focussed approach to the research. The second part of this chapter introduces mountain biking as a case study by which to explore these issues, reviewing
previous theorisations of the sport and arguing mountain bikers represent a significant youth user group for the investigation of leisure lifestyles in the countryside.

Chapter 5 presents the methodology adopted within the thesis. The adoption of a subtle realist philosophical position is linked to debates surrounding ethnography, researching with young people, mobilities and mobile methods and justifies the overall qualitative approach. The methodology draws upon an assemblage of research methods, the key elements of which are in depth, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and accompanied and unaccompanied mobile methods. The research adopted a reflective ethical approach and the procedures for ensuring the ethical integrity of the research are described within this chapter. The research site is also introduced and contextualised within this chapter through an outline of the organisation of cycling spaces at Bedgebury and a discussion of the profile of visitors and the pattern of use by young people taken from Forest Research quantitative survey results.

Chapter 6 unveils the research findings, introducing the spaces of mountain biking both within and around Bedgebury and highlighting the importance of these spaces in the performance of various youth mountain biking lifestyles. The chapter then focuses on the characteristics of youth mountain biking lifestyles exploring their attitudes towards competition, commitment and consumption and the role these play in their own leisure identities. Youth mountain bikers distinguish themselves from others through their attitudes to these ideals and also through their own relationships with space.

Chapter 7 continues the analysis of data, exploring the role of space in youth leisure lifestyles and how youth mountain bikers construct countryside in comparison to other leisure space. The countryside emerges as a central feature of youth mountain biking lifestyles and identities, yet attitudes to nature as part of these are more complex than is currently understood. This chapter shows how young people develop distinctive and meaningful relationships with countryside space and are empowered to shape their own leisure spaces and create their own forms of knowledge through participation in mountain biking.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by revisiting the research aims introduced as part of this chapter. Each aim is considered in relation to the research findings and the discussions in the literature review.
Chapter 2  Youth lifestyles

2.1  Theorising youth
Young people have been labelled as both a barometer and a product of social change (Jones and Wallace, 1992; Miles, 2000) and have become a prime field for investigation in social science. As discussed in chapter 1, ‘youth’ is often conceptualised as being in the midst of childhood and adulthood which appears intrinsic to the condition of ‘youth’ (Northcote, 2006). Such an ideological state it is claimed creates ambiguity and uncertainty for young people, who are challenged to become active members of society (Sibley, 1995).

Theorists have conceptualised a dynamic relationship between society and young people, documenting widespread influences on the construction of their everyday lives and identities. The balance between the roles of structural institutions and the autonomy of the individual is an overarching discourse in the different recent theoretical approaches used to analyse young people’s lives. Research into youth, however, is also, in terms of theoretical perspective, essentially split into two traditions; the study of youth cultures which explores individual youth cultural identities and the study of youth transitions which investigates the social structuring of pathways to adulthood (Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006). As discussed in chapter 1, the definition of youth is contested as part of three interconnected debates over age, categorisation and transition. Both culture and transition traditions are shown to address these issues but the chapter argues these are more satisfactorily addressed within a cultural rather than a transitional approach.

This chapter is primarily concerned with the youth culture approach to research, motivated by a concern over the creativity of young people and how youth is interpreted through the interplay of cultural goods, lifestyle choices and their visual and verbal expression (Fornäs and Bolin, 1995). By arguing for a definition of youth as fluid and fluctuating between and within individual experiences in a particular age range, this chapter provides part of the rationale for the focus of the thesis on lifestyle and identity. The notion of transition, however, is also discussed in this section as it
offers a useful historical perspective which illustrates the ways in which young people respond to particular structural constraints and tensions in a particular place at a particular time (Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006). The transition approach considers the change from youth to adulthood as a development demarcated by institutionally defined transitions and has been critiqued for discounting a vast array of other influences on young people’s lives (Cohen, 1997). The transition debate has also been heavily criticised for situating youth as ‘problematic’ and for its failure to incorporate wider influences on young people’s biographies in contemporary life including the processes of identity formation, leisure and consumption practices (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999).

Nevertheless, in their study of ‘risk’ and transitions of young male vehicle offenders, Stephen and Squires (2003) defend the prolonged value of transition claiming the limbo status between childhood dependency and economic and social adult status continues to cause uncertainty and tension. Similarly, in his study of Canadian school children, Lehmann (2004) found that socio-economic background and gender continue to influence individuals’ school-work transitions despite claims of reduced structural influence and individualisation of late modern and risk discourses. Along with other theorists (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999; Macdonald et al., 2001; Evans, 2002; Macdonald and Shildrick, 2007), these authors acknowledge that young people’s lives are inherently more complex than this one element, and call for a broader conceptualisation and exploration of new frameworks within transition studies (Stephen and Squires, 2003; Lehmann, 2004).

More recently Macdonald and Shildrick (2007; Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006) examine youth transitions through their differentiated leisure experiences. They argue with others (e.g. Fornäs and Bolin, 1995), that as emphasis shifts from work to leisure, or from production to consumption, understanding contemporary youth in terms of education or employment, for example, is, for the most part, no longer applicable. Contemporary youth may be defined through the increasing importance of consumption practices, defined, for example, by the music they buy or the brands they wear (Rutherford, 1997). Thus recent research adopting a transition approach can be seen as problematic due to the emphasis on institutional markers but it confirms the
importance of the focus of this thesis of examining the contribution of leisure to identity development.

As the debate around transition has progressed, other, more theoretically informed debates of youth have emerged which are not concerned with transition but seek to undertake a critical investigation of the new life contexts encountered by young people, and to develop socio-cultural analyses of youth. In section 2.2 this chapter will move onto review this research by considering first the role of writings on subcultures and then of post-subcultures and how they have been applied to contemporary British youth.

Sections 2.2 to 2.4 present an overview of the evolution of social and cultural studies of youth by covering the key theoretical concepts which have emerged within the field. Two additional concepts applied to contemporary youth of ‘individualism’ and ‘tribes’ are also examined in section 2.5. Section 2.6 offers a critical insight into the role of identity in contemporary studies of youth, investigating how these vary amongst youth, and section 2.7 develops this to consider identity in the making of lifestyles. In section 2.8 the consumption of leisure as part of youth identity and lifestyles is explored. The chapter ends in section 2.9 with a synopsis of the contemporary youth theory that has been reviewed and argues for a need to consider how youth identities and lifestyles are crucially influenced by space and spatial issues are then examined in more detail in chapter 3. Collectively, these different sections highlight the need to consider youth leisure in the countryside in terms of identity, lifestyle and space.

### 2.2 Youth and theories of subcultures

This section presents a brief critique of key theoretical works within the field of youth studies and subcultures, in order to take account of the complex contemporary processes that shape youth cultures and lives and the nature in which they have been theorised, beginning with an analysis of work the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). This is followed by a review of the post-subcultural school of thought, which applies a more contemporary theorisation to youth cultures as a progression from the original subcultural thesis.
The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham introduced youth as a key area of study for sociology in the 1970s. Employing a Gramscian Marxist framework, CCCS attempted to marry structuralist and post-structuralist approaches in much of its work, through a macro perspective on youth culture (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004). Embedded within a modernist paradigm, the CCCS developed a depth model in the analysis of society which pursued an understanding of the meanings behind narrative, rather than merely considering the aesthetic affect (Muggleton, 2000). They addressed the issues of the times, through a focus on youth, unemployment and class struggle in British youth culture. It was argued that after the Second World War, traditional patterns of life were replaced with new ones, through changes in formation of the family, employment and education patterns and shifts in work / leisure status (Hebdige, 1979). This was coupled with changes in the nature of class expression in British culture, and led to the polarisation and fragmentation of the working class from the rest of society (Hebdige, 1979).

The CCCS approach considered access to culture unequal, and took resistance as a form of expression against the hegemonic culture (Epstein, 1998). The cultural practices of youth ‘common culture’ were often interpreted as ‘risk’ behaviour, and this became the dominant construction of youth. The CCCS presented a subcultural theory of delinquency and deviance where becoming a delinquent was considered a result of a labelling process particularly apparent amongst working class youth. The explanation for these patterns of delinquency according to Cohen (1972) lay in the social stratification of society. Working class youth were subject to tension and strain in access to education, and the economic pursuit of success and, therefore, their deviant behaviour was socially induced through inequality (Downes and Rock, 1989).

The causes of delinquency were also explored through symbolic interactionism, for example, through Stan Cohen’s (1972) analysis of mods and rockers and the ‘moral panic’ that followed. Cohen (1972) theorised that youth as folk devils were the creation of distinguishable social types and their collective behaviour led to the subsequent reactions of ‘moral panic’ by organised systems of social control. He was particularly interested in the media’s treatment of young people, creating stigma and condemnation, and consequently enforcing the boundary between deviance and
normality (Moore, 2005). Similarly, Willis (1990:14) argues that schemes such as youth training and apprenticeships that attempt to assist and normalise transition are in turn offering identities and meanings that are ‘restricted, applied and focused’.

Such theoretical perspectives appeared in policy documents. The Scarman Report (1982) subsequent to the Brixton disorders in 1981 identified two causes of the disorder – the oppressive policing; particularly harassment of young blacks in Brixton and most tellingly, Scarman (1982) saw the riots as a protest against society by people deeply frustrated and deprived who sought to bring their grievances to the attention of the public. The report formed a detailed investigation into social conditions, particularly those of young people in Brixton, citing ‘insecure social and economic conditions, an impoverished environment and rejection by society’ (1982:11) as contributing factors to the riots.

Hebdige (1979:19) also in the CCCS tradition furthered this thesis by exploring style and the ‘heroic rhetoric of resistance’ associated with particular subcultures. He has referred to this as a ‘symbolic violation of the social order’ (1979:19), where subcultural style is represented as ‘noise’ that challenges the hegemony and the inevitability of class and gender stereotypes. Subcultural authenticity is found in the extent to which these subcultures take place outside the gaze of control and power (McRobbie, 2003) yet Hebdige (1979) claimed that the dominant culture attempts to appropriate the ‘spectacular subculture’, in order to incorporate these ‘resistances’ into its framework of meanings in two ways. First, the pillaging and mass (re)production of subcultural signs, and second, labelling and repositioning of deviant behaviour as ‘other’ by structural / institutional forces. Subcultures, however, have represented a challenge to the mainstream and provided young people with a means to assert their individuality.

The CCCS also emphasised the role of the media in creating ‘extended mythologies of youth’ (Hall and Jefferson, 1976) and aimed to counter mass media accounts which focussed on the spectacular aspects of young people (Epstein, 1998). The media was seen as both integral to the ‘othering’ of youth subcultures, and as exploitative by diffusing subcultural style into mainstream fashion leading to paradoxical treatment of subcultures as both ‘celebrated and ridiculed’ (Hebdige, 1979:95).
Hall and Jefferson (1976:15) claimed ‘youth culture’ as a term, smothered the complexities of young people’s lives. More specifically they argued it paints them as ‘incipiently classless’, defining them in terms of leisure consumption, and ignoring the dialectic between the production and consumption of youth cultures involving youth and commercial markets whilst disguising and repressing the differences between and within youth. The CCCS promoted the concept of subculture, however, as more sympathetic to the processes which formed them, and presented subcultures not as an independent class of their own, but as products of social and institutional forces within society at the time.

The work of the CCCS defined the field of youth cultural studies and recognised the importance of leisure in the formation of identity, and, therefore, remains an important influence on the ways in which young people’s lives are theorised and understood today. Indeed subcultures provide space for young people to experience social reality away from the adult world and subcultural theory explored how young people collectively and symbolically react to particular social positions. Therefore, for some, it has continued to be conceptually important. The CCCS approach to subcultural theory has, however, received criticism, discussed in the section below.

2.3 Beyond subculture?

The criticisms of CCCS are predominantly responding to it’s over simplistic (Marchart, 2003) and rigid approach to theorising the lives and subcultures of young people around class concerns. It overlooks young people’s agency in constructing their own lives and forming individualised identities. Its limited subcultural definition of youth as an age; a stage in life, does not allow for an understanding of youth as an ideological state which involves negotiating both the constraints, and opportunities in contemporary society (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004). The CCCS assumptions and representations of youth have been widely contested, primarily for its generalisations of post war youth cultures as predominantly working class, and for its masculinist bias (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). Whilst they acknowledged the value of studying the societal indicators of youth subcultures, Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) have criticised its failure to consider the responses to youth culture on a local scale, how everyday spaces are important in the interpretation of music and style, and in the
consumption of culture. Identity is reappropriated, affirmed and demonstrated through the use of space; however the CCCS approach is more firmly centred around structural influences on young people’s lives and has often been discussed as pre-Foucauldian in its analysis of social control (Cohen, 1997).

More generally, Thornton (1995) rejected the CCCS definition of subculture due to its mistreatment of the media, positioning it in opposition to subculture and challenges CCCS claims that the media exploited and othered youth, arguing the media is a vital tool in authentication of youth cultural practices. Similarly, for McRobbie (1993) subcultural theory is flawed through the romanticised claims about the dissolution of youth subculture from the outside. She labelled this representation of pure subculture versus the contaminated world as ‘false and idealised’ (1993:411), but argued that subcultures retain an ideology of authentic through the development of subcultural capital. Synonymous with the approach of Pierre Bourdieu (Fowler, 1997), cultural capital is a form of power within the field of cultural production as individuals acquire, reinvest and maintain social status (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). Through her investigations into the power relations and hierarchies operating within youth clubbing cultures Thornton (1995) develops Bourdieu’s thesis, defining subcultural capital as the ‘social logic’ of youth, based on the differentiating and comparing of themselves by youths in pursuit of distinction.

The criticism of subcultural theory for its limited scope and preoccupation with class concerns combined with increasing fragmentation of youth style since 1980s has led to the emergence of post-subcultural theory (Redhead, 1990), further developed by Muggleton (1997; 2000). The rationale for cultural analysis has transcended purely class considerations to accommodate reflection upon meanings around notions of gender, sexuality, race and identity (McRobbie, 1993). Investigations have evolved to discover how young people express themselves in different cultural venues, and how new identities and lifestyles are formed.

2.4 Post-subcultural theory: youth theory rethought

Whilst there were earlier references to post-subcultures by writers such as Chambers (1987), the challenge to CCCS was most instrumental through the works of Maffesoli
Bourdieu (1984) and Butler (1990) and was typified by a shift to the study of micro narratives and accounts of everyday life (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). Although arguably a focus on the micro narratives has led to neglect of a macro-political perspective (Marchart, 2003), post-subcultural theory attempted to address more accurately the conditions of contemporary youth.

The use of homologies to decode the meanings of subcultural styles extended analysis from class based perspectives into understanding the cultural elements of subcultures (Epstein, 1998). Post-subcultural studies rejected the structuralist dimensions of subcultural studies, focusing instead upon the ways in which young lives are shaped around consumption and leisure choices. Rutherford (1997) has attributed these changes to new work and leisure conditions such as the decentralisation of the work site, flexibility of working hours and short term contracts.

Post-subcultural theory often presented itself in part as being a set of theories for examining young people’s experiences of postmodernity. Muggleton (1997) discussed this shift in theoretical perspective in relation to the evolution of the analysis of style from the ‘spectacular’ depth model presented by Hebdige (1979) to postmodern saturation of style, images and signs which travel and intensify, becoming blurred and detached from their original cultural contexts. The implications of the postmodern fragmentation for youth are the weakening of subcultural divisions, and the fluidity in expression of taste and identity (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004).

Consequently, in Redhead’s (1990) critiques of youth and pop he points to the need to readdress the theorisation of youth pop cultures, again rejecting the model of modernity applied in subcultural theory, particularly the notion of ‘authentic’ subcultures. Rather subcultures are hybrids of authenticity (Marchart, 2003), as mass media has made it impossible for ‘pure’ subcultural innovation to occur due to commodification and diffusion into the mass market, resulting in stylistic heterogeneity (Muggleton, 1997). Muggleton (1997) has drawn upon Baudrillard (1983) in defence of postmodernism, and rejected claims of a contamination of the authentic and reasoning that if everything is comprised of signs and representations, and is ‘hyper-real’, then these are only taking on qualities of the real as simulacra.
Therefore, post-subcultural youths move freely from one style to another, no longer have any sense of ‘authenticity’ instead they ‘revel in choice’ (1997:198).

After the ‘homogeneity’ of the CCCS approach, post-subcultural theory has been praised for its interpretation of individual voices (Wood, 2003) whilst concurrently critiqued by theorists (Giddens, 1991; Chaney, 1996; Miles, 2000; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003) who have moved beyond the use of the ‘subcultural’ term in conceptualisation of contemporary youth. In particular, post-subcultural studies have been criticised for the choice of subject within research, McRobbie (2000), for example, pointed to the absence of female narratives in post-subcultural theory, accounted for through the notion of ‘bedroom’ culture but lacking any external spatial presence. In addition, an inclination towards the study of culturally affluent individuals has been criticised for ignoring the lives of less advantaged people and for the outright dismissal of class significance in young people’s lives (Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006).

Both ‘subcultural’ and ‘post-subcultural’ approaches have documented young lives as inherently complex and burdened as the crux of the condition of youth. The CCCS laid the foundations for vast areas of research advancing the concept of subculture, and allowing subsequent researchers to challenge and reinvestigate the nature of youth lives, applying new approaches and adapting to the changing experiences of young people. Post-subcultural approaches contextualised youth experience and scaled down to a focus on the geographies of the everyday. Critiques of post-subcultures have suggested, however, that these experiences must still be interpreted through the socio-temporal contexts in which young people’s lives are rooted (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003) and, therefore, others have considered how young people’s lives are constructed in response to the socio temporal conditions and contexts of late modernity. The next section will discuss this type of theorisation of youth by considering two contrasting approaches to understanding youth life strategies based on notions of individualisation and theoretical discussions of tribes. Both of these theoretical approaches, however, have been associated with the discourse of risk.
2.5 Youth and risk: individualisation and tribes

The concept of risk has become fundamental to understanding the way in which young people organise their worlds. Youth life strategies of individualisation and tribes which attempt to capture relations between individual experiences and the socio temporal context are often located in the discourse of risk. Contemporary society is framed by an underlying need ‘to protect us from ourselves’ (Furedi, 1997:4), as a concern with safety and a heightened sense of danger enters every sphere of social life. The concept of risk has become fundamental to the way in which social actors organise the world (Giddens, 1991) and young people themselves have been framed as ‘risky’ (Mitchell et al., 2004). According to Bunton et al. (2004) young people are experiencing risk as a two way phenomena; as both unwilling receivers in uncertain times whilst concurrently seeking and celebrating risk laden experiences through various leisure pursuits.

This is not, however, universally experienced; Furlong and Cartmel (2007), point to inequalities in the exposure to risks, for example, Geldens and Bourke (2008) claim young people’s negotiation of risk is dependent upon socio-geoeconomic location and Bunton et al. (2004) argue negotiation of risk is gender specific. Whilst old demarcators are less significant, gendered discourses of risk are highly visible within youth leisure discourses, where boys are consistently presented as risk takers (Stephen and Squires, 2003; Cranshaw, 2004), and conversely girls are conveyed as risky through lack of control. The power relations between the genders become obviously unequal. Male youth express choice over risky behaviour, whilst girls are imbued with the notion of risk, due to an apparent lack of bodily control (Bunton et al., 2004).

Emerging from these complex risk discourses is a move away from the problematic conceptualisation of risk, to a more holistic and reflexive understanding of how everyday risk is negotiated. Bunton et al. (2004) suggest youth attitudes to risk expressed during everyday life are part of broader strategies to deal with risk within contemporary society. These coping strategies are expressed within social theory via two contrasting schools of thought on the socialisation and life strategies of young people as a result of late modern conditions. The first school of thought stresses the
prioritisation of the self through ‘individualism’ and the second emphasises clustering as ‘tribus’.

Beck (1992) conjured the notion of a society based upon ‘reflexive modernisation’ and individualisation is part of the dissolution of traditional boundaries. The concept of agency has developed through recognition of the empowered individual, and certainly gaining agency is inherently bound within the definition of youth and more prominently observed within contemporary youth generations (Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). Beck’s (1992) conception of individualisation recognises the emergence of new individual situations and biographies which have been conditioned, liberated and exposed. The individual is ‘the centre of action’ who must make decisions and life choices, where once these were ascribed (Beck, 1992).

‘With detraditionalization and the creation of global media networks, the biography is increasingly removed from its direct spheres of contact and opened up across the boundaries of countries and experts for a long distance morality which puts the individual in the position of potentially having to take a continual stand. At the same moment he or she sinks into insignificance, he or she is elevated to the apparent throne of a world shaper’ (Beck, 1992:137).

In their studies of punk subculturalists, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) observed young people maintained a resistance to group identities because of the connotations with conformity and instead sought the authenticity that is supposedly attributed to individuality. Individualism is, therefore, presented through concerns over the self, but not necessarily as a response to a set of contemporary social conditions. Thus, the decline of traditional categorisations such as a class, gender and race has created space for the expression of individual, rather than collective difference. Beck (1992) would offer caution against this claim, arguing class and family connections have not disappeared, but become diminished as choices over lifestyle and identity instead become central to ego formation. These lifestyle choices according to Giddens (1991) are linked to the promotion of individualism through commodification processes which increase the level of choice available and feed the consumers individual wants.
Theorists such as Furlong and Cartmel (2007) refute the claim that class is no longer shaping young people’s lives, branding late modernity an epistemological fallacy and criticise both Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) for their heavy focus on individualisation. The epistemological fallacy lies in intensification of risk and uncertainty in late modern lives, leaving individuals to negotiate a set of structural conditions independently, despite the continuing value of human interdependence (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Whilst some have claimed that there is an absence altogether of organic links between individuals (Furedi, 1997) others have argued that young people are developing new forms of solidarity, for example, through tribes.

Therefore, in contrast, the second school of thought argues that risk coping strategies are linked to ‘tribus’. Maffesoli (1996) characterises contemporary social lives by a concern with conformity as a consequence of collectivist tendencies. His post-structuralist approach identifies ‘neo-tribes’ as part of everyday life, and claims the cohesive aspect of social sharing can be found in various forms at the heart of various social experiences. These ‘villages within the city’ (Maffesoli, 1996:42) can have no goal or purpose other than congregation, and proxemics explains this instinctive need to form a collective body and indulge in mutual aid as a response to mass culture.

For Maffesoli (1996), the uniformity of mass media, globalisation and homogenisation of culture have led to the formation of these localised groups labelled as tribes due to the sharing of rituals, customs, ‘habitus’, and puissance which transcends individual trajectories. Instead, masses diffract into tribes and tribes coalesce into masses through shared emotion, and sociality is demonstrated through the roles an individual adopts according to the changing values of the tribe. This ‘organic sense of solidarity’ (Maffesoli, 1996:13) has been drawn upon in ‘clubcultural’ studies, where nightclub interactions are depicted as micro-structurings of neo-tribes. Northcote (2006), however, faults this judgment arguing that these clubbing tribes are ephemeral, and many participants on reaching their twenties will abandon their tribe and conform to the responsibilities that come with adulthood.

In keeping with the post-subcultural approach discussed earlier, neo-tribes or ‘transitory tribes’, are characterised by fluidity, and visual expression of style and appearance (Malbon, 1998). As a concept, however, ‘tribus’ is criticised for its
position as an oppositional culture to contemporary consumerism and the concept of individualisation (St John, 2003). Maffesoli (1996) claims that there are many examples of tribal development in everyday life, however, the everyday spaces he refers to are those of the megalopolis; urbanscapes. He refers to these collectives as a ‘unicity’, with disregard for the social and cultural formations of those within other landscapes and locales.

So here we have two distinct readings of the social and youth in late modernism; the narrative of the individual who faces risk and uncertainty alongside increased agency compared to a narrative which argues that youth is typified by the emergence of new forms of sociality, as ephemeral groupings. Both capture some but not all of youth experience, and this chapter has explored how identity and lifestyle offers a more all encompassing approach. The social construction of youth discussed in Chapter 1 showed how the very essence of the term ‘transition’ is arguably ill-equipped to encompass the complexities that characterise these contrasting youth experiences. In addition, changing structural conditions, of class, race, age and gender roles, fluidity between work and non work and the effects of globalisation, have further reshaped the state of youth and their place within society.

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the relationship between individualised experiences and these new forms of sociality, this chapter will move on to explore the theorisation of youth through the concepts of identity and lifestyle. Both are heavily implicated by theoretical and empirical researchers as the foundation for understanding youth experiences in rapidly changing social conditions (see Miles, 2000; Chaney, 2000).

Discussions of lifestyle and identity are of course connected to subcultural and post-subcultural approaches as Miles (2000) and Chaney (1996) have illustrated, however, these concepts are not adequate enough to capture the experience of youth in contemporary society. Bennett (2005) claims, the subcultural term is inherently bound up with ascribed class, race or gender determined characteristics of youth, whereas lifestyle and identity theories acknowledges these are reflexively developed. Lifestyles, occupy a more neutral ground acting as a broader term accounting for a variety of youth experiences (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). As Chaney (1996) aptly observes,
lifestyles are inherently more inclusive than subcultures, many would not consider themselves part of a subculture, anyone, however, can have a lifestyle.

The concepts of leisure, lifestyle and identity will form the focus for the remainder of the chapter, and indeed the proposed programme of research. Youth is a fluid concept, and must account for the diversity occurring between individual experiences. Overall, however, as this section has shown, the subcultural approaches have limitations when attempting to frame young lives in a rapidly changing contemporary context, whilst some post-subcultural approaches have been critiqued for overlooking the influence of the socio temporal context. In addition, individualisation and tribus concepts have not entirely captured the forms of contemporary youth lives and cultures. This leads to an investigation, in the next section, of the role of identity, lifestyle and later, in Chapter 3, the use of space for leisure in youth. The next section will continue this line of thought, first, introducing the concept of changing modes of identity before looking more broadly at the interplay of identity with lifestyles and spaces of youth.

2.6 Contemporary conceptualisations: youth identity

Through an exploration of identity and lifestyle this section argues that uniting the social construction of youth with late modern conditions can be addressed by the adoption of these terms to account for the variance in the experiences of contemporary youth.

Contemporary youth embodies multiple identities (Muggleton, 1997), and in keeping with this, identity theory has been vast and varied in approach including theories surrounding processes of commodification, personalisation, fragmentation or unification (Giddens, 1991). This is not without justification as Lyon (1999) proclaims the rise of identity as the source of meaning and the crucible of culture and Erikson (1968) claims forming identity is one of the central tasks of youth.

Originally introduced by Erikson (1968), social identity theory has been widely applied to rationalise the relationship between identity and society based upon an understanding of the psychological reality of social groups and the social identity that is derived from group membership. The advocation of this approach also stems from its strong separation from ‘individualism’ through two conceptual features. First,
within social identity theory, self definition and identity is conceptualised as lying on a continuum running from solely individual to solely group formed, (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). Second, this theory recognises related sets of social categories such as gender, race, nationality, within groups act to inform social identities, and, therefore, the adoption of different strategies for membership of different groups (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). Social identity theory maintains that young people constitute society through their membership to various groups, therefore, theorising a complex relationship between youth and society.

In Bennett’s (2005) discussions of ‘postmodern’ identities, he identifies three key schools of thought surrounding the processes of identity formation, namely the disintegrated self, the liquid self and third space identities. The first emphasises the disintegration of the self as fragmented and disconnected and is presented as a pessimistic view of the effect of postmodernism on the individual. This decentred subject is explored by Côté and Allahar (1994) who draw on Erikson’s (1968) social identity theory to understand how youths negotiate the problems associated with forming a viable adult identity. Erikson (1968:13) suggests ‘youth after youth will be bewildered by the incapacity to assume a role forced on him by inexolerable standardisation of American adolescence’, however, by layering the internal processes of identity formation over the macro sociological perspectives, a greater understanding of these struggles of youth can be achieved (Côté and Allahar, 1994). The emphasis of this perspective remains on the struggle faced by youth in the establishment of stable identities in what is considered a period of uncertainty (Bennett, 2005; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007).

The second school of thought, surrounding late modern identities is centred around the ‘liquid self’ and the liberating effects of contemporary conditions on the individual. Here the subject is increasingly free of structural ties and presented with choice and empowerment. Identities from this perspective become closely associated with how individuals negotiate cultural changes in production, consumption and symbolic signification (Featherstone, 1991).

Through this discourse, contemporary identities are liquid in nature, and characterised by connections between neoliberalism and the self as ‘unfixed’ (Bauman, 2005).
Consumer choice or even saturation, has led to the expression of identities through certain tribal affiliations, and the acquisition of cultural capital. Chaney (1996) argues, however, that these personal and social identities have become destabilised and ambiguous in a culture of mass consumerism. In his analysis of contemporary identity formation, he comments upon the difficulties of negotiating between the public and private spheres of life (Chaney, 1996). His approach recognises the subject as empowered, but simultaneously challenged by the range of responses and different codes of expression required as a result of increased opportunity and access to new spaces. Chaney’s (1996) argument that ‘lifestyles’ work by negotiating the balance between these spheres and are thus more appropriate than subcultures for conceptualising contemporary youth identities, will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.7 below.

The third school of thought considers identity formation to occupy the ‘third space’, as neither rigidly bound, nor fluid and empowered (Bennett, 2005). This approach allows for negotiation and adjustment of previous categories and influences on identity, and for fluidity in meaning and practice of ‘subculturalists’ (McRobbie, 1993). Youth identities emerge here as part of wider lifestyle projects, some of which are based on subcultures, but which are adjusted or maintained according to dynamic relations and perceptions in society.

Discussions around youth identities are seldom presented without a consideration of the constraints and controls in the formation and experience of identity roles in terms of their location as neither adult nor child, and the differences experienced between genders. As argued in Chapter 1, society maintains a hierarchical relationship between the poles of childhood and adulthood in which young people operate in a middle space. Valentine (2000) observes ambiguity between competing definitions, of childhood which is conceptualised in terms of dependency and structure, and adulthood representing a time of individualised activities and independent access into social and cultural life. Youth identities are, therefore, often understood through the process of taking up ‘discursively constructed subject positions – as ‘adult’, ‘child’, ‘masculine’, ‘feminine’ and so on’ (Valentine, 2000:265).
Young people negotiate the narrative of the self in complex ways and theoretical discussions of identity, constraints and experience have also been advanced through debates over gender. The identities of women, and young women in particular, remains a key area of research on youth leisure and lifestyles. Whilst some claim processes of individualisation have ‘freed’ women from gendered expectations of motherhood and homemaking (Rutherford, 1997), others argue young people are still conditioned to accept traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity which are presented to them in exaggerated forms (Côté and Allahar, 1994).

McRobbie (1993) argues that the changes experienced are indicative of ‘changing modes of femininity’ giving greater uncertainty about what it is to be a woman in a society where the roles are blurred, and identities have become detached from their traditional gender positions. In her analysis of teen magazines, she elicits a ‘new vocabulary of femininity’, where girls are forming their own identities and express their well-being independently of boys (McRobbie, 1993:416). Kearney’s (1998) studies of radical female subculturalists draw upon the work of Michael de Certeau, identifying separatism as a tactic of the disenfranchised, a strategy for the newly empowered based upon a collective identity. Riot grrrls as they are termed, act in direct opposition to mainstream culture aware that gender is ‘big business’ (Côté and Allahar, 1994) and that the media can exploit and commodify marginalised cultures (Kearney, 1998).

The detailed studies of leisure and identity are discussed more fully in Chapter 3, the wider discussions of identity presented above show, however, how identity theories have understood the meanings attributed to the construction of identity and the fluidity of identity practice for contemporary youth. Consequently, the analysis of identity must display sensitivity towards the variation in experiences of constraints to youth identity formation. Social identity theory has highlighted the importance of social interaction in the determination of identity and, therefore, the multitude of identities adopted by young people who operate in diverse social settings.

Lifestyle perspectives are often a key dimension in understanding identity. Therefore, the next section examines how lifestyles have been used in many discussions of youth
to explain the relationship between individual experience and the socio temporal context.

2.7 Youth and lifestyle

Lifestyle represents an effective conceptualising tool to understand the intricacies of young people's lives by offering a constructive ‘reflexive’ conceptualisation of the roles of leisure and space (Miles, 2000). A lifestyle study is differentiated from previous theorisations of social and cultural life by focussing on the consumption of identity tools as opposed to the production of identities through predetermined class and social categories such as race, gender and sexuality. As Hollands (2002), however, points out, lifestyles account for a diversity of youth cultural forms and are, therefore, at least ‘contoured’ by social divisions.

The significance of the concept of lifestyles for contemporary youth culture is found in its ability to capture how social actors understand themselves both as individual and unique entities, and as part of emergent types of networks, based in new structures of social identification (Chaney, 1996). In essence, lifestyles are a response to the expanded choice in late modern society and this choice becomes increasingly important in the constitution of self identity and daily activity (Giddens, 1991). Lifestyles are organised around habits and rituals, and practices which concur with the type of lifestyle to which one has ascribed. Fluid and unrestrained, they allow for the movement of individuals through different spaces and locales (Chaney, 1996).

For Chaney (1996), lifestyles develop through a process of design as ‘aesthetic projects’. They depend upon cultural forms, places, styles and goods, and the acquisition of cultural capital, however, it is the ways in which people use these resources, or how they consume them that is of interest to Chaney (1996), not how these were acquired, or the conditions through which they were produced. As such lifestyles offer an umbrella term encompassing patterns of consumption, cultural codes, distinction and taste (Tomlinson et al., 2005) which in turn provide tools for the formation of identity.

Lifestyles as ‘patterns of action’ (Tomlinson, 1990) allow individuals to express wider feelings and attitudes about the world around them. The lifestyle debate presented in
this section suggests that lifestyles seem to be underpinned by a conceptualisation of identity formation in ‘the third space’ as neither rigidly bound, nor fluid and empowered (Bennett, 2005). This approach allows for negotiation and adjustment of previous categories and influences on identity, whilst responding to the increasing choice available to young people. Lifestyles become a medium for the expression of identities, and as such are informed and moulded through the collection of experiences, attitudes and objects. Through the employment of multiple identities, young people are continually adapting and reshaping their expressions of lifestyles which are spatially and temporally subjective.

From a lifestyle perspective youth is presented as highly receptive to changes in fashion, popular culture and technology (Langman, 1992), and are, therefore, heavily involved members of consumer society (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Through the discussions of identity and lifestyle above, it is clear that young people consume objects, spaces and experiences as part of a process of distinction. Lifestyle theorists have, therefore, predominantly focussed on the collective identities formed around consumerism (e.g. Featherstone, 1991; Chaney, 1996), importantly, however, theorists have also considered lifestyle and identity of youth through the consumption of leisure.

2.8 Consumption and youth leisure lifestyles

Within contemporary Western societies leisure experiences have become increasingly associated with a stylisation of everyday life reflecting a general expansion of the cultural sphere in wider society (Featherstone, 1991). This is especially apparent within youth cultures, where status appears to motivate the consumption of goods and experiences, and as Shields (1992:16) comments; ‘consumption for adornment, expression and group solidarity become not merely the means to a lifestyle but the enactment of lifestyle’. Direct links have been made between postmodernism and consumer culture (Lyon, 1999), and the latter has moved from being previously classified as peripheral and feminine to a now central occupation within cultural and social studies (Featherstone, 1991).

Within contemporary youth, visual styles are considered central to the establishment of identity and the shaping of lifestyles (Miles et al., 1998) where products and goods are
still given meaning and status, as social indicators of belonging or difference (Bourdieu, 1984). The consumption of particular products, leisure and fashions can also operate as lifestyle indicators about an individual’s social position. Young people have been observed to construct ‘otherness’ identifying or differentiating themselves from those who share or do not share similar cultural affiliations and leisure lifestyles. Similarly, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) point to the ‘UK chav phenomenon’ where links to lower working classes are signified through particular brand choices and visual appearances. Young people use particular clothing to signify belonging, thus as Baudrillard (1983) argues, it goes beyond commodities being consumed, as they become signs.

Consumer lifestyles have emerged over the last thirty years where new self images could be bought and improved upon, ‘fully fashioned and changed as easily as clothes’ (Cohen, 1997:293). This ‘lifestyle shopping’ is characterised by a fusion of two spatial practices, between leisure and consumption to form a new spatiality, a site of cultural change, and social experimentation, ‘a theatre of everyday life’ (Shields, 1992:7). Thus leisure and space become central to youth identity formation and a conceptual relationship between the spheres of leisure, lifestyle and consumerism is often formed.

Crouch and Tomlinson (1994) conceptualise youth culture as a self-generated form of leisure ‘with people significantly making their own culture, and so too contributes to the construction of their own identities’. For young people, therefore, leisure operates as a social space, where both self and group identities are constructed independently of the family, and where different lifestyles can be tried and exchanged (Hendry et al., 1993). Consumption of various youth cultural leisure practices have been recognised by commentators as important tools for the articulation of lifestyles.

Academic research has recognised, for example, the consumption of music in youth. Connell and Gibson (2003) discuss how music is consumed as both a commodity and a culture whilst others have shown young people distinguish themselves from others through the consumption of particular music tastes, or attendance at particular clubs (Thornton, 1995). Market research has revealed the importance of night-time activities. 59% of 15 – 29 year olds regularly go to pubs and bars, followed in popularity by
going to the cinema and going to discos and nightclubs (Mintel, 2000) whilst half of 15-19 yr olds claim to regularly go to rock concerts (Mintel, 2007).

Sport participation amongst young people has also received considerable attention as some argue that sport is becoming less popular in youth. For example, market research claims 23% of 15-29 year olds cite sport as a regular leisure activity (Mintel, 2000) and there is evidence to suggest that participation in leisure involving sport and physical activity falls dramatically for young males and females between the ages of 16 and 24 years old (Department for Culture Media and Sport and Strategy Unit, 2002). In 1987, The General Household survey recorded 80% of 16-19 year olds had participated in some form of sport, game or physical activity in the 4 weeks before interview (excluding walking), this had reduced to 72% by 2002 (Office for National Statistics, 2004). Mintel (2002) data also suggests the appeal of sporting activities as part of leisure lifestyles appears to decline with age with 53% of 13-14 yr olds claiming sport is a part of their social life compared to only 39% of 17 year olds.

Recent polling research suggests, however, that young people are more inclined to participate in sport in their own leisure time than 8 years ago and young people link keeping fit to being healthy (MORI, 2003). Some writers have argued that young people’s under participation in sports and physical activity has been overstated and the issues surrounding daily physical activity, oversimplified (Smith et al., 2004). Roberts (2006), for example, claims it is not lack of sport participation that characterises youth lifestyles, but instead inactive use of free time in general. Smith et al. (2004) claim that young people are active; but through participation in lifestyle activities as part of friendship groups or other informal networks characterised by fluid, individual, recreational groups which have not been captured by research.

As well as more formal, or adult led activities, youth leisure tends to be dominated by more casual, peer based activities (Hendry et al., 2002) and a strong theme emerging through some of the literature (e.g. Davis and Ridge, 1997; Travlou, 2003; Valentine, 2004) is the often implicit criticism of the young for the involvement in casual leisure activities, notably ‘hanging around’. The involvement of young people in these activities can be attributed to their quest for pleasure and their desire to express self agency through their choice of leisure pursuits (Willis, 1990; Hendry et al., 2002).
Roberts (2006) would argue that as young people’s leisure becomes more commercialised, these pursuits are becoming less significant for contemporary youth yet research has shown the continuing importance of these activities, and particularly their association with ‘asbomania’ (Moulds, 2008).

Young people are, however, increasingly using consumption as part of these leisure lifestyles, and as Hollands (2002) argues, exploring hybrid symbolic and lifestyle aspects of consumption are crucial for understanding contemporary youth cultures. Chapter 4 considers how consumption lifestyles are developed through active lifestyle sports of which mountain biking is one. More generally, however, the discussion so far has not addressed how as part of these lifestyles young people also form relationships with space. Therefore, as Hollands (2002) continues; whilst consumption and lifestyle have been conceptually linked, the notion of lifestyle spaces is less well explored. The attempts to understand the interaction between space, lifestyle and identity are examined in the next chapter.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has summarised and critiqued theoretical standpoints on the lives of youth, presenting and challenging key theoretical tools in an effort to understand how the discussion of youth leisure has evolved from subculture to lifestyle. In approaching the sociology of youth, researchers have applied varied techniques and widely contested frameworks of analysis. This chapter has demonstrated a division between the studies of transition and studies of subculture where although subcultural studies acknowledge the notion of transition they tend to argue it is not a sufficiently complex concept to capture the nature of changing youth experiences, lifestyles and identities (see Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995; Miles, 2000; Northcote, 2006).

Within cultural studies, criticism over the dominant portrayal of youth as excluded, as risk taking and as ‘other’ is frequently asserted, as well as a criticism of a tendency to universalise what it is to be young, where experiences remain so varied (Miles, 2000; Valentine, 2000). Thus, subculture as a term becomes replaced with neo-tribes and post-subcultures; twisted and reworked to address narratives of individualisation which have given young people more freedom to dip in and out of social groups. In addition,
the influence of class and family background, whilst still seen as important (Evans, 2002), are dampened through the expression of identity through a new authority of consumerism (Keat et al., 1994).

Many of the sociological accounts of subcultures and post-subcultures discussed have adopted an insider approach to the study of youth (see Thornton, 1995; Muggleton, 1997; Malbon, 1998; Muggleton, 2000; Bennett, 2005) although with little reflection on the disadvantages of this (Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006), demonstrating the ease at which adults may presume to know or feel an affinity with the young. In addition, post-subculturalists are criticised for giving a ‘distorted and incomplete view’ (Shildrick and Macdonald, 2006:128) and by concentrating on two ends of the spectrum with extreme cultural expressions at one end and conceptions of ‘disadvantaged’ youth at the other, arguably creating yet another ‘moral panic’ over a so called lost generation. Others argue, by contrast, that young people are at the forefront of cultural production, of expressions of style and of forming identities and lifestyles, whose problems are not just restricted to the sphere of youth but are conducive to the whole of contemporary society (Miles, 2000).

Therefore, this chapter has shown the limitations of these various perspectives on youth. Yet in order to move beyond critiques of transition, subculture and post-subculture, the chapter has then argued that lifestyle and identity provide important and effective conceptual tools which can bind late modern social theories and theories of youth together. The thesis adopts lifestyle and identity as approaches to understanding youth which recognise the importance of both group affiliations and of individual choice. This allows for reflexivity, resituating youth into a less structured framework in which the temporal and spatial variation of the relations between self and society can be identified and understood.

These themes of identity and lifestyle will then be taken forward, in order to evolve the understanding of youth within the context of leisure spaces. The synthesis of lifestyle and identity has been developed in some areas by writings about consumption, however, another key area is the research on leisure spaces of youth. Miles (2000) criticises research into lifestyles for their failure to capture the essence of youth, and in taking a narrow focus on the spaces of youth, whilst leaving others untouched. This
thesis responds by including countryside or non built-up spaces not distinctively associated with youth, but yet which hold symbolic meaning and a capacity for engagement in a social and cultural critique of the relationship between individuals and space. Leisure and youth cultures are becoming increasingly important in theorisations of youth identity (Shields, 1992; Thornton, 1995; Malbon, 1998; Bennett, 2005; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007), leisure spaces, therefore, become a key area of exploration for a more thorough understanding of identity and lifestyle practices in youth. The next chapter, therefore, will build upon these theorisations through a review of youth culture and identity theorised through their relationships with space.
Chapter 3  The spaces of youth lifestyles and identities

3.1  Spatialising youth leisure
The experiences of leisure within youth are not homogeneous and the subjectivity of space is constructed by individuals and situated within their own social and structural contexts (Bourdieu, 1984). ‘...people construct their own symbols of their environment through the positioning of those spaces in cultural practice’ (Crouch and Tomlinson, 1994:310) and as is argued in this chapter, the spaces of lifestyles are crucial to understandings of youth leisure identities.

‘...the physicality of where leisure happens in Late Modernity is very real; it contributes to the cultural identity of distinctive leisure practices: people’s geographical knowledge is significantly local. The cultural meaning of local places is constituted through everyday leisure practices in a way that resonates with other sources of meaning and identity, not least those of advertising and other more global signs. Place is both real and metaphorical; literal and symbolic: place is experienced in leisure as flaneurie, but that also as de Certeau\(^1\) argued, celebrated, material and very real’ (Crouch and Tomlinson, 1994:317)

This chapter reveals the interconnections between identity, lifestyle and leisure space by exploring the territories through which youth lifestyles and identities have been theorised and expressed. This chapter begins by reviewing the geographies of youth and then differentiates between youth leisure spaces according to the ways they have been theorised within the literature as either urban, rural or countryside. The

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significance of this division of space was discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.5), and is reviewed again in the concluding section of this chapter (3.9).

Section 3.2 introduces debates within rural and youth geographies, and provides the foundations of the sections which follow by introducing the ‘place’ of geographies of young people and leisure. It illustrates the difference in spatial experience for young people, and grounds the rest of the discussions within a framework which recognises the construction of spaces and selves the way young people ‘see it’ (Matthews and Limb, 1999).

The section which follows (3.3) reviews the way in which young people’s lifestyles and identities have been attached to particular leisure spaces beginning with the construction of lifestyles in local, home and neighbourhood spaces. Youth leisure research has often been considered in a largely urban context and, therefore, section 3.4 reviews the research which links youth leisure and urban consumption spaces and indeed the contributions these have made to understandings of youth lifestyle, space and identity. This leads to a review of literature within the rural context in section 3.5, which although brief, uncovers some common themes with writings on urban spaces which characterise the youth leisure experience.

In section 3.6, the chapter turns to discuss the theorisation of youth leisure in the countryside. The barriers to accessing the countryside in youth have emerged as a central component of the research and, therefore, section 3.6 traces this research, first to determine the extent and scope of research, and second to understand the conceptual underpinnings of research in this area, and the contributions to debates on youth leisure, identity and lifestyle. It then continues into section 3.7 uncovering key theorisations around young people’s experiences of leisure conflict in countryside spaces. Section 3.8 explores how the countryside has been linked to leisure lifestyles through adventurous outdoor recreation. The chapter concludes by considering how rural and countryside spaces have been theorised through their use by young people, critiquing the way in which these theories have been applied to the study of youth leisure.
3.2 The geographies of youth

There is little contributed to the place of youth within geographical debates and the sociospatial relationships developed by young people is a neglected area of cultural, social geography (Matthews and Limb, 1999). As James (1990) has claimed, despite new prominence given to critical and feminist writings contributing to a retheorisation of debates over inequality within contemporary cultural geography, young people and children have been ‘hidden’ from geography as well as from other disciplines. Nevertheless, commentaries on children’s understandings of space have not been entirely absent (see McKendrick, 2000). Previous work originates within disciplines of environmental and developmental psychology (e.g. Hart, 1979; Spencer et al., 1989; Matthews, 1992) and James’ (1990) comments sparked a debate over both the representation of children within geography and the methodological and ethical issues of conducting research with children (see James, 1990; Sibley, 1991; Winchester, 1991) centred on the recognition of children’s realities as a valid set of experiences, capable of contributing to contemporary cultural geographical discourse (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). Any social and cultural geography of young people as opposed to children has, however, been exiguous.

According to Jenks (2005) childhood is characterised by a separation from adulthood and this is no less apparent in their situation in social space. For young people, however, their place within both ‘lived’ and theoretical space remains far more blurred. As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, young people are conceptually bound between adulthood and childhood and within many discussions, both ‘children’ and ‘young people’ have been used as parallel terms despite the vast multiplicity of difference in experiences both within and between them. With the exception of a few (Skelton and Valentine 1998; Leyshon, 2002a; Nairn et al., 2003; Weller, 2006), geographical literature has only partially addressed the problematic conceptual categorisation of young people. Weller (2006) claimed this has led in part, to a failure to provide an adequate theorisation of young people, casting them as the neglected ‘other’ within children’s geographies.

Early geographies of youth culture have been criticised as limited and depthless, for focussing on the practices and everyday experience of space and the spatial oppression
of young people without further exploration of the relationship between social space and shared lifestyles (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). Such geographical theorisation of young people is not entirely absent (see Skelton, 2000; Aitken, 2001; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), there are, however, recurrent calls for the separation of youth from children’s geographies (Weller, 2006) and criticism over the construction of the ‘unitary public child’ (Philo, 2000). Geographical research has made only limited attempts to address the geographies of young people, in their own right.

Nevertheless, whilst limited in scope, and theoretically problematic in the conceptual positioning of young people, geographical research has revealed some important and distinct relations between leisure, space and youth. For example, research has identified the marked differences in the use of public space between young people and that of adults or children. Spencer et al. (1989), for example, have drawn attention to young people’s use of bus shelters for self display and multiple social activities exclusive of actually waiting for a bus. Holt and Griffin (2005) described processes of ‘othering’ which occur in use of leisure spaces, where young people operated subtle coding systems to distinguish between locals (or townies), and students leisure spaces and essentially construct leisure spaces as classed. These ‘alternative scripts’ (Spencer et al., 1989) played out by young people illustrate how places can become important for adopting and expressing identity and maintaining solidarity with others with a similar lifestyle, particularly those who according to Hetherington (1998) as ‘youths’ are living outside the conventions of society. Despite some investigation of young people’s use of space, there is little geographical understanding of the role space plays in youth identity formation (Leyshon, 2008). The next section will, however, explore the issues that have been addressed as part of the theorisation of youth in space.

3.3 The lifestyle spaces of youth

Bennett (2000:64) observes that ‘through their lifestyles, late modern individuals exhibit a continued ‘tiedness’ to local spaces in which they live out their everyday lives’. Youth leisure lifestyles emerge as a trajectory extending from the home to the neighbourhood and further afield. In childhood the home is constructed as safe and the locality as threatening (Valentine, 1996b), for young people, however, the home is experienced paradoxically as public space subject to adult surveillance and the street as
private and autonomous space. These issues are exemplified in studies which have indicated an age related expansion of the environmental range used by children and young people (Van Vliet, 1983; Matthews, 1992). Young people continue to show the highest participation in out of home leisure compared to other age groups (Roberts, 2006). Theorists have acknowledged the role of public space in local neighbourhoods as part of many different youth leisure lifestyles originating from Whyte’s (1993) street corner society which explored how young men’s social worlds were lived out on the streets of a Boston Italian slum.

Hanging around is constructed as a conventional youth leisure activity, yet public street space has sometimes been presented as a leisure space for marginalised youth whose geographical location, ethnicity, gender or feelings of disenfranchisement may restrict individuals to leisure in the spaces of their homes, neighbourhoods and immediate locales (Macdonald, 1997; Watt and Stenson, 1998; Hollands, 2002; Macdonald and Shildrick, 2007). Travlou (2003) argues that young people are seemingly invisible within the ‘fourth environment’, identified as public spaces beyond home, school and playground, and only allowed to access ‘token spaces’ such as the street, yet are demonised by society for this colonisation.

Macdonald and Shildrick (2007) found young people’s use of local street spaces was often a response to an inability to finance other leisure activities, although this was not necessarily a negative experience, instead representing an important informal leisure space for creating and maintaining identities. In her study of teenage girls in a low income Welsh community, Skelton (2000) told of the importance of street and public space for forming friendships and building social networks away from the limits of the home.

Thus marginal spaces, particularly on the street have become recognised as important social venues for young people, affording the opportunity to exercise some autonomy over space, away from the adult gaze (Hil and Bessant, 1999; Matthews et al., 2000b; Valentine, 2004). Lieberg (1995), for example, has claimed the types of public spaces teenagers are attracted to have particular physical and spatial qualities. Youth, unlike adults have little access to backstage space, spaces to withdraw to; therefore, Lieberg (1995) has argued, they seek qualities deemed undesirable by adults in their choice of
public space. These ‘fourth environments’ (Van Vliet, 1983) have become a key area of research for those who argue that young people’s lives are restricted to marginal spaces, and are frequently associated with the spaces from which they are excluded (Lieberg, 1995). Some theorists have considered occupation of these marginal spaces as central to the experience of youth (Lieberg, 1995; Valentine et al., 1998).

Hanging around and other street based informal leisure is often a contested experience for young people performed in what theorists have termed ‘tyrannical spaces’ (Percy-Smith and Matthews, 2001). ‘Hanging around’ is heavily implicated with the notion of disrupting the order of public space (Davis and Ridge, 1997; Roberts, 1997; Hendry et al., 2002; Valentine, 2004). Macdonald and Shildrick (2007:343) have claimed young people are ‘complained about, surveyed, moved on and dispersed’ by adults, and demonised as illegitimate users of public space. In addition, young people are threatened by the presence of other youth groups and fearful of neighbourhood bullying in both local and wider public space (Percy-Smith and Matthews, 2001; Travlou, 2004).

Whilst many of these studies of ‘the street’ have focussed on local environments, these are predominantly urban local environments (e.g. Lieberg, 1995; Malone and Hasluck, 1998; Percy-Smith and Matthews, 2001; Travlou, 2004). In addition, lifestyle and identity studies in other leisure sites outside the regulatory spaces of the school or home have also focused on the urban locale. The next section then examines the way in which lifestyle and identity are understood in these urban contexts for two reasons. First, to show the dominance of urban based literatures in the study of youth leisure, identity and lifestyle. Second is that literature on urban use of leisure spaces identifies a number of key issues concerning the interaction between lifestyle, identity and space that need to also be considered in a countryside context.

3.4 Urban youth leisure spaces

As outlined in Chapter 1, for the large part, children and youth geographies have been urban geographies (Matthews et al., 2000a; McCormack, 2002; Leyshon, 2008). For young people, urban spaces have been constructed as ‘the’ place to be. Youth culture has become synonymous with urban lifestyles and studies of youth leisure have most
notably focussed on urban areas, particularly through the occupation of car parks, streets, shopping centres and other public spaces (Philo, 2000). For Northcote (2006), urban environments represent an opportunity for those young people seeking to carve out new adult identities, to ‘get out’ and leave behind the limitations and dependency of childhood. These ‘urban playscapes’ (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002:95) provide the setting for extensive ethnographic and empirical studies of youth identities within social leisure research.

Lieberg (1995:736) has identified young people use urban space to learn, to display, and to take control within two distinct spatial zones; ‘backstage’ places of retreat and ‘on stage’ places of interaction. Spaces both on stage and backstage assume a cultural importance over and above their functional form and become youth territories loaded with their own symbolic meanings. It is through this ‘creative symbolic work’ that city spaces become meaningful in the formation of identities and the performance and expression of different lifestyle choices (Lieberg, 1995).

Urban environments embody contemporary popular culture, and youth orientated lifestyles through the emphasis on symbolic consumption of cultural goods, and the stylisation of life. Featherstone (1991) has tackled city cultures and postmodern lifestyles synonymously, assuming cities as prime cultural centres in Western contemporary society. In this case cities have been theorised as the primary location for consumption and production of cultural capital, particularly in relation to youth culture. For youth, city life has:

‘...a superficial and adventitious character; it tends to complicate social relationships and to produce new and divergent individual types. It introduces, at the same time, an element of chance and adventure which adds to the stimulus of city life and gives it, for young and fresh nerves, a peculiar attractiveness’ (Park, 1997:32).

Chatterton and Hollands (2003:21) have presented strong evidence which documents the growth of these new urban ‘landscapes of consumption’ with young people valued through their role as lifestyle based consumers (Miles, 2000). The consumption of
cultural goods and the display of cultural capital within urban public life have inspired key commentaries on youth cultural consumption of music, clubbing and dancing in urban night spaces (see McRobbie, 1993; Thornton, 1995; Hetherington, 1996; Malbon, 1999; Northcote, 2006). Although Thornton (1995) has claimed youth ‘club cultures’ often go unnoticed, youth urban nightspace have become an area of intense ethnographic and empirical investigation.

Nightclubbing has been described as the ‘urban rite of passage’ (Northcote, 2006:1) marking a new kind of freedom for young people to explore adult activities and open up new forms of identity. Thornton (1995) has claimed the key issue with night spaces is that they facilitate the meeting of likeminded young people who share similar lifestyles, cultural tastes and preferences and express this through shared spatial and social behaviours. Although it has been argued that an older audience does participate in nightlife (Goulding and Shankar, 2002), these spaces are dominated by young people and are associated with mainstream, residual or alternative lifestyles within the cultural understanding of youth (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Crucially, however, writings on night spaces have focused on the leisure experience of young people over 16 or 18 years of age missing the younger youth group identified as part of the focus of this thesis in Chapter 1.

In addition to night spaces, theorists have turned their attention to the ‘shared’ stage of the shopping mall to investigate the lifestyles and identities of young people. Commercial space replicates and reconstructs the type of symbolic work that young people use in creating meaning and identity for themselves (Lieberg, 1995) and these environments represent key spaces for the negotiation and adjustment of youth identities beyond the realms of the home and the school (Bennett, 2005). The importance of the ‘presentation of the self’ (Featherstone, 1991:97) has encouraged young people to creatively define their social identity and lifestyles through their use and consumption of leisure spaces as a symbolic resource (Willis, 1990). The importance of malls for ‘hanging around’ has highlighted how consumption symbols and spaces are central to the normative production of identities, particularly for young females (Thomas, 2005), providing the opportunity for the display of capital in a
leisure environment that re-appropriates these style meanings carrying them through the range of goods, products and accessible lifestyles you can ‘buy into’.

These studies of particular spaces underpin general claims that the experience of urban environments in youth is negotiated ‘as an intensity of experience and risk’ (Jenks, 2005:84), and contemporary debates have theorised these urban and youth encounters as a binary composition of the postmodern city as both a ‘landscape of consumption’ (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003:21), and a ‘landscape of exclusion’ (Sibley, 1995:1). Cohen (2000:318) argued this has formed a dual city phenomenon where young people are paradoxically construed as both urban degenerates and as ‘the sexy signs of urban vitality and cosmopolitanism associated with the cultural industries that have increasingly come to dominate strategies of urban regeneration in these areas’. Thus for young people, leisure performances in urban space may involve the thrill of challenging boundaries, gaining critical review from the dominant culture and negotiation of their marginal role. Alongside these notions of thrill and excitement, however, sit readings of how youth lifestyles reflect urban risk, conflict and control (Malone, 2001).

Young people, it has been claimed, have been designed out of city centres subjected to heavy surveillance and normalisation of moving on powers with the objective of reducing the visible presence of particular groups in particular public places and reinforcing the exclusion of young people as ‘non-members of the community’ (White, 1993:90). Eubanks Owens (2002), for example, has commented upon the marginalisation of youth skateboarders from public space in the US, where skateboarding has been effectively constructed as a crime by laws prohibiting the sport in public space (also see Borden, 2001; Travlou, 2003). For Valentine et al. (1998), these types of conflicts represent young people’s problematic identity within society and the failure to consult young people on the way in which space is produced. Young people’s ‘polluting presence’ (Matthews et al., 2000b:63) is challenged by these wider social processes of polarisation and targeting of powerless groups (Valentine, 2001).

According to Malone and Hasluck (1998) young people’s leisure spaces have become increasingly commercialised. Matthews et al. (2000c) have conceptualised the mall according to three spatial themes as teenage hangout, zone of conflict and cultural
boundary zone highlighting the tensions that lie between youth lifestyle space in the public realm. For young people, particularly affluent teenagers, urban consumption space welcomes them as a growing market (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), and consumption of goods is linked to style choice, self identity and group belonging (Miles et al., 1998) but access is denied to those who are unable to afford the cost of entry or obey the constructed rules of social conduct (White, 1993).

For young people, identity construction is a major component of being a youth (Willis, 1990), and their emergent identities require informal space of their own to assert themselves (Hall et al., 1999). Thus, Valentine (2001) has claimed an essential feature of these youth identities is the distance created between themselves and others, which in turn will become etched onto spaces from which they may be accepted or excluded. Leisure space often becomes a battleground for the conflict between the traditional concepts of community held by adults and new youth formations which are perceived by adults as ‘risky’ (Foreman, 2004). Young people are accused of privatising public space through a type of informal control and the creation of youth territories (Matthews et al., 2000b), whilst adults similarly restrict access to space through the patrolling of security guards and the designing out of undesirable groups (White, 1993).

Youth leisure, therefore, has been theorised through the use of public space, night spaces, and consumption spaces all within a broader urban context. The literature has shown how activities such as hanging around or night clubbing are performed by young people as part of identity and lifestyle. Importantly the literature has also shown how leisure spaces whether legitimate, casual, marginal or contested are invested with cultural values (Sibley, 1995), both in the regulation and control of space by adults and by the young people who live their lives through them.

Youth urban encounters have emerged as the most heavily theorised youth cultural environment and the spatial type most associated with projects of identity and lifestyle. These readings have suggested that any study of youth leisure must consider spatial conflict, control and exclusion, and as discussed in the following section, these issues have also been considered in rural locations, however, with the exception of a few studies (Burgess, 1995; Bell et al., 2003; Ward Thompson et al., 2006), young
people’s use of green open spaces and rural environments has been given less attention than urban space (Valentine et al., 1998; McCormack, 2002).

The countryside is often posed in opposition to the city (Countryside Agency, 2005) and consequently, loses out to the appeal of bright lights, multiple leisure opportunities and commercial entertainment through criticisms over a lack of appropriate facilities. Rural youths are claimed to value ‘urbanness’ (Nairn et al., 2003) and research within urban leisure studies has cited several pull factors which attract young people to the city whereas studies of rural communities have often revealed young people feel ‘trapped’ (Halfacree, 2004). Rural communities are considered by some young people as insular and unwelcoming, and as spatially and socially remote where past research of urban youth has uncovered expressions of sympathy for their rural peers for being ‘out of it’ (Countryside Agency, 2005).

There is little research, however, which has challenged the primacy of urban spaces for the exploration of youth identity and lifestyle, or has tackled the role of countryside leisure activities for young people’s identities and lifestyles. This chapter now turns its attention to investigating how theorists have understood young people’s leisure connections as part of identity and lifestyle, first through their experiences of living in rural space, and second through their experiences of accessing spaces in the countryside for leisure.

3.5 Rural youth leisure spaces
A significant strand of research which has addressed young people in rural contexts is found within rural geographies as an emerging sensitivity to the geographies of ‘others’ (Philo, 1992; Milbourne, 2000). Halfacree (2004) has claimed rural geographies of youth have contributed to making young people visible, and have highlighted the differentiated experiences of young people in rural areas. There are distinctions, however, between young people who grow up living in rural areas, and young people who choose to visit rural or countryside spaces for leisure, with rural geographies contributing to the former area of research. Panelli (2002:121) has observed, the value of contemporary rural youth research lies within the fields of ‘migration, development, gender, ethnicity, education, economic restructuring,
regional planning and policy’ but rural youth geographies have also hinted at the theoretical importance of rural leisure spaces for youth identities and lifestyles, most notably through a special issue of the Journal of Rural Studies (2002).

In this special issue, Jones’ (2002) paper discussed how particular leisure spaces were used by young people who live in rural areas as a cultural boundary and a marker of social identity between groups of young people in rural towns. In McCormack’s (2002) study of children in New Zealand, participation in recreational activities in rural areas was considered paramount in the representations they formed about rurality. By contrast, Lægran (2002) examined how young people living in rural areas in Norway used both rural internet cafés and petrol stations in different ways to adults or children. These venues provided spaces to construct their lifestyles, although crucially it was the urban appeal of the cafés, and the freedom offered by the car which appealed to the young people as opposed to a rural quality of the space.

Similar to urban settings, rural youth leisure often involves a reliance on public spaces for hanging around and socialising and geographers have investigated these places beyond the school and the home essentially forming a ‘rural geography of the outdoors’ (Matthews et al., 2000a:142). A lack of entertainment or designated leisure spaces in rural areas means public spaces are often the only spaces in which young people can perform their lifestyles and carve out identities (Davis and Ridge, 1997; Skelton, 2000). In Rye’s (2006) study of rural youth in Norway, images of the rural were reproduced by young people as both ‘rural idyll’ and ‘rural dull’; as two independent dimensions of young people’s experience of rurality. Similarly, Davis and Ridge (1997) classified the perceptions of rural youths as either ‘rural bliss’ or ‘urban bliss’. Studies of youth and public space have attempted to disrupt the notion of the rural idyll in young people’s lives arguing this rural childhood myth perpetuates a misconstrued notion of freedom (Tucker and Matthews, 2000), safety (Valentine, 1997) and a closeness with nature (Jones, 1997; Nairn et al., 2003). In reality, as Matthews et al.(2000a) have revealed, young people living in rural areas feel restricted and excluded from countryside spaces of fields and woodlands (also see Davis and Ridge, 1997; Smith and Barker, 2001) and observed, censored and merely tolerated in their use of rural public space.
Also reflecting studies of urban youth leisure (e.g. White, 1993; Eubank Owens 2001; Malone, 2001; Eubanks Owens, 2002), Tucker and Matthews (2000) have conceptualised young people’s relationships with rural leisure spaces through conflict, between adults who invigilate and control these spaces and between rival youth groups, manifested as a sense of ownership over particular leisure spaces. For Jones (2002), hanging around in public space in a rural Welsh town was perceived by adults as deviant and disordered behaviour, symbolising a particular cultural identity which threatened traditional community life. Thus young people who live in rural areas have been constructed as a threat to the rural idyll and their relationships with rural environments have been conceptualised in terms of socio-spatial processes of exclusion, marginalisation and tension (see Davis and Ridge, 1997; Tucker and Matthews, 2000, 2001; Hendry et al., 2002; Leyshon, 2002b; Glendinning et al., 2003; Nairn et al., 2003; Leyshon, 2008).

Despite these writings on control, conflict and exclusion in rural leisure spaces and the revised agenda of rural studies to give a voice to ‘other’ geographies of rural life (Cloke and Little, 1997; Davis and Ridge, 1997), the broader construction of youth identities and lifestyles in countryside leisure space remains poorly understood. Research has focused on how young people grow up in rural spaces and become embedded in the social structure of rural places (e.g. Davis and Ridge, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000a; Jones, 2002; Leyshon, 2008). There is insufficient attention within these studies and indeed within wider geographical discourse to recognise how young people construct the countryside as a space for leisure and recreation, as Crouch (1997:189) has contended ‘leisure is often ‘othered’ in the cultural debate about the countryside’ but is an important component of rural geographical knowledge.

In addition, much of the research has concentrated on rural childhoods (e.g. Jones, 1997; Valentine, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000a) rather than rural youth and furthermore young people involved in countryside recreation are not necessarily ‘rural youths’. Those who participate in leisure in rural or countryside space may not become involved in the social structure of rural places, but rather live their leisure lifestyles in rural or countryside areas and construct these spaces as part of a wider leisure
landscape. Writers have investigated the use of countryside space for leisure in youth, but rarely as part of rural geographies.

The geographical literature on rural youth leisure, like the literature on urban spaces, has stressed the need to consider control, conflict and exclusion as well as the form of leisure practice such as hanging around or other ‘deviancies’. There is, however, a distinct dimension to writing on youth leisure and the countryside which also considers the significance of these processes in countryside or non built-up environments which is considered in the next section after a discussion of youth leisure in the countryside in general.

3.6 Youth leisure and countryside space

For young people, accessing countryside space for leisure has been considered by policy organisations to be beneficial to physical health, psychological health, development of self identity, social, community and educational development (Tabbush and O’Brien, 2003; O’Brien, 2005a). Indeed, a number of writers have recognised the opportunity for recreation and well being afforded by ‘natural’ environments, emerging as a discourse which links the benefits of contact with the countryside and health and wellbeing in youth (Kong, 2000; Kahn and Kellert, 2002; Bingley and Milligan, 2004; Cooper, 2005; Louv, 2005). Although many young people also recognise the physical and psychological benefits of countryside recreation, there is, however, a disparity in transferring this into an understanding of the motivations to consume (Mulder et al., 2005).

The lack of youth presence in countryside space has not only led to the development of policy strategies for promoting youth engagement (Countryside Agency, 2005; Ward Thompson et al., 2006; O’Brien and Weldon, 2007) but also several political and theoretical attempts to explain the factors preventing engagement with the countryside for leisure. Thus, perhaps the most significant body of research which has recognised the countryside as a space for leisure is focussed on the barriers and constraints to experiencing the countryside in youth. It is useful to engage with this research on young people’s attitudes to leisure in the countryside to develop a broad understanding
of youth construction of the countryside as a space for leisure, and how this is constrained.

Research into constraints to participation has been primarily a North American debate (Ravenscroft and Curry, 2004) where recognised barriers are generally physical or psychological, however, often these are closely related and remain difficult to disentangle. Physical barriers for young people include costs involved, travel difficulties (Roker and Richardson, 2003; Countryside Agency, 2005) and time pressures (Ravenscroft and Curry, 2004). Psychological barriers to the involvement of young people include lack of interest (Roker and Richardson, 2003) and negative perceptions of the countryside (Countryside Agency, 2005). These are discussed in more detail below.

Mulder et al., (2005) studied the influences on young people’s demand for the countryside in Hampshire based on the four determinants of demand: price of commodity, income of potential user, availability and price of substitutes and consumer tastes and preferences previously determined by Gratton and Taylor (2000). Results from this quantitative study showed young people’s participation rates for parks and urban green spaces were significantly higher than those for country parks and nature reserves reasoning that more visits to parks and urban spaces were associated with their plentiful supply, no need for transport and limited time sacrifice needed for visits (Mulder et al., 2005). Whilst Mulder et al. (2005) have claimed transport is not the most important barrier to youth participation in the countryside, mobility constraints can limit leisure opportunities for young people, and many have argued lack of transport represents one of the most significant barriers to young people’s connection with the countryside (Roker and Richardson, 2003; Community Heritage Initiative, 2004; Countryside Agency, 2005).

Youth is a time for exercising autonomy, and a dependency on adults to access leisure activities is undesirable for many (Davis and Ridge, 1997). This may detract from the benefits of the space as a social context for developing identity and negotiating independence if reliance on parents or other adults is continued (Hendry et al., 1993; McMeeking and Purkayastha, 1995). Indeed enjoyment of the countryside is not universally experienced, not all young people feel compelled to spend time in the
countryside, many are detached and have little interest in what the countryside could offer, possibly reflecting wider social attitudes where over a third of the population of Great Britain have claimed that visiting the countryside plays no part of their leisure lifestyle (Slee et al., 2001).

The Diversity Review found young people’s construction of the countryside for leisure was largely dependent on previous engagement with these spaces (Countryside Agency, 2005). Those with little or no engagement expressed negative attitudes towards it, whilst those with more regular experience expressed a more positive understanding. A significant number of countryside users reporting frequent visits to the countryside as a child also suggested that those places visited as a child affected preferences to types of green spaces and frequency of visits in later life (English Nature, 2004; Ward Thompson et al., 2004; Mulder et al., 2005).

According to this particular contention, recent opinion has even suggested we write off today’s generation of young people as ‘a lost cohort’ where ‘there may be limited success in trying to engage a group that have been largely disaffected and unconnected from outdoor recreation’ (Henley Centre, 2005:125). This is based upon the assumption that childhood experiences of outdoor recreation are a positive and even an exclusive influencing factor and indicator of future use. Other studies have suggested the influence of childhood engagements with nature can also be dampened and acquire negative connotations through significant parental anxiety, or negative myths, stories and media reports (Burgess, 1995; Bingley and Milligan, 2004). Thus motivations for use or non use of the countryside remain multifaceted and complex.

In their Diversity Review, the Countryside Agency (2005) observed that many of the under-represented groups (black and ethnic minority communities, disabled people, low income groups, inner city inhabitants) shared similar representations of the countryside, however, what differentiated young people from the groups was the attitudes formed towards these representations. According to the Countryside Agency (2005) Diversity Review the main factors restricting use of the countryside amongst young people were their tastes and preferences, with some expressing a distinct distaste towards it (Henley Centre, 2005). Young people exhibited ‘by far’ the most negative associations with the countryside than any of the other groups claiming it
lacked interest or excitement with ‘nothing for young people to do’ (Countryside Agency, 2005:3).

Contextualised within wider leisure lifestyles, previous research found countryside recreation to be the least favourite amongst young people when compared with other leisure activities such as watching television or going to the cinema (Mulder et al., 2005). Within this study, an average of 25% of respondents found the countryside boring, 29% stated that there is nothing to do when you get there, 41% don’t like getting rained on and 32% don’t like getting their footwear dirty (Mulder et al., 2005:123). Other research has claimed heritage activities are often perceived as ‘adult activities’ (Roker and Richardson, 2003) and of little leisure interest to young people. Thus the research discussed so far has framed the countryside as an important leisure space for health and wellbeing, yet focussed largely on the non participation of young people as opposed to an attempt to understand the experiences of those who do engage.

Within this literature on young people and the countryside is a specific focus on nature and the role it plays in young people’s countryside leisure experience and this is distinctive compared to writing on urban leisure spaces. Eubanks Owens (1988) study of teenagers in California reported 70% of participants valued outdoor places as somewhere they could experience nature. In addition, many studies have largely focussed on those of school age (e.g. under 16) or younger children on the premise that experience of nature in childhood has significant effects on the use and understanding of countryside space in later life (Macnaghten et al., 1998; Kong, 2000; Ward Thompson et al., 2004). The way in which people interact with and attach meaning to natural environments has been described as both a dynamic and multifaceted phenomena (Urry and Macnaghten, 1998; Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999).

Naess (1989) has argued that we have basic intuitions about the value of nature and that our biological heritage allows us to delight in the intricate living diversity of nature. As Porteous (1996) has noted, however, a universal love of nature and ‘delight’ in its beauty are subjectively acknowledged feelings and cannot be applied ubiquitously. Macnaghten and Urry (2001) studied the recreational uses of trees and woodlands and discussed how Asian youth’s expressed little appreciation of nature in the raw, but saw it as a means to experience adventure sports claiming more generally
that ‘what was important rarely related to the intrinsic character of the outdoor spaces themselves, but rather to the human experiences and social relationships that such spaces afford’ (Macnaghten and Urry, 2001:170).

Results from Kaplan and Kaplan’s (2002) study of visual preference for landscapes, for example, strongly suggested that adolescents have lower preference for natural settings and strongest for certain kinds of developed areas, claiming that Western youth leisure experience is more focused upon self and peers, than the composition of the physical environment and place and so appreciation of a natural setting becomes relatively insignificant. Cater (2007) has illustrated this in his discussion of the complex and contradictory role of nature in the consumption of bungee jumping in New Zealand. Although he has claimed nature and landscape aesthetics remain an integral part of the experience, they operate as a backdrop, as passive, the participant removed from any meaningful engagement with ‘the setting’. Similarly Burgess’ (1995) research with teenage girls revealed little about their appreciation of woodlands rather the trees were appreciated as a backdrop for social activities, and as a place to engage in social interaction. Other research revealed teenage girls’ participation in countryside activities is significantly lower than that of teenage boys (Ward Thompson et al., 2004).

The countryside, therefore, is not considered an appropriate leisure space for many young people. Some have explained a lack of participation is due to the image of the countryside as distinctly untrendy and socially unacceptable among peers (Bell et al., 2003; Countryside Agency, 2005) assuming a simplistic understanding of youth leisure lifestyles. Yet contrary to these findings, there is evidence to suggest that there are some young people who choose to access the countryside for leisure. For example, within The Diversity Review, it was claimed that whilst young people who had little or no experience of the countryside were negative about it, young people who did access the countryside were positive about the recreational opportunities the space affords (Countryside Agency, 2005).

Adventurous activities in countryside leisure settings have been enjoyed by many young people, particularly boys, as a leisure choice and as a central reference for cultural identity formation (Pederson, 2003). Indeed, historically, young people have
accessed countryside spaces for activities such as surfing (see Booth, 2003) or kayaking (see Watters, 2003) as part of their expression of lifestyle, and this continues to be important. The paradox then lies in young people’s expression of negative views about the countryside, yet some young people are involved in both new (and older) forms of lifestyle consumption and attaching symbolic meanings to countryside space.

Young people access the space of the countryside as part of a wider bricolage of leisure and social spaces and the marginal nature of the countryside (Shields, 1991) may allow some young people to perform identities, negotiate social relationships and exercise empowerment and ownership away from the youth masses and the adult gaze (Bell et al., 2003). The presence of young people in countryside spaces can often go unnoticed, especially where access is gained through alternative routes and activities are performed in different time spaces to more traditional countryside use. For example, Bell et al.’s (2003) research revealed young people access the countryside at night time, or choose secluded areas so as to maintain invisibility from other users. Young people can become almost lost, away from the gaze of adults in robust and absorbent landscapes, and express their autonomy in legitimate behaviours but which could often be considered unacceptable in other leisure environments (Bell et al., 2003). As such these findings highlight Valentine’s (2008:38) claim ‘the difference that place makes’ in the acceptability of what may be deemed ‘risky’ youth leisure behaviour in countryside settings. Thus the countryside represents a space where some young people can construct their lifestyles and their selves, and where the setting opens up possibilities for the inscribing of their own cultural values and meanings. The existing research has suggested, however, that motivations for using countryside leisure spaces are complex and need considering in the context of constraints. In addition, the influence of nature or the countryside as part of leisure spaces may be of some significance to young people but often as a backdrop.

3.7 Countryside leisure, youth and conflict
The discussion above has revealed that young people’s attitudes towards the countryside vary widely and it remains difficult to understand the interaction between motivations and constraints to participation. The appeal of the countryside is not homogeneous or recognised by all young people whilst its use as a leisure space is not
restricted to solely those young people who live in rural areas. Instead the construction of the countryside as a space for leisure is complex and operates in a multitude of ways for different people. Leisure needs and desires also vary among and between people, and what is considered desirable by some is considered a drawback by others.

Consequently, the countryside has been theorised as contested space (Cloke and Little, 1997) where differing leisure requirements often lead to conflict both between leisure activities and wider (countryside) land use. Tensions are most notable between the increased interest in leisure provision and the growing concern for conservation of natural landscapes (Martin and Mason, 1993), however, conflict between user groups within countryside leisure landscapes have also been widely documented. The discussion of young people and countryside leisure has been linked to these debates over contestation and tension that are also prevalent in the writing on urban leisure.

Young people, it has been argued, negotiate encounters with countryside leisure space through a paradox of freedom and control (Bell et al., 2003). Whilst some young people may experience some countryside spaces such as woodlands as scary, unknown and dangerous (see Bingley and Milligan, 2007), for others this will add to their enjoyment of the space. Concerns of risk associated with the countryside take multiple forms, political and social stigma along with the media has portrayed some spaces, particularly woodlands as dangerous landscapes (Burgess, 1995), juxtaposed against the discourse of environmental concern. Young people’s relationship with the countryside, as with many other types of leisure spaces is problematised by their relationships with other users, who are both a threat to and are threatened by their presence.

Previous research with young people and countryside recreation has unearthed a desire for a ‘secure wilderness’ experience where a desire for exploration was contested by a concern for safety within woodland space (Ravenscroft et al., 2001:61). Fear over other teenage groups, ‘loitering youths’ and gangs particularly for younger age groups who feel intimidated by the presence and activities of older youth is well documented, particularly with regards to urban fringe woodlands and green spaces (Burgess, 1995; Bell et al., 2003; O’Brien, 2005a; Ward Thompson et al., 2006). Burgess’ (1995) study of urban fringe woodlands revealed a desire for ‘safe dangers’ by young people who
enjoyed the adventurous nature of woodland space, but in an environment where the imagined community would operate informal surveillance and control.

Young people’s use of woodlands, for example, is often perceived as threatening by other user groups (Bell et al., 2003; Ward Thompson et al., 2004) and paradoxically it is then teenagers that may feel as if they are unwelcome. In Tucker and Matthews’ (2000) study, older youth groups believed adults viewed them problematically when they met in groups in rural outdoor environments and feelings of exclusion from countryside space is apparent for young people who express an uncertainty of where they are allowed to be (Mulder et al., 2005).

Young people’s presence may conflict with the ‘tranquillity’ aspects of countryside and it has been claimed that an increase in young people ‘may antagonise those that have sought calm and relaxation in the countryside’ (Henley Centre, 2005:35). Indeed, Bell et al. (2003) have confirmed this by claiming young people challenge the adult hegemony of public space and participate in activities perceived by others as antisocial. Bell et al. (2003) studied the ambiguities in society’s attitudes towards the use (and abuse) of woodlands and public space, contrasting the attitudes of young people and different adult groups. This study identified concepts of tension in three forms: between parents and children over the need to protect; between different youth age groups over the nature of woodland use, for example, younger children expressed a fear of gangs, drinking, drug use and sexual activity associated with older youth groups; and the tensions between adults and children over the use of these spaces (Bell et al., 2003).

Youth leisure in countryside spaces, is affected by processes of conflict, constraint and control yet similar to the findings in urban environment, this will not prevent some young people using the countryside and other localities as key leisure spaces in the construction of lifestyle and identity. As noted in Chapter 2, lifestyles are based on actions to express feelings about the world that are worked into the process of negotiating and changing identity. Existing research on rural and countryside spaces has started to reveal some of the components of youth leisure lifestyles, however, much of the debate over countryside identities and lifestyles is not just about youth but about recreation and lifestyle more generally. The next section, therefore, considers
key issues affecting youth leisure lifestyles in the countryside as part of wider discussions of recreation and leisure lifestyles in the countryside.

3.8 The countryside and leisure lifestyles

Uses of the countryside for leisure are becoming increasingly diverse which some have argued is reflecting a changing social, cultural and environmental agenda in wider society (e.g. Butterfield, 2000; Macnaghten, 2003). The tastes and preferences of youth participants within previous research appear to be significant barrier to the involvement in countryside experiences when set within the context of other leisure lifestyles and spaces that appeal to youth cultures. It has been claimed, for example, that the design for accessible countryside spaces for young people need not match ‘conventional’ ideas about the countryside, but instead embrace modern trends towards lifestyle sports (Tabbush and O’Brien, 2003). The countryside must compete within a heavily filled leisure environment to offer the greater satisfaction and variety in the least amount of time (Roberts, 2006). Thus romanticised versions of traditional outdoor leisure are becoming restructured to the demands of mass market and niche leisure forms. These changes have been understood through complex relationships of power between traditional institutions in the countryside, and new leisure uses particularly new forms of adventure pursuit with the potential to shape new meanings and place identity for countryside leisure locations (Urry, 1995; Cater, 2007).

In response, some have argued that experiences of the environment are expected to change to become more commodified where representations of countryside spaces are elaborated and extended to produce imagined and also commodified geographies of place (Cloke and Perkins, 1998). Encounters with countryside spaces through leisure will, according to Ward Thompson et al. (2006), reflect a ‘growing culture of convenience’, as a packaged and sanitised experience. Ward Thompson et al. (2006) claim commodifying the countryside is potentially the only way to encourage participation in those young people who have never experienced natural environments. These ‘newly commodified rural spaces’ (Cloke, 1993:54) reconstruct rurality, presenting new cultural meanings, and the opportunity for new forms of engagement. For example, through commodification of place, spectacle, embodied experience and memory, Cloke and Perkins (2002) have argued that rural adventure tourism in New
Zealand has become a ‘tourist product’, operating as a sign of distinction and contributing to the formation of cultural identities. Adventure tourism such as canyoning, white water rafting and bungy jumping were popular with young people as part of a ‘designer rurality’ where tourists immerse themselves in nature in fashionable ways (Cloke and Perkins, 2002). Packaging experiences which appeal to youth cultural styles, may act to alter the tastes and preferences of the target audience, which according to Mulder et al. (2005) may be more successful than simply removing generalised barriers to participation.

The opportunity to pursue adventurous activities is one of the reasons young people choose to access the countryside for leisure and these engagements have been theorised in relation to identity and lifestyle. Urry (1995:220) links changes in countryside leisure to the detraditionalisation of social life which has created ‘new sociations’ with people connected through an emotional satisfaction gained from a particular experience or goal. He claims the countryside is one of the locations for these new enthusiasms and sociations, providing a site for experimentation with lifestyle, social identity and empowerment (Urry, 1995). Indeed the recognition that adventure sells (Cater and Smith, 2003), has contributed to a discourse of nature and the countryside as a space for active and adventurous leisure lifestyles. Experiences of adventure have become a key area of research as theorists debate the cultural meanings of these engagements and rework concepts of performativity, flow, embodiment and attitudes to nature through active recreation, particularly in countryside space.

Just as in the literature on youth leisure and the countryside, there have been different views on the significance of nature to lifestyles based on adventurous activities. Some have argued that the relationship between the leisure experience and nature as part of place or context is of less importance (e.g. Burgess, 1995; Cater, 2007), however, for others, the presence of nature is often intrinsic to the authenticity of the experiences, as ‘confronting the wild’ (Becker, 2003; Waitt, 2008). Stebbins (2007:9), for example, specifically cited leisure activities such as mountain biking as ‘nature-challenge’ hobbies where ‘mostly beating nature is thrill enough’. Pigram (1993) has argued that for some recreationists it is the experience of nature that motivates participation and indeed Franklin (2002) has described the most theoretically interesting element of
climbing is the interface between hands and nature. Other writers have commented upon the relationship between nature and adventurous activities particularly through discourses of embodiment (Cater, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Macnaghten, 2003) and risk (Stranger, 1999; Krein, 2007).

Lewis (2001:77), for example, discussed the adventure climber as ‘an embodied self in nature’, one which uses hands to look, and a reliance on kinathesis to orientate the body as it moves through landscape. He described kinathesis as ‘an embodied sense of awareness’ (Lewis, 2001:69) and proclaimed it is most associated with those adventurous experiences which unite body and world. Similarly, Midol and Bryor (1995:208) observed that young people who participate in what they term ‘whizz sports’ are seeking ‘a harmonious fusion with nature’ and Franklin (2003) proclaims it is implicit that embodied activities take place against spectacular (natural) backdrops. Stranger (1999:270) has also contributed to debates over the relationship between nature and adventurous activities making the connection between what he determines as ‘the sublime in nature’ and Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1998) concept of flow. In his discussions of surfing he claims that flow unifies participant and environment and it is this ‘total engagement in psychic capabilities that facilitates the ecstatic union with nature’ (Stranger, 1999:270).

Rohde and Kendle et al., (2004) have argued that active engagement with adventurous recreation in natural settings increases self esteem through empowering the participant with the self control to negotiate their own skills to overcome challenge, combined with a similar sense of risk and uncertainty that is often associated with criminal or antisocial behaviour. This emotional sense of fear and thrill and of pride and accomplishment responds to identity theorisations of the role of freedom of choice and of individualisation and risk in youth identity construction (Becker, 2003). This is linked to claims by policy organisations that the countryside offers a distinct opportunity for the negotiation of identity ‘as young people discover new worlds, and develop new skills, they also discover themselves’ (Countryside Agency, 2005:79).

The countryside has, therefore, become the subject of a theoretical re-imagination as an arena of adventure, for the display and distinction of self (Foley et al., 2003). These activities are often distinct events and are highly organised and commodified. Despite
a growing interest in lifestyle sports, in natural settings, and the political importance of (healthy) youth leisure activities, more regular and often informal consumption of countryside space as part of a leisure lifestyle chosen by young people is rarely recognised by either commentators, or many young people themselves.

Although much of the research which focuses on the use of countryside as leisure space has been hugely influential in contemporary understandings of countryside leisure there is still limited research devoted to understanding perceptions, experience and use of the countryside and the natural environment by young people who choose to access these spaces (Roker and Richardson, 2003; Mulder et al., 2005; Ward Thompson et al., 2006). The older youth group (15-18 years old) is particularly under-represented in the literature compared to younger children, despite this being, according to Travlou (2003), the ‘crucial age’ of teenage leisure experience. In this respect, it can be argued that older youth, particularly those between 15 to 18 years old, experience exclusion from public space, as discussed above, are largely absent from environmental planning (Matthews et al., 2000b; Travlou, 2005), and have also been ignored, until recently from countryside research (Matthews 1995).

The rest of the chapter is devoted to moving beyond current research priorities and the focus on formal adventure based activities to highlight a new agenda for research that considers how countryside spaces used less formally and more regularly can contribute to lifestyle and identity.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how previous research has attempted to explain young people’s relationships within leisure spaces in various settings. By introducing a spatial perspective, the chapter has revealed several themes which are important to the experience of leisure and the negotiation of identity and lifestyle in youth.

The youth leisure literature in a (largely) urban context stressed the importance of local environments and informal spaces to hang around and perform non organised leisure often focussing on the ‘moral panic’ linked to leisure activities such as sedentary ‘hanging around’ (Tucker and Matthews, 2001) or unhealthy alcohol consumption (Valentine et al., 2008). These literatures also recognised the marginalisation of youth
in space and the policing of youth leisure particularly through the performance of these informal street based activities and thus youth leisure has been theorised within the context of conflict and control. Interestingly, these issues also permeated the understanding of the experience of youth leisure in both rural and countryside space.

Rural geographies focussed on similar activities unveiling the marginalisation of young people who live in rural areas and their restriction from particular leisure spaces, whilst countryside leisure literature revealed the experiences of young people who chose to access the countryside for leisure were negotiated though paradoxes of freedom and of control. Young people’s use of countryside space for leisure has often been presented as an investigation of constraints and barriers. Research has revealed barriers to participation in countryside recreation are not exclusive to young people; however, the research discussed in this chapter makes it clear that there may be several physical and psychological obstacles to their involvement in leisure in these spaces. In particular, issues have emerged about the sharing of physical space with other user groups such as adults or younger children (Bell et al., 2003), and also the cultural constructions which young people attached to countryside space as adult, ‘uncool’ (Bell et al., 2003; Countryside Agency, 2005) or though negative media portrayal (Burgess, 1995; Bingley and Milligan, 2004; Ward Thompson et al., 2006).

Consequently, youth engagements with the countryside have often been construed and affected by processes of marginalisation in both the use and planning of environments. Within this, however, discussions of the motivations of young people involved in countryside leisure have revealed opportunities for youth identity and lifestyle formation through the marginal characteristics of the countryside offering space away from adults which they can construct as their own.

Countryside leisure for people of any age can take many forms, as formal / informal, individual / collective, organised or spontaneous activities. The research discussed above, however, is limited, by the choice of research participants and through the types of activities addressed. Youth engagements with the countryside as part of education, or health initiatives have largely been examined through structured recreational experiences. These are explored as a major component of the pedagogical discourse on youth health and the countryside. In addition research on youth and adult involvement
in adventurous activities, whilst providing useful insights into the role of nature in the leisure experience also tends to focus on organised, tourist based, and highly commodified activities.

Studies investigating such structured approaches to countryside recreation provide a useful understanding of the countryside as a hugely beneficial resource for young people through work, education or play, however, countryside recreation is frequently performed as unstructured activities (Haywood et al., 1995). Countryside activities that require formal participation appear to have lower, (often far lower) participation rates than informal or individual activities (Mulder et al., 2005). Furthermore it is argued that unstructured activities offer the greatest opportunity for identity formation in the countryside (Ward Thompson et al., 2006) and within youth leisure more generally (Roberts, 2006).

The methodological constraints of capturing participants involved in informal recreation may explain the limited research in this area. Often, activities may take place unofficially or at unusual times, however, the importance of informal use of outdoor leisure space for young people has been recognised in both rural, countryside and urban settings. Ward Thompson et al., (2006:8) have reflected on the lack of evidence exploring unstructured use of ‘local wild adventure space’ by young people, despite hailing its importance as ‘the principle way through which children and young people engage with nature…’. This is particularly relevant for young people who typically engage in more unstructured, informal activities during their leisure time. Indeed it has been recognised that unstructured, unregulated and low cost leisure activities are important as an autonomous engagement with countryside space (Davis, 2006).

Furthermore, whilst the experience of nature may play a role in youth leisure in the countryside, the experience of nature and countryside space in youth is demonstrably complex, ranging from therapeutic to risky and from a solitary appreciation to socially involving. The literature devoted to understanding young people’s engagements with nature is, however, extremely limited and has concentrated on the voices of the urban (e.g. Kong et al., 1999; Kong, 2000; Countryside Agency, 2005), the socially excluded (e.g. Nichols, 1999; McCormack, 2003) or ethnic minority groups (e.g. Edwards and
Weldon, 2006) leading to a critique of the barriers and constraints to participation, rather than an analysis of the motivations for using countryside space for leisure in youth. Some of the studies, tended to concentrate on youth groups characterised by educational exclusion and unemployment (e.g. O'Brien, 2004), or groups from disadvantaged areas (e.g. Ward Thompson et al., 2006) and, therefore, offer only a partial understanding of youth engagements.

Participants of some research projects may have been recruited through membership of external youth groups (e.g. Ward Thompson et al., 2006) excluding those young people who may participate in countryside activities in less managed ways. Also, the participation discussed in the literature above may be sporadic and disparate framing a specific event rather than a representation of continuous, voluntary participation in countryside activities (e.g. Burgess, 1995; Cloke and Perkins, 1998; Mulder et al., 2005). Much of the research which claimed young people have a distinct distaste for countryside environments, and nature in particular is often based upon the experiences of those involved in infrequent engagements in countryside recreation known as ‘dabblers’ or ‘samplers’ (Keeling, 2006) rather than more committed recreationists. For example, Bell et al.’s (2003), study claimed that children enjoyed visiting woodlands; however, its attraction fades in youth unless they had a specific outdoor interest. There is, however, a lack of responding research which investigates the motivations for youths who do engage with the countryside especially those who participate in regular countryside based activities. This requires further investigation along different axes of engagement, particularly those who immerse themselves in leisure lifestyles and thus leisure space, and who until now have been absent from youth leisure research.

The separation of urban space, rural residential space and countryside leisure space within this chapter has provided a useful way of organising discussions and reflects the division within the literature of young people’s use of urban, rural or countryside locales for leisure. Crucially, youth leisure in all contexts is negotiated around access, regulation, conflict and control and studies in rural areas often replicate findings from urban areas (see Matthews and Limb, 1999; Tucker and Matthews, 2001; Valentine, 2004). The significance in this context, is the leisure potential afforded by the space
based on factors such as privacy, terrain, ownership and social opportunities. What is missing from discussions is the role of non built-up spaces, where natural resources are integral to the opportunities afforded by the leisure space.

Thus we have arrived at a questioning of the premise of urban theorisations of youth leisure, the under theorisation of youth leisure in countryside space and ready to explore these in the next chapter through lifestyle sports. Countryside space refers to those spaces constructed by young people through leisure as countryside, or as natural or as non built-up and the divisions between urban, rural or countryside space become less important as emphasis is instead placed upon the making of place through activity and how this contributes to lifestyle and identity.

‘Particular kinds of leisure significant in the late twentieth century include the making and remaking of space, giving different meanings in terms of social relationships and cultural practices amongst people in different social divisions, affirming identity and reconstructing identity. These environments are less places of detached enjoyment and reflection, but important continual settings of cultural exchange and lived experience; shared practices and identity creation’ (Crouch and Tomlinson, 1994:316).
Chapter 4  Lifestyle sports and youth leisure

4.1 Youth leisure lifestyles
Young people consume leisure as part of wider lifestyle projects, which in turn inform their identities, as Chaney (1996:191) proclaimed ‘life-style is the language of social identity in postmodern culture’. Stebbins (2007:68) has defined lifestyle within the leisure perspective as ‘a distinctive set of shared patterns of tangible behaviour that is organized around a set of coherent interests or social conditions or both, that is explained and justified by a set of related values, attitudes and orientations and that, under certain conditions, becomes the basis for separate, common social identity for its participants’. Leisure becomes a platform and a social context upon young people shape their lifestyles and build their identities, thus it becomes important to explore these ‘shared patterns of behaviour’, and the ‘values, attitudes and orientations’ which characterise youth leisure experiences. This chapter will show how processes of lifestyle and identity are explored through lifestyle sports and presents mountain biking as a case study by which to explore these issues in relation to youth.

The previous chapter illustrated the absence of countryside spaces in the theorisation of youth leisure lifestyles, yet explored the use of these, and other spaces by young people, hinting at the potential for expanding current understandings of cultural leisure practice through adventurous lifestyle sports. This chapter investigates the theorisation of lifestyle sports and youth revealing both interconnections and schisms between these bodies of research and arguing for a more youth centred approach to the theorisation of these activities.

This chapter begins by outlining how lifestyle sports have been addressed within the literature and maps their conceptualisation as alternative, collective and performative sporting forms. In section 4.3 the chapter considers the how the consumption of lifestyle sports has been linked to youth lifestyles and positioned as a youth cultural form. The literature has demonstrated the role of lifestyle sports as a platform for the
expression of youth identity, and indeed the assumed relationship between young people and lifestyle sports, yet this section reveals how the theorisation of the youth experience in these sports has been only partially explored. Section 4.4 then considers how lifestyle sports have been considered ‘in space’, that is how theorists have linked the consumption of various lifestyle sports as part of identity and lifestyle with the politics of the spaces in which they are found.

In light of these discussions of youth and lifestyle sports section 4.5 breaks to consider the issues raised throughout the literature review in relation to the objectives and aims set out in Chapter 1. It reiterates the key issues raised before, in sections 4.6 and 4.7, mountain biking is introduced, theorised and critiqued as a case study for the investigation of youth identities and leisure lifestyles. The chapter closes by reflecting on the role of lifestyle sport literature in the theorisation of youth leisure, and demonstrating the possibilities for exploring the interconnections between youth identity, lifestyle and leisure space through mountain biking.

4.2 Theorising lifestyle sports

Active engagements with adventurous recreation have largely been understood as ‘extreme’, ‘alternative’ or ‘lifestyle’ sports (Tomlinson et al., 2005). These sports are vast and varied, including activities such as snowboarding, mountain biking, BMX, skateboarding and surfing. Debates within sport sociology and leisure studies have framed lifestyle sports in contemporary leisure culture as a mode for conspicuous consumption drawing upon identity, lifestyle, individualisation and commodification concepts to explain participation in particular sporting activities.

Commercialisation and media proliferation of sports that capitalises on the image of lifestyle sports has grabbed the attention of many commentators (Humphreys, 1997; Henio, 2000; Rinehart, 2002; Wheaton and Beal, 2003; Nelson, 2006) where leisure practice is seen as an entrepreneurial engine for new media, fashion and cultural industries (Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003). Lifestyle sports have been theorised as ‘alternative’ from dominant or traditional sports (Wheaton, 2004a) and from mainstream society in general, as BMX rider Downs (2003:149) has claimed ‘our riding separates us from the flat-footed public….we do not have a place in normal
Lifestyle sports such as snowboarding maintain ‘an artistic philosophy which values freedom and self-expression’ (Humphreys, 2003:407). They embody anti-commercial principles and several commentators (e.g. Kiewa, 2002; Beal and Weidman, 2003; Humphreys, 2003) have studied the conflicts between lifestyle sports maintaining their individuality, authenticity and alternative appeal in the wake of commercialisation.

Commentators have argued that lifestyle sports embody an alternative ethos to traditional sports founded upon a more relaxed approach to leisure, privileging individuality over a team orientation (Rinehart, 2002) and participant rather than institutional control (Beal and Weidman, 2003). Similarly, lifestyle sports differ themselves through their attitudes to competition, for example, the inclusion of snowboarding in the Olympic Games, bought opposition to the intensity of competition imposed upon snowboarders (Humphreys, 2003).

Kiewa (2002) explored how climbers develop symbolic behaviour that signifies resistance to mainstream society. Both Kiewa (2002) and Donnelly (2003) have described the division occurring within climbing communities, whereas adventure climbing is self governing and anarchic, sport climbing has emerged as an institutionalised form which has embraced consumerist society violating the alternative roots of the sport.

New individualised forms of lifestyle sports offer a particular kind of ‘desirable’ lifestyle and associated cultural significations to those who consume them (Wheaton, 2000) often associated with an alternative or counter culture. Some have claimed this cultural resistance to mainstream sports has been exaggerated; and theorised lifestyle sports as insular social worlds rather than oppositional (Crosset and Beal, 1997). Commodification of these sports is, however, widely accepted as some have argued that the media are crucial to creating and communicating notions of authenticity amongst lifestyle sport groups (Wheaton and Beal 2003).

Whilst participants are keen to differentiate themselves from other commercialised or mainstream sporting forms, there are more subtle forms of distinction operating within lifestyle sporting practices which distinguish between authentic or inauthentic
identities, strongly associated with commitment. Through windsurfing Wheaton (2003:94) has argued that for the very committed, this leisure consumption is central to their lifestyle status, identity and ‘sense of self’. Indeed, Wheaton (2005) differentiated between the hardcore lifestylers and those that consumed sports as ‘weekend warriors’ or as postmodern ‘flaneur’ and, therefore has claimed that status hierarchies occur between participants in lifestyle sporting contexts.

Crosset and Beal (1997) have claimed the groupings of sporting communities can be understood as social worlds divided into distinct subworlds whose members are linked through shared perspectives, unique activities and knowledge. Building social capital is an integral part of the experience, and relationships are formed through the sharing of sporting ideologies, codes and rituals, which unite participants of a chosen lifestyle. Indeed some (e.g. Wheaton, 2004a; Edensor and Richards, 2007) have applied Maffesoli’s (1996) ‘tribus’ thesis to describe fragmented leisure lifestyle groupings united by particular tastes expressed within a shared site of (leisure) consumption.

Within lifestyle sports literature, theorists have recognised a symbolic value attributed to equipment or kit associated with an individual status within the culture. Wheaton (2003:86), for example, discussed the negative connotations of buying into a lifestyle for newcomers with ‘all the gear and no idea’. Established group members often refute those who attempt to buy their way into a particular lifestyle or who brandish recognised brand names instead of developing a sense of personal style (Beal and Weidman, 2003).

Wheaton (2003) has recognised the importance of visual signs of identity such as clothing and equipment but also those less visible indicators which are often more important to the process of identity constructions. For example, in her studies of windsurfing cultures she claimed ‘lifestyle rituals’ such as checking the weather, or living near to the beach demonstrated the most commitment to the lifestyle (Wheaton, 1997, 2003). Essentially an individual whose lifestyle revolves around the particular activity, who commits time and effort will achieve both higher status within the lifestyle group, but more importantly, will construct the most legitimate lifestyle sport identity (Wheaton, 2000). Kiewa (2002) identified that processes of commercialisation within climbing cultures have led to an increasing reliance and emphasis on symbolic
behaviour to denote boundaries between sub groups in climbing communities. These subtleties were recognised by insiders as the paramount distinction between being a ‘real’ and ‘pretend’ climber.

Lifestyle sports involve the performative expression of identity (Booth, 2003; Howe, 2003) and performances have been theorised as the shaping of both body and space (e.g. Edensor and Richards, 2007). Cater (2007:65) has claimed, for example, that ‘to partake in adventure is basically to act performatively’ where activities are performed through the body rather than via the gaze. For Thrift (2001:50), performativity has moved ‘from the stage to fill all manner of venues’, and increasingly, adventurous lifestyle activities have been conceptualised as performative.

Lifestyle sport literature has then revealed several common themes surrounding the ideologies of those who participate in a broad range of sports such as snowboarding, windsurfing, skateboarding and climbing. Importantly it has set to exploring the identity politics and lifestyle practices of some participants of lifestyle sports. In addition to these more generic understandings, lifestyle sports have been linked, in part, to youth culture.

4.3 Lifestyle sports and youth culture

Mintel (2003) findings reported 15 - 24 years old showed the highest participation in what they term ‘extreme sports’ the most popular being mountain biking, BMX and snowboarding. As discussed above, despite significant media portrayal and commercialisation, lifestyle sports have been considered by many as ‘alternative’, carrying social and cultural meanings particularly among contemporary youth culture as a form of contemporary conspicuous consumption (Wheaton 1997). Lifestyle sports offer aesthetic signs which allow young people to present a meaningful identity recognised by global youth culture. For example, Edensor and Richards (2007) have pointed out the intertextualities between youth cultures and lifestyle sports, which utilise consumer and media cultures for identity construction.

The desire for adventure and fun as part of a leisure lifestyle is most notable in youth groups (Macnaghten et al., 1998), as shown in Chapter 3, adventurous activities represent an important component of the youth leisure experience in the countryside.
Risk is considered an integral feature of many contemporary leisure experiences desired by the ‘new breed of adventure seekers’ and appropriated into a particular set of lifestyle experiences (Palmer, 2004), especially for the young (Nichols, 1999; Bunton et al., 2004; Mitchell, 2004). Ferguson and Todd (2005) have discussed the consumption of adventure tourism by young people as a tool for expressing a particular type of ‘cool’ identity. Lifestyle sports represent a symbolic form of consumption through which young people can express cultural distinctions from adult others (Thorpe, 2004) and experience risk in legitimate ways.

Both lifestyle sports and youth culture place importance on the role of embodied style to distinguish cultural identity and difference and these have often been theorised as a form of resistance to dominant sporting cultures (Kiewa, 2002) and to mainstream youth cultural forms (Hebdige, 1979) respectively. Participants of both may employ particular styles to demonstrate affiliation to or differentiation from lifestyle groupings (see Thorpe, 2004). Rinehart (2007), for example, claimed youth action sport participants assert identities of the out of bounds ‘outsider’ as a form of resistance to normative sport and society and as a disregard to authority. As such many lifestyle sport activities form part of a popular and expanding youth culture.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the expression of particular tastes can create and maintain social distinction amongst youth, and amongst different lifestyle sport groupings. For example, in snowboarding culture Thorpe (2004:37) has argued ‘the embodiment of taste via clothing practice has become a crucial feature of social stratification and identity formation in snowboarding culture’. The presentation of the body and choice of clothing within snowboarding culture is presented as an opposition to the dominance of skiing, indicative of conflicts between two recreational groups; whilst ‘skiing embodied technical discipline and control, snowboarding embodied freedom, hedonism and irresponsibility’ (Humphreys, 1996:9). Henio (2000:176) has claimed that conflicts between skiers and snowboarders are the result of cultural meanings attached to the sports, as she has noted ‘sport is an active battleground for cultural significance and is not immune to issues of social class, domination and resistance, legitimation and race / gender’. Henio (2000) situated the resistance and rebellion of snowboarding within the youth cultural elements of the sport. For some writers, sports
such as skateboarding and snowboarding have been linked to distinct lifestyles and Humphreys (1996:18) has argued they ‘express the critical deviant politics of alternative youth’.

Both lifestyle sports and youth cultures have been theorised as self generated forms of leisure (Crouch and Tomlinson, 1994; Wheaton, 2000) in which participants are active in the construction of culture and identity. Crouch and Tomlinson (1994) observed a sense of collectivity in self-generated styles of leisure where involvement in networks of other like minded individuals is pivotal to participation. Wheaton (2003), for example, has discussed the importance of friendship and social activities for windsurfers, whilst it has also been claimed young people are motivated by the social nature of sporting activities (MORI, 2003). Eubanks Owens (2001:782) has described how skateboarding ‘provides teens a mechanism for challenging themselves and a social setting for time with their peers’.

Lifestyle sport cultures are assumed to be alternative youth cultures (e.g. Humphreys 1997), however, there are several disparities as part of the theorisation of youth within a lifestyle sport context. There is clearly an important youth cultural element in the practice of lifestyle sports yet there is no explicit youth dimension within the literature and few have investigated what it means for young people to participate in these cultures. Youth and rebellion, for example, are often parallel in discussions of lifestyle sports (e.g. Henio, 2000; Edensor and Richards, 2006; Humphreys, 2006) but as Thornton (2003) has contended; whilst sport has been investigated as a form of social and moral regulation, rarely have commentators questioned how youth adopt and appropriate its symbols in resistant or counter hegemonic ways. Instead young people who dress to identify with particular sporting cultures or youth cultural forms become signs of trouble as Thornton (2003:276) has argued ‘the dominant representations though of such embodiment present youth, in particular black, male youth, as menacing and as threats to the social order’.

According to Wheaton (2004a) lifestyle sports share commonalities in their ethos, ideologies and consumption patterns and in particular an emphasis on ‘grass roots’ participation (Tomlinson et al., 2005) assuming a fairly conventional approach to consumption, a model which is easily transposed from one sport to another. Much of
this research focuses on the world of the ‘lifestyler’; by her own admission Wheaton (2004b) has acknowledged that windsurfing is largely inaccessible by public transport and requires considerable economic investment thus the majority of her respondents were between 30 and 40 years old and showed a bias towards the professional classes. In addition the hierarchies of power and authority theorised around gender (Kay and Laberge, 2004; Wheaton, 2004b) or athletic skill (Thornton, 2004) may be experienced differently as part of youth leisure lifestyles as opposed to those of adults.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, young people’s leisure is inherently ‘disordered’ especially when compared to older people; therefore, whilst young people and older ‘lifestylers’ are constructing identities through participation in these activities, they do this in vastly different ways. Only a few studies have explored youth and lifestyle sports (e.g. Eubanks Owens, 2001; Rinehart and Grenfall, 2002; Thornton, 2003; Beal and Wilson, 2004). Excepting Thornton (2003) and Rinehart and Grenfall’s (2002) study, lifestyle sport literature has often failed to link these so-called youth cultural pursuits involving lifestyle sports with the ‘lived’ youth leisure experience, especially the politics of the spaces they occupy. For example, the previous chapter showed how the spaces of youth leisure are affected by conflict, control, regulation and exclusion yet these concepts are largely absent from writings on lifestyle sports. Chapter 3 also showed how the spaces of youth leisure play a central role in the construction of identity and lifestyle and, therefore, the next section explores how the spaces of lifestyle sports have been addressed.

4.4 The spaces of lifestyle sports
Crouch and Tomlinson (1994) have argued that spaces and environments made through leisure experiences are ‘fascinating entities into the investigation of contemporary culture and consumption’. Tomlinson et al. (2005) have claimed there is relevance in investigating the physical location of lifestyle sports, particularly how commodified forms of provision such as skate parks, or indeed ready made mountain biking trails are received by participants where some activities rely on marginal spaces as part of their identities and lifestyles. Lifestyle sports are performed in all manner of venues, but writers have often paid less attention to the spaces of lifestyles and more to the construction of selves. This ignores the role of place in the construction of the self.
As Smale (1999:177) has argued, considerations of space and place have been notably absent from leisure literature ‘despite the critical role it plays in everything we do’. This is not to say theorists are not concerned with space, rather, the origins of lifestyle sport theory within consumption literature has created a more pressing interest in material and symbolic consumption within lifestyle sports and the commercialisation processes described in section 4.2.

Some theorists have, however, investigated how space is constructed through the ‘doing’ of leisure (Crouch, 2000), and lifestyle sport theorists have uncovered some important spatial links between the practice of lifestyle activities and the sporting body. Midol and Bryor (1995) have given attention to the relations ‘whizz sport’ participants formed with the environment, and Wheaton (1997) recognised the consumption of non urban spaces shaped part of the lifestyle sport experience of windsurfers. Several writers (e.g. Booth, 2003; Lanagan, 2003; Waitt, 2008) have also discussed how surfers assert ownership over particular leisure spaces although these issues were often only briefly explored.

Others have focused on the interconnections between bodies and space, conceptualising lifestyle sports as dance, where meanings are articulated through kinetic expression. Brown et al. (2007) has investigated the place experiences of recreationists according to their different modes of movement whilst Booth (2003:231), for example, has conceptualised surfing as an interaction between body and landscape where surfers ‘translate a host of philosophies, cultural tastes, values and perceptions into movement’. In addition, Borden (2001:243) commented upon the improvised choreography of skateboarding and the resulting relationships with space. He considered how skateboarders exploit a given terrain to present new uses other than its original function. Principally, he described skateboarders’ relationships with (city) space through the dialectic between appropriation, colonisation and identity formation ‘to redefine both the city and themselves’ (Borden, 2001).

Both Tomlinson et al. (2005) and Wheaton (2000) have claimed that underpinning commercialised, elite or media forms of lifestyle sports, there are lived cultures that are fundamentally about ‘doing it’; performed in local ‘liminal’ spaces in ways that resist or condemn forms of institutionalisation, regulation and commercialisation and involve
a commitment to particular way of life. Nevertheless, commodification is similarly observed in the ‘place’ of lifestyle sports, for example, through the development of Disneyland style Ex(treme) parks in the UK, providing indoor sports venues for up to 20 forms of adventure sport (Robathon, 2004). Rinehart and Grenfall (2002) contrasted the way in which youth BMX participants interpret these supervised, corporate planned, commodified spaces with a participant driven, self-made street venue ‘free’ from supervision, ownership and profit. Rinehart and Grenfall (2002:303) observed how the BMX participants would ride in a multitude of places, ‘whenever and where the impulse strikes them…they easily move in and out of the disciplinary, commodified fields of a mass-produced Vans site into their own leisure-orientated, idiosyncratic, self-constructed site’.

Theorisations of sports such as skateboarding and BMX have often been more sympathetic to the experiences of young people, particularly how the relationship between young people and space is heavily influenced by the formal or informal control of that space (e.g. Beal and Wilson, 2004). Borden (2001) has been explicit in the differentiation between the ‘found’ space that skateboarders adopt, exploit and reinterpret bestowing it new uses than its original intentions, and that of ‘constructed’, purpose built skate space. Here then, he has recognised how different controls and powers within skate spaces operate to include or exclude, to sanction or condemn, to police or be policed, and how this is interpreted by those who use them (Borden, 2001).

Wheaton (2005) discussed a hierarchy of space within surfing cultures, where insiders exercised territorialism and policed these spaces to prevent women or less skilled surfers from access. Similarly Waitt’s (2008) research with surfing communities has highlighted how territorial self proclaimed ‘locals’ defend surf breaks from unfamiliar surfers. For young people, however, it is claimed spaces are often policed by adult outsiders who inflict particular controls and constraints (Valentine, 2004), for example, Eubanks Owens (2001) has commented upon the paradoxical treatment of youth skateboarders whose access to particular spaces is either tolerated or oppressed. Disliked by many adults who simultaneously recognise a need for providing space for
young people, ‘skateboard parks are a place for youth and a way to restrict their behaviour’ (Eubanks Owens 2001:791).

For ‘lifestylers’, accessing formally controlled spaces is often preferred, and many are welcomed as a target market. As discussed in Chapter 3, the relationship between young people and leisure space is more often lived through processes of marginalisation and disenfranchisement and subject to constraint and control.

‘...we dig up the empty lot in the neighbourhood to build jumps. We are the older guys practicing flatland in the park while parents keep a sceptical eye on us because they are sure we are there to sell their precious Billy drugs (or worse!). We are the trespassers who invade the hidden parts of your town known only to security guards because there is a fun bank or rail to ride’ (Downs 2003:149).

Here then, Downs (2003) has described how participation in lifestyle sports in legitimate spaces of parks and open spaces is associated with deviance and subject to ‘moral panic’, thus participants seek out marginal, background spaces to perform their identities and lifestyles away from the public gaze.

Lifestyles sports have been theorised, in part in relation to youth and the literature has made links between the performance of these activities and the spaces in which they reside. Before mountain biking is introduced as a case study for exploring the relationship between youth identity, lifestyle and space, the following section reviews the arguments that have emerged from the review of literature so far.

4.5 Synthesising youth debates

The broad concern of the thesis is to investigate the role of leisure, identity, lifestyle and space in contemporary youth culture, recognising the debates which accompany the term ‘youth’ and its problematic definition. Studies of subcultures and post-subcultures bought youth (sub)cultures to the forefront of academic enquiry and highlighted how young people distinguish themselves from others through the consumption of particular styles. Yet subcultural approaches often focussed on spectacular or highly distinctive youth groups rather than considering a broad spectrum of youth experiences.
The more recent focus on lifestyles has taken a much broader approach and considered the wider influences on young people’s lives. Whereas some studies have, simplistically, conceptualised youth either as positioned between the realms of adult and child, or as a stage in transition, or as defined through narrow age ranges, lifestyle approaches have considered the experiences and lives of young people in a more complex manner by exploring how young people of wide ranging ages and experiences understand themselves (Miles 2000) both as distinct from, but also in relation to adults and children.

In addition, previous research into youth lifestyles has revealed the importance of leisure and consumption in understanding young people’s lives (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Chaney, 1996). Leisure and consumption as part of youth lifestyles have also emerged as important within academic and political debates because some have suggested fewer young people are taking part in conventional forms of sport, instead participating in new forms of sports or activities that are less structured or outwardly competitive (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Young people are taking part in activities which have most relevance and cultural signification as part of their lifestyles and identities. This thesis argues for a lifestyle perspective which considers young people’s lives as a whole, and therefore accepts young people may be active but through activities outside those that are conventionally understood. Lifestyles are constructed in space, and changes in the way in which sport and leisure activities are consumed have resulted in changes in the relationship between young people and space.

In addition to understanding identity and lifestyle, this thesis also seeks to investigate how, through their lifestyles; young people form relationships with space. Space is integral to the performance of lifestyle and identity as young people use particular spaces to assert belonging or to differentiate themselves from others, and theorists have shown how youth lifestyle and identity is linked to particular spaces. For example, in nightclubs young people differentiate themselves from others identifying different pubs or clubs with different lifestyle scenes (Thornton, 1995; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), or hang around in shopping malls to enact their own lifestyles within a wider consumption arena (Thomas, 2005). These activities are predominantly located in
urban settings and for the large part; theorisations of youth identity and lifestyle are concerned with urban spaces. These commentaries have, however, highlighted some key issues which affect young people’s relationships with space. Research has discussed how young people’s use of space may vary from that of children or adults (e.g. Spencer et al., 1989; Lieberg, 1995) and how their lifestyles are often subject to policing or surveillance by others. It has also shown how different spaces facilitate young people in building social networks, exercising autonomy and creating belonging or difference.

This thesis continues the focus on spaces exploring how they interact with, and are made meaningful by processes related to identity and lifestyle in youth. Yet the dominance of urban theorisations has led to the recognition that theorists have not been critical about the location of spaces that are used by young people. This thesis contributes to debates associated with lifestyle, identity and space, investigating young people’s use of countryside space to understand how young people form their own knowledge of place. This thesis builds upon previous research exploring how issues such as surveillance, hanging around, or the role of space in distinction transpose onto young people’s use of countryside space. Therefore, the thesis extends the understanding of the role of countryside space in the formation of identity and lifestyle.

Rural geographies have acknowledged the dominance of urban theorisations and have investigated the youth experience of rural environments. This body of research has challenged misconceptions over the rural idyll and made links with previous debates over the importance of public space in young people’s lives, yet these studies have focussed on young people who live in rural areas who may be challenged to access other types of leisure space especially those in urban areas. In addition, key debates surrounding youth leisure in the countryside concern barriers to participation (Mulder et al., 2001) and conflict with other user groups (Bell et al., 2003; Ward Thompson et al., 2004). This previous research, however, investigates young people’s use of countryside space for leisure, largely through the insights of young people who would not normally visit these spaces. Therefore, this thesis investigates the meanings attached to countryside space by young people who choose to access the spaces as part
of their lifestyles and who are drawn from both urban and rural areas. The thesis uses the term countryside spaces rather than rural spaces to indicate that the research is not constrained by the urban-rural binary and to indicate that spaces where youths develop lifestyles and identities are connected to a variety of different types of spaces in both rural and urban locations.

Writers have also theorised the countryside as a space for leisure through lifestyle activities, many of which appeal to youth (Rohde and Kendle, 2004). Yet discussions on these activities whilst stimulating interesting debates around concepts such as embodiment (e.g. Lewis, 2001; Franklin 2003) and risk (Stranger, 1999; Krein, 2007), have been theorised in relation to adult participants rather than understanding them according to youth. Therefore there remains a need to explore lifestyle sports in countryside space from a youth perspective. This thesis aims to address this gap, exploring how young people construct these spaces through a particular activity which is performed but not confined to countryside space, so as to understand why countryside space is chosen, what features of countryside space are important to the performance of the activity, and how space features as part of identity and lifestyle.

Two key general issues have also been stressed in the discussions in earlier chapters of youth lifestyle perspective which have significant implications for the approach to the empirical research. First, is the need to understand how young people define themselves, and second it is necessary to understand how young people define the spaces in which they locate their lifestyles. The methodology discussed in the next chapter, therefore, privileges the youth voice and adopts a definition of youth that involves a wide age category so as to capture a broad range of lifestyles and also to allow an exploration of the variations of identities and lifestyles between young people. Discussions in Chapter 3 have also revealed disparities in research investigating how young people use and construct different types of space. Therefore this thesis becomes concerned with exploring how young people construct a range of different spaces as part of their own lifestyles.

The discussion of the theorisation of youth has also uncovered several important research themes that can be analysed through a case study of mountain biking. The conceptual framework of this thesis is built around the relationship between leisure,
lifestyle, identity and space which it has been argued in earlier chapters provides an important foundation by which to explore the experiences of contemporary youth. Within this framework youth is framed as a fluid and individually negotiated construct, with participants between ages 13 and 25 years included as ‘youth’ participants. This reflects the outcomes of the conceptual discussion and other research into youth which recognises the differences in the experiences of leisure between adults, youth and children; age differences within youth; and the need for youth to define themselves.

The second part to this chapter presents the activity of mountain biking as a case study by which to explore these issues reflecting on the scope for exploration of the relationship between mountain biking and the concepts of identity, lifestyle and leisure space in youth. The following sections draw upon writings about mountain biking, to argue that mountain biking research is often focussed on the environmental issues and social conflicts and although it raises interesting issues over the use of countryside space for leisure, the relationship between lifestyle, identity and space has been overlooked, particularly in the youth context.

This thesis explores the importance of leisure space in understandings of youth identity and lifestyle through the research with youth mountain bikers at Bedgebury Forest, Kent. Employing qualitative techniques which privilege the ‘youth’ voice, this thesis will contribute to understandings of the ‘youth’ experience of mountain biking. In addition, by focussing on youth mountain biking at Bedgebury, this thesis contributes to theorisations of youth leisure in countryside leisure spaces.

4.6 Constructing the mountain biker

Mountain biking, which involves using specially adapted bicycles on off-road terrain, emerged in 1970s, founded by a group of friends in California, who, in the pursuit of leisure were inspired by the landscape of Mount Tam and designed mountain bikes for a single run known as The Repack (Van der Plas and Kelly, 1998). Its progression to the mountain bike of today was, according to Eassom (2003:198), ‘due to a combination of various factors: personalities, changing features of consumer culture, altered perceptions of the environment, changing psychologies of identity and image, and increased leisure time’.

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Many authors have commented upon the dramatic increase in participation in mountain biking in the UK (Dougill and Stroh, 2001; Palmer, 2006), and overseas, and it has been suggested that globally mountain biking on a wider scale is still in this growth stage (Ramthun, 1997). Crowther (1999) has commented that despite its relative infancy, the opportunities mountain biking has offered for personal and environmental freedom has increased its historical significance. Mountain biking is, however, still considered a ‘new’ countryside activity (Hollenhorst et al., 1995) and research has focussed on assessing the impacts of this new influx of adventure tourists on local ecologies and environments (e.g. Jacoby, 1990; Goeft and Alder, 2001).

Mountain bike riders are not a homogenous group (Eassom, 2003) and several authors have attempted to profile the socio-demographic characteristics of mountain bikers in the UK (Ruff and Mellors, 1993; Countryside Access and Activities Network, 2007; EKOS Ltd and Tourism Resource Company, 2007) and abroad (Cessford, 1995; Hollenhorst et al., 1995; Chavez, 1997; Symmonds et al., 2000; Bowker and English 2002) and research has focussed on producing a characterisation of the mountain biker, and exploring the patterns of participation. Nevertheless, profiling data often acts as a precursor for further research into the analysis of behavioural patterns of riders rather than as an area of interest in its own right.

Bowker and English (2002), for example, surveyed over 1000 mountain bikers in order to construct a profile of mountain biking participants and their perceptions of the trails at Tsali, USA. They identified 70% of participants were male, 96% white, and over 70% of riders were under 40 years, and 35% under 29 (Bowker and English, 2002). These findings have been broadly replicated throughout the studies in the UK: only 8% of Ruff and Mellor’s (1993) sample were women, and 57% of the population under the age of 25 whilst in Northern Ireland 90% of respondents to an online survey were male (Countryside Access and Activities Network 2007). The under representation of women within the sport has been further explored in Cessford’s (1995) report, where he has observed that whereas women represented only 15% of the total sample, they comprised 42% of beginner riders.

Mountain biking is claimed to achieve many positive benefits for those who participate such as social cohesion, confidence building, as well as benefits to mental and physical
health and well being (EKOS Ltd and Tourism Resource Company 2007). Hollenhorst 
et al. (1995) have claimed this may explain its rapid rise in popularity. Through 
questionnaire data Goeft and Alder (2001) elicited motivations for mountain biking 
namely fun, health, challenge and social activity. They also commented that half of 
respondents considered mountain biking as a way to experience nature and relax. 
Hollenhorst et al., (1995) found motivations were three fold, and were ranked in 
importance: just over 30% of respondents rode for enjoyment, 23% rode for exercise 
and 11% for being amongst nature with the reasons of the remaining 36% of 
participants not cited. The authors made other observations about the social patterns of 
participation noting, for example, most people rode with friends although in the form 
of organised rides, races and events (Hollenhorst et al., 1995).

Other research has moved beyond the profiling of participants, and adopted an 
alternative approach which has attempted to explore the complex identities and 
practices of mountain biking populations and subpopulations in more depth. Through 
her survey of mountain bike riders in California, Chavez (1997) loosely distinguished 
between two broad types of mountain bikers by combining the level of skill of riders 
with a consideration of their leisure identity and by analysing responses to the question 
‘mountain biking says a lot about who I am’. She adopted a simplistic method of 
categorising mountain bikers as either ‘specialists’ or ‘generalists’ according to 
responses to these questions.

Similarly, Ramthun (1997) chose to focus on the attitudes of mountain biking 
populations, analysing attitudes according to their commitment to the sport and found 
that as riders gained more experience, their commitment to the sport increased. He 
claimed the development of social contacts, investment in equipment and membership 
of clubs meant that often participants develop a dedication to the sport through their 
own personal investment (Ramthun, 1997). Interestingly, he found more committed 
riders were more inclined to volunteer to help building and maintaining mountain bike 
landscapes and become more involved in political representation for the sport 
(Ramthun, 1997). Mountain bikers have been described as ‘politically active’ (Chavez 
et al., 1993), and research has found that mountain biking organisations take an active 
role in establishing regulations for the sport as well as promoting social opportunities
(Hollenhorst et al., 1995). Ruff and Mellors (1993) have echoed this as they too observed a strong sense of commitment within mountain biking communities.

Although lacking recent research, commentaries on mountain biking have documented the dramatic increase in uptake witnessed over the previous 20 years. For some this popularity has been the subject of enquiry through questionnaires and surveys of riders to unearth their reasons and attitudes to riding. It is claimed, for example, this success is due to offering a safer and healthier alternative to road cycling as well as offering a freedom to roam the countryside and a connection with childhood experience of cycling (Ruff and Mellors, 1993). In depth research exploring the meanings of participation for individuals, however, remains limited and only partially explored by Chavez, et al. (1993), Ramthun (1997) and Baker (1990). The information gained is partly designed to be a tool for management rather than a contribution to academic debate about the identity and lifestyle opportunities offered through mountain biking.

Nevertheless, mountain bike research has acknowledged, however limitedly, that recreational activities are often performed as part of wider leisure lifestyles and act as a tool for displaying a particular set of values or distinction from other lifestyle groups. Mountain bike riders are recognised as having distinct recreationist qualities. Baker (1990), for example, describes ‘bicycle towns’ in Colorado and Montana USA known nationally for their strong bicycle cultures, whilst others have commented that the popular emergence in the 1980’s was accompanied by ‘a growing sense of identity’ (Ruff and Mellors, 1993) as mountain biking was detached from more traditional outdoor sports of climbing or hiking and claimed its own lifestyle agenda. Similarly, Eassom (2003) writes about the mountain bikes in 1990s as a tool for both social differentiation and identification and as a visible statement of identity between those who owned one and those who didn’t. Dougill and Stroh (2001) found that social interaction with likeminded ‘outdoor type’ people and a sense of camaraderie represented an important part of many outdoor recreational experiences and they argued that harnessing these group identities may provide a foundation for resolving some user conflicts. These snippets show lifestyle and identity have been addressed, but in passing and relating to distinct locations.
Whereas writings on lifestyle sports have acknowledged links between the performance of these activities and youth culture, the presence of young people within the mountain biking community has been only briefly commented upon. Heer et al. (2003), for example, have observed the mean age of mountain bikers is often significantly younger than those participating in walking or hiking, hinting at a youth dimension, although there is no attempt at explaining this observation. In addition, the relationship between the age of the rider and landscape preferences were made explicit. Chavez (1997) has commented on how the management of a trail near to a college town would have to be very different to that of a trail with an older average age group suggesting adult and youth mountain bikers have different leisure needs.

In Symmonds et al.’s (2000) study they compared the preferences for landscape features according to age. The study has claimed the presence of gullies, mud, obstacles and standing water are less important as age increased, suggesting that older riders may be less physical or prepared to take risks, and ‘prefer to recreate in a more passive and appreciative mode’ (2000:558). Younger riders showed higher preferences for tree roots, mud, rocks, surface water as well as steep gradients, bumps and jumps particularly for those under twenty years old. There are clear age trends in these observations but the authors have raised caution to assuming age is a suitable predictor of rider characteristics, claiming it is important to recognise the complexities in mountain biking populations and the wide variation in preferences, experience and skill. As discussed in Chapter 1, young people use age to distinguish between older and younger riders and this thesis uses a broad age range so as to capture the wide variation in experiences.

Young people’s experiences of mountain biking do, however, remain largely unexplored as writers do not distinguish between mountain bikers, assuming the meanings participants associate with mountain biking can be universally applied. Nevertheless, some of these writers have hinted at a youth dimension and offer a small contribution to further discussion on the meanings of countryside activities within youth.
4.7 Mountain biking, marginalisation and social conflict

As well as constructing rider profiles, theorists have focussed their attention on the impacts mountain bikers have on the countryside. Mountain biking has been described in terms of ‘controversy and discord’ (Hollenhorst et al., 1995:41) and since its conception has been by accompanied by substantial public scrutiny. These issues are broadly categorised according to concerns over the negative impacts of mountain biking in either social or ecological arenas. As countryside spaces become increasingly popular for multiple recreational uses, the management of these tensions has become the subject of much research (see Jacoby, 1990; Chavez et al., 1993; Goeft and Alder, 2001; White et al., 2006).

Research on the ecological impacts of mountain biking is situated within the field of recreation ecology (White et al., 2006) where there appears to be a trade off between meeting the needs of recreationists without compromising the quality of a natural resource (Bowker and English, 2002; Symmonds et al., 2000). Impacts of mountain biking have often been cited as soil compaction, erosion and loss; vegetation loss and changes in trail width (Goeft and Alder, 2001). These claims are then weighed against the impacts of more traditional countryside user groups of hikers and horse riders. The extent to which mountain biking contributes to resource degradation is, however, subject to debate as some have identified the emergence of a blame culture (Dougill and Stroh, 2001). Mountain bikers are often held responsible for ecological degradation and consequently have been restricted from use despite a lack of reputable evidence (White et al., 2006; Dougill and Stroh, 2001). Studies have mentioned negative and misconstrued perceptions of ‘gung-ho’ mountain bikers who care little for the environment and discuss the need to tame the ‘brasher rogue elements of mountain bike users’ (Dougill and Stroh, 2001:17) cast as irresponsible users of countryside space (Chavez, 1997; Ruff and Mellors, 1993). These kinds of understandings have perpetuated what some have termed a mythical conflict particularly between hikers and bikers (Dougill and Stroh, 2001) over the legitimacy of particular forms of recreation in countryside areas perceived as vulnerable.

Social conflict between mountain bikers and other user groups has been well documented (Dougill and Stroh, 2001; Cessford, 2002). These tensions are most
prominent between mountain bikers and hikers, specifically as one way conflicts for hikers caused by negative interactions with mountain bikers; yet as Carothers et al., (2001) have claimed, these feelings are not reversed. A Swiss forest study by Heer et al., (2003), for example, found that 57% of hikers reported negative interaction with other forest users, compared to only 22% of mountain bikers.

The personal meanings attached to mountain biking and the motivations for participating are diverse and complex (Hollenhorst et al., 1995) and thus participants may adopt very different approaches to a recreational activity. Carothers et al., (2001) have termed this social value conflict where the norms and values of one group clash with those of another. Nevertheless, Carothers et al., (2001) have claimed that these types of conflict are absent because hikers and mountain bikers often share similar social values, and, therefore, they have argued that conflicts arise in other forms. Resource specificity as discussed by Jacob and Schreyer (1980) is often evident in conflicts between mountain biking recreational groups. For example, in their research on mountain bikers in the US, Chavez et al., (1993) found conflicts about ‘turf” were particularly evident when trails were shared with traditional users e.g. hikers and equestrian users, who shared a history with particular area. Cyclists are seen to disrupt established trail use patterns (Baker, 1990) and increase pressure on what is perceived to be a limited resource (Ruff and Mellors, 1993; Chavez, 1997).

Carothers et al., (2001) determined that much of the conflict occurring between hikers and mountain bikers is interpersonal and rather than being based on social values is associated simply with their physical presence. Although highly subjective, Symmonds et al., (2000) modelled a social carrying capacity for mountain bikers, acknowledging the effect the numbers and distribution of visitors may have on the quality of recreational activity. Experiencing wilderness is often cited as important to outdoor recreational activity, and failure of the resource to absorb recreationists produces tensions amongst users.

The most visible form of conflict between mountain bikers and other recreationists is the mode of experiencing the environment. The difference in mobility between mountain bikers and other user types results in more passive recreational forms feeling threatened (Ruff and Mellors, 1993) by the nature of movement on mountain bikes.
Whilst Cessford (1995:40-41) has argued ‘….pure speed is not the objective’, he has gone on to describe the experience as ‘….the technical challenge of travelling quickly but in control over rough surfaces and terrain’ in equally vigorous terms. Perceptions of risk for other non mountain biking users involve cyclists’ speed in relation to the conditions (Cessford, 2002) and the ability to approach quickly but without noise (Chavez et al., 1993).

Rather than finding conflicts between mobility types within the countryside, Dougill and Stroh (2001) found social conflicts partly stemmed from age differences between participants. Generational differences saw young people more frequently involved in conflict, although the study did not focus on any explicit youth dimension. The younger interviewees believe themselves to be accommodating of other countryside users, but reported older people to be less accepting of others, whilst older participants commented on a need to educate young people in their use of the countryside.

Mountain biking has been framed discordantly, with research exploring the nature of lifestyle conflict and animosity between user groups who share a particular leisure resource for recreation. Within this research, however, a strand has emerged which has recognised the relationship between the leisure pursuit, the participant and the (countryside) leisure landscape and this is discussed in the next section.

4.7 The spaces of mountain biking

Research on mountain biking, whilst still often driven by a concern for the ecological consequences, has also included an analysis of the landscape values and preferences of riders from a landscape management perspective, again mostly through research on adults. Cessford (1995) was one of the first to recognise the emphasis in research on the impacts of mountain biking and a lack of research devoted to understanding the types of recreation experiences which appeal to mountain bikers. In his research, Cessford (1995) acknowledged the diversity of setting preferences displayed by mountain bikers, claiming these varied according to the rider’s level of skill. In addition, Goeft and Alder (2001) have considered the trail preference of mountain bikers in conjunction with the kinds of impacts these features have on the sustainability of the trail. The landscape preferences of mountain bikers showed
several references to natural features, and particularly to the importance of seeing ‘nature’ whilst riding (e.g. Hollenhorst et al., 1995).

In Hollenhorst et al.’s (1995) study, when mountain bikers were asked why they chose to ride in a national forest, nature was cited by over 30% of respondents, with trails and access to trails mentioned by 34% of respondents. Scenic views and natural settings were recognised as important components for riders, with preference given to natural forest and wooded areas (Cessford, 1995; Ruff and Mellors, 1993). Goeft and Alder’s (2001) have claimed the preferred setting for mountain biking is single-tracks, native bush and forest, whilst built-up areas and suburbs are least popular. They also reported that mountain bikers were positive about their encounters with other cyclists and enjoyed seeing wildlife as part of their experience. Similarly, Heer et al. (2003) investigated the relationship between outdoor recreation and ecological and biological knowledge in Switzerland, concluding both forms of knowledge for hikers and mountain bikers who visited forests for recreation to be fairly high and showed an increase with age.

The role of natural features in the riding experience has been further analysed by Cessford (1995), through the layering of participant attributes alongside these requirements to determine landscape preferences according to rider type. Beginner riders, for example, were likely to emphasise more passive recreational features such as gentle slopes or attractive scenery whereas those who were more experienced were looking for a different leisure experience citing technical and challenging trails for more speed and excitement.

Some have claimed mountain bikers have a unique relationship with countryside landscapes, for example, Brown et al. (2007) have argued that mountain bikers value landscapes in different ways to other recreationists. Moreover, mountain bikers’ construction and experience of nature has been subject to unconventional representation; Bridgers (2003:186, original emphasis) has employed an embodied conceptualisation of the relationship between the mountain biker and nature which he claims goes beyond that of conventional nature appreciation:
'The single most important draw of riding a mountain bike is NATURE – not the environmentalist, tree hugging, untouchable nature of Sierra Club twits who try to make themselves look like caring people by keeping you off the grass so they can buy a three-million-dollar home and have the mountains untouched in their picture window- but the nature that you can just dive into and have sex with. The challenge is to treat her right’.

This section on the spaces of mountain biking has presented evidence to suggest that mountain bikers are united as participants of a particular recreational community who have a unique relationship with their leisure landscape (Brown et al., 2007). That is, mountain bikers are distinct from other recreational groups experiencing diverse but connected forms of marginalisation, landscapes concerns and relationships with other countryside users.

Mountain biking provides an important foundation for the theoretical exploration and development of these themes of identity, lifestyle and active leisure in relation to youth. Research so far has hinted at a distinct youth user group (e.g. Dougill and Stroh, 2001), highlighted the connections between mountain biking and countryside space (e.g. Brown et al., 2007), and recognised a mountain biking community based on shared lifestyles and identities (e.g. Ruff and Mellors, 1993). Although much of the research on mountain biking has focussed on providing guidance and practical information for park and recreation managers to incorporate mountain biking into countryside management ‘on the ground’ the research has unearthed some useful foundations for subsequent debate on mountain biking and youth lifestyle and identity.

4.8 Conclusion
Clearly lifestyle sports represent an important leisure choice which has inarguable links to youth culture. The literature on lifestyle sports has concentrated on the performance of these activities in relation to identities and lifestyles discussed in section 4.5; however, consumption of leisure and recreation also attaches symbolic and spatial meanings to the landscape. This chapter has demonstrated how participation in lifestyle sports is connected to cultural consumption practices but previous attempts to
link the performance of these activities with the meanings these inscribe on space lack sufficient depth.

In addition, the meanings and understandings of lifestyles sports for youth participants remain complex and only partially explored. Thompson et al. (2005) have argued there is little research which investigates the physically active leisure choices young people make, and the meanings these are given in their own lives from their own perspective. This chapter has shown how both mountain biking and wider lifestyle sports literature have failed to consider the youth context; instead the research assumes motivations for participation remain similar to those of adults.

Mountain biking participants are differentiated according to motivations, landscape preferences and abilities as well as demographically and theorists have attempted to explain the relationships within and between these variables. Some key themes have also emerged which demonstrate an awareness of the importance of socio-spatial relationships within a recreational setting. Holllenhorst et al. (1995), for example, expressed an interest in the social formation and the social benefits of participation in mountain biking but reported little of this in their findings and White et al., (2006) listed the social, individual and economic benefits of mountain biking but these papers failed to explore these issues further. Bowker and English (2002), although collecting a wide range of additional information on the types of rider such as level of experience and the nature of the trip (frequency, seasonality, group size, trails used), only used this information to describe the attributes of participants; and did not consider motivations for these visits, social relationships formed here, or comparisons with other sites. The extent to which this information facilitates the development of a management plan is open to debate.

In addition, much of the research investigating landscape values relies on quantitative, survey style methods of research where participants are only offered preformed categories of what the researchers considered important trail attributes, rather than letting the participant define what is important to them. For example, Dougill and Stroh’s (2001) reflection on the use of qualitative techniques to elicit information on the external factors influencing the experience of outdoor recreation, noted how participants would often expand on other aspects of their recreational experience when
given the scope. Researchers have recognised a need to incorporate more social research into management (Symmonds et al., 2000) yet few have begun to delve deeper.

Whilst the mountain biking literature has made only limited attempts to explore the identity and lifestyles of those who participate, it has unearthed important connections to the space in which these lifestyles are performed. Discussions of mountain biking have essentially classified mountain biking as a countryside activity and revealed the importance of considering recreationists relationships with the environment but have not been tackled in any depth except in terms of conflict or relationships with flora and fauna. Although each area has hinted at the respective implications, the link between mountain biking, youth identity, lifestyle and leisure space has not been adequately addressed.

Investigating the use of countryside space for mountain biking, this thesis will contribute new theorisations and empirical knowledge to political and theoretical debates of youth leisure and the countryside. It has drawn upon debates within sport and leisure studies, youth cultural studies and the geographies of youth to explore the role of mountain biking in the assemblage of respectively self or space. By considering the workings of identity, leisure and lifestyle ‘in space’, it will develop a more thorough understanding of how young people situate themselves within their own leisure landscapes.
Chapter 5  Methods and methodology

5.1  Researching youth

Methodology and theory are inseparable components of any research strategy and some commentators have argued that research of social and cultural theory needs to consider methodological issues from the outset (Seale, 1999). As Bell and Newby (1977) contended; one of the greatest methodological challenges is pinpointing the most appropriate research strategy and defending its position by accepting its constraints and celebrating its capabilities in regard to the intended study. The chapter is presented as a reflective discussion on the methodological framework for the study and also offers critical insight into the relationships between methods and the resulting interpretations. The methodological approach taken within this project is central to the interpretations of the data gathered, and, therefore, by critically engaging with reflexive methods, the chapter benefits from a review of techniques as an additional layer of understanding to youth identity and lifestyles in mountain biking spaces. In considering the methodological approach to the research this chapter will visit some of the key issues and debates within the qualitative paradigm and particularly to research with young people.

As outlined in Chapter 1 and discussed more fully in section 4.5, the thesis is organised according to three aims, each of which represents a commitment to unearthing young people’s meanings understandings and interpretations of particular social and spatial relations. The study, therefore, lends itself to a qualitative approach which prioritises context, description, process and flexibility (Bryman, 2004). One of the aims of this chapter is to justify the use of the following mixed methods; participant observation, recorded rides, semi-structured interviews and forum analysis.

The decision to use qualitative methods was formed through a consideration of both the philosophical position adopted by the researcher, the framing and focus of the research aims, as well as attitudes towards the role of research and the responsibilities
of being a researcher (Dwyer and Limb, 2001). This chapter begins in section 5.2.1 - 5.2.4 by outlining the rationale for the choice of methodology and setting it within its ontological and epistemological frame. Section 5.3.1 introduces the research setting and 5.3.2 critiques the results of previous quantitative research conducted at the site and section 5.3.3 considers the researchers positionality. Section 5.4.1 - 5.4.7 presents the research design in particular the sample, the participants and the methods used and thus considers both the practical application of the methodology and the context of the research site. Section 5.5 then revisits the debates set out in section 5.2, and offers a reflexive account of the methodological process through a discussion of ethics. Section 5.6 considers the limitations of the research and section 5.7 concludes the chapter.

The first section introduces the research through a discussion of objectivity and truth in epistemology, before positioning the research within the realm of ethnographic research philosophies. The focus then narrows, framing the research through a discussion of debates over research with young people and introducing mobilities and mobile methods as central influences in the choice of research methodology.

5.2.1 Epistemology: the production of knowledge

The epistemological position of the thesis is interpretivist placing emphasis on the meaning of social phenomena and the distinctiveness of human interactions. The exploration of the relations between people and place becomes what Pile (1991) would call an ‘interpretative geography’ by confronting the power relations within the research process and acknowledging the distinctions between observer and observed. This epistemology views research as an intersubjective process and through self reflexivity recognises both researcher and researched as producing socially constructed truths. This thesis acknowledges a politics of knowledge associated with these truths which raise further philosophical choices for researchers practising cultural geographical research. Discussions over the production of knowledge proceed below.

Positivist epistemologies assume the investigator and investigated are separate entities, neither influenced by each other, and by the employment of rigorous procedure, findings are undoubtedly ‘true’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Weber (1949:54) stated that ‘it is true that in our sciences, personal value judgements have tended to influence
scientific arguments without being explicitly admitted’. As positivist realist approaches repudiate such values, qualitative work has become the subject of inter-paradigm debates over the applicability of truth in enquiry. Value judgements which arguably deny social and cultural studies objectivity are according to Weber (1949), hugely important within social and cultural work in allowing one to arrive at what they consider a rational understanding, and suggest that the process involved in determining validity of knowledge is itself a judgement of value. Weber (1949) has, however, argued that within social science, truths should be sought. The importance of faithfully representing these ‘truths’ gives ethnography and realism a shared concern.

For example, Schutz and Luckmann (1974:123) have argued everyday life is unquestionably accepted by us as ‘paramount reality’ through which we objectify our knowledge, and, therefore, realist epistemologies discern these worlds are accessible to researchers for study. The assumptions, however, that these realities can be read so openly by outside researchers has been criticised for assuming that ‘simply because we were there we know’ (Hammersley, 1992:52). Instead, constructionists have argued that objects and artefacts in this ‘natural reality’ attain cultural significance through the social construction of shared meanings. ‘…we act and operate not only within the life-world but also upon it. Our bodily movements gear into the life-world and transform its objects and their reciprocal relations’ (Schutz and Luckmann, 1974:6).

Some qualitative researchers have responded to these debates by asserting the need for the production of knowledge through grounded theory (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967), where empirical texts and narratives become the ultimate basis for developing theory (Flick, 2005). From this perspective the investigation of human relations with society and space within the interpretative paradigm requires subtle research techniques which Geertz (1973) has asserted are less able to generalise, if this is indeed at all desirable, about a whole culture. The advantages lie in a methods potential to give thick description within culture rather than across it. This is not a criticism of the role of theoretically framing research, rather an acknowledgement of the disparities between the subjectivity of observation and the necessary robustness of a theoretical framework in formulating interpretation of events with the ability to ‘yield defensible interpretations as new social phenomena swim into view’ (Geertz, 1973:27).
Silverman (2000), for example, has drawn attention to the flexibility of qualitative research techniques to respond to both theory and the research situation. The importance of this flexibility, allowing the research situation to dictate the methods for obtaining representations is of central importance to the methodological development of this thesis. As Silverman (2000) has pointed out, however, there are resulting criticisms over a lack of structure and consequently the defensibility of results. Commentators Baxter and Eyles (1997) and Bailey et al. (1999) documented this struggle, between the research process which demands creative flexibility and scope for gaining thick description and the process of evaluation and analysis which requires a more rigorous approach. As such, there are those who have demanded a more certain basis for knowledge to sustain cultural studies (Barker, 2000).

Some qualitative work within interpretivist positions has responded to objectivity debates through the employment of criteria to determine the quality of research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have offered criteria based on trustworthiness and authenticity that offers qualitative research a specific approach based upon the following four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The applicability of such criteria is heavily debated within wider qualitative discourse through the reflections of realist ontologies over whether the world is knowable (Bryman, 2004).

The paradoxical struggle between flexibility and rigour within the qualitative paradigm has been experienced and overcome as part of the interpretative geography within this thesis through a reflection and critique of the role of combining methods within the ethnographic paradigm. This research has adopted a mixed methods approach, based upon both the tangible benefits of employing more than one method, whilst also reflecting a philosophical perspective of ethnography as ‘a way of seeing’ (Wolcott, 1999). Studies of youth require a clear statement of the philosophy of the approach and these debates over the pursuit of truth are continued in the following section, through the discussion of ethnographic research methods.
5.2.2 The philosophical perspective

This thesis employed a mixed methods approach where several techniques were conducted as an attempt to expand the capacity for social explanation (Irwin, 2006). Within this thesis the employment of more than one method reflects the adoption of a particular philosophical perspective.

Traditional understandings of ethnography have positioned it within anthropology, as a study of places or cultures different from the norm, and essentially as the study of ‘others’ (Wolcott, 1999). For Crang and Cook (1995), ethnography provides an understanding of the world as it is experienced and of the everyday lives of those who actually ‘live them out’. It appears, however, that ethnography is evolving and the definition of ethnography is subject to debate. A lack of a clear definition of ethnography has led commentators to adopt their own criteria for determining if research qualifies as ethnographic (Wolcott, 1999; Bryman, 2004). Some have argued there is a strong difference between doing ethnography and borrowing ethnographic techniques (Wolcott, 1999), so first there is a need to demonstrate how, or if indeed, the research qualifies as ‘ethnographic’.

For Barker (2000), it is often the spirit of ethnography which is invoked, to demonstrate a qualitative understanding of cultural activity against the tradition of quantitative research. Aull Davies (1999:4) adopted the term ethnography to refer to ‘a research process based on fieldwork using a variety of (mainly qualitative) research techniques but including some engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time’. Others, however, have gone beyond this, conceptualising ethnography as not just a fieldwork technique but ‘a way of looking and beyond this a way of seeing’ (Wolcott 1999:43). As such Wolcott has moved away from a concern with the practicalities of deeming research ethnographic, instead demanding an ethnographic mindset. His reflexive and more abstract understanding of ethnography is demonstrated in what Walcott (1999:46) identified as three integral processes of ethnographic work as ‘experiencing, enquiring and examining’. Wolcott has been sympathetic to the difficulties involved in determining what counts as ethnography, but has been quick to exercise caution that research employing these will not necessarily be ethnographic.
Experiencing is often associated with participant observation techniques within ethnography, and at times participant observation and ethnography are used perhaps unsatisfactorily in interchangeable ways (e.g. Cook, 1997). For Wolcott (1999:46), participant observation provides ‘firsthand experience in naturally occurring events’ and constituted only one element of ethnographic work. The second element, enquiry, was finely balanced with the requirements of experiencing, and demanded skilled decisions in determining whether questions would be answered naturally or require probing by the researcher. Wolcott’s third requirement of ethnographic work was the examination of the history of the research subject. Arguably an awareness of previous studies and events in history within the field is essential in any research proposal. As discussed earlier, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have argued that consideration of previous work can act to confirm findings.

The discussions above have illustrated the variation within academic understandings of ethnography. In terms of the more tangible characteristics, commentators have identified several common themes that characterise ethnographic work. The employment of multiple methods is one of the most prevalent characteristics of ethnography, where researchers hope to build up a more rounded picture forming ‘webs of interdependency’ (Crang and Cook, 1995:10). Bell and Newby (1977) advocated methodological pluralism as an antithesis to previous positivistic hegemony in sociology. Their epistemological position is opposed to Feyerabend’s (1975) epistemological anarchy, claiming that variety in method is desirable, as there is no clear way of choosing.

Henwood (2006) has commented on the difficulty of seeing combinatorial methods as a panacea for research methods and, indeed, Silverman (2000) has criticised approaches which adopt multiple methods as a way to supposedly obtain absolute truth. Here, however, Silverman (2000) was referring more to the employment of multiple methods by triangulation, where methods are used together to corroborate each other, and as Baxter and Eyles (1997) have argued, triangulation of methods does not guarantee more rigorous results. Within this thesis, methods are adopted for providing additional insight by offering the researcher differing interpretative lenses by which to view an issue in keeping with Kincheloe and McLaren’s (2005:320) argument.
that ‘…As parts of complex systems and intricate processes, objects of inquiry are far too mercurial to be viewed by a single way of seeing or as a snapshot of a particular phenomenon at a specific moment in time’. The danger is narrowing the focus too much, and possibly failing to capture enough data using only one method, thus a methodological assemblage is employed to capture multiple realities, knowledge’s and experiences and the relations between them (Bissell, 2008).

Tomlinson et al. (2005:4) considered data collection for lifestyle and identity expression through sport and leisure must reflect the complexity of these collective forms, and recommended the use of ‘diaries, photographic and oral records, as well as the observation of events, gatherings and competitions’. It is argued here that this thesis will require more depth and level of exploration than one method can provide, and, therefore, it approaches ethnography from a philosophical perspective as ‘a set of methods’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Wolcott (1999) conceptualises ethnography as a philosophical lens. For the remainder of the discussion this thesis adopts Wolcott’s (1999) term of ‘ethnographic research’ to refer to the ontological and methodological basis for the research but underpins this with a subtle realist approach.

A subtle realist approach to ethnography prioritises the pursuit of ‘thick description’, and is considered incompatible, for example, with theories which ‘ride roughshod over the complexities of the social world’ Hammersley (1992:12). There are times other interpretative approaches can be presented as ‘self validating’ (Geertz, 1973:2), almost disregarding any claims for truth on the basis that interpretations are subjective, and universal acceptance of one viewpoint is never possible. As Willis (2000:113) has accepted, ‘there is no guaranteed truth connection’, and representation of respondent’s view’s, depends upon an assumption that a culture can be read by another (Seale, 1999). Crang and Cook (1995) have argued that the validity of ethnographic truth claims have to be gauged on their own terms; as accounts that are true to those who revealed them, are embedded in wider social processes, which allow researchers to understand the means by which the world is constructed.

Within this thesis it is argued, following Barker (2000), that qualitative work should demonstrate robustness and indeed that Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for qualitative research offers a valuable tool for defending the value of qualitative
research. Hammersley (1992) captured this in his demands for a subtle form of realism. He claimed that realism is naïve, insisting that description can never be pure as all facts involve some theoretical assumptions, however, questioned the value of relativist's incommensurable worlds of multiple truths. He extended the debate by moving away from a dichotomous solution of either or; instead opting for a revised form of realism based upon his three basic assumptions. Subtle realism assumes that knowledge can never be absolute, and, therefore, ethnographers must be reasonably confident that there is an absence of reasons to believe findings are not true. Second, subtle realism asserts that reality is independent of the claims researchers make about it, whilst the final tenet recognises that the aims of social research is to represent reality, not reproduce it ‘thus there can be multiple, non-contradictory and valid descriptions of the same phenomena’ (1992:51).

So far the chapter has acknowledged the subjectivities involved in qualitative research but similarly demonstrated the benefits of employing (multiple) qualitative research techniques for the exploration of lived realities and offering new ways of seeing. Earlier explorations of positivist and constructivist perspectives and their corresponding realist and relativist ontology’s were shown to have limitations for examining everyday lives (Hammersley, 1995). The discussion of ethnography has led to the arguments for using the research methodology and Hammersley’s (1992) subtle realism. Thus through an ethnographic standpoint the research accepts that the self is the primary research instrument and the researcher is implicated in the research through the co-construction of accounts, and recognises ‘that ‘some’ things, whilst being accepted as ‘real’, are still only knowable through our concepts of them’ (Cloke et al., 1991:91). This methodological and philosophical perspective is not used crudely but developed to respond to the field of research. The next section considers two separate but connected methodological issues concerning youth and mobilities which have further shaped the research methodology.

5.2.3 Methodological positioning of youth
This thesis has recognised the problems of presenting ‘youth’ as a homogeneous group, situated between the realms of childhood and adulthood. This ambiguity in status where identity, rights and responsibilities are not clearly defined (Coleman et
Leysnol (2002a) argued the researcher’s biggest problem is understanding young people’s lives from their perspective and transferring this meaning from one field (context) to another (academic). Traditional social research techniques have been criticised for their separation of subject and object, where research has essentially been ‘us’ and ‘them’ reinforcing the notion of children and young people as ‘other’ (Valentine et al., 2001). All research accounts are, however, mediated by the teller’s experience and thus debates have emerged over the politics and ethics in research particularly with young people and children (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). Coleman et al. (2004) have argued that often there are inequalities in communication between young people and adults and this has led to calls for a ‘more flexible, people-centred approach’ to researching young people (Miles, 2000), fuelled by a belief that research should be with children and young people rather than on or about them (Fraser et al., 2004).

New techniques focussed around participatory research have sought to ensure young people’s voices are heard and recognised as agents not objects (Tisdall, 2005). Research with children and young people has previously benefited from a multi method and participatory approach (Hart, 1997; Cahill, 2007) where a variety of methods will engage participants in research in a way most suited to them and lead to a rich data set (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). Leyshon (2002a) used a range of qualitative techniques to explore youth identity, allowing young people to express themselves in different ways. He claimed they were successful first because they allowed young people space to talk, and second because they engaged their interest (Leyshon, 2002a).

For example, Marshall and Rossman (1999) have argued that some younger youth may be self conscious, and can be unwilling communicators and, therefore, may be unresponsive during interview, responding better through participant observation or mobile methods. Understanding the relationship between leisure, identity and lifestyle and recognising their spatiality was achieved within this thesis through ethnographic techniques, essentially mapping the social world.
The research methodology used in this thesis adopted reflexive principles which recognise the problems of interpreting and representing young people’s actions and meanings. As Matthews et al. (2000a) have argued, however, the use of appropriate methodologies should get researchers closer to young people’s worlds. The shape of youth cultural formations is reflected in the choice of methods which included forum analysis recorded rides, semi-structured group and individual interviews, and observations of events and gatherings.

5.2.4 Mobility and mobile methods debates

The final theoretical influence of the research methodology is drawn from research on mobilities and mobile methods. The use of mobile methods within social constructivist epistemologies is an emerging form of social research (Murray, 2007). This section presents a rationale for the utilisation of mobile methods and explains the role of a mobile methodology within this research.

This thesis recognises the changing connections and distinctions occurring within and through the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006). First, through a departure from ‘static’ social science the mobilities paradigm challenges the ontological distinction between people and place reproducing boundaries as fluid and unfixed, whilst also acknowledging patterns of connection and disconnection made and unmade through performance and practice in space (Sheller and Urry, 2006). These theoretical concerns with the making of space through movement have been accompanied by a geographical methodological interest in the influence of place and movement on the knowledge produced during the research process and have led to an interest in mobile research methods.

For some, mobile methods represent a means of capturing mobilities, observing and mapping the movements of people between places (Larsen et al., 2006), whilst for others, a mobile method represents a way of harnessing the socio-spatial relations which occur through mobility. The disparities in the application and indeed the reasons for employing a mobile research technique highlight a second paradoxical struggle of whether the use of a mobile method implies an acceptance of a mobile methodology. By this, the thesis is questioning whether the rationale for a researcher adopting a
method is merely for its data elicitation advantages, for example, to overcome power relations or for pragmatic reasons. Or whether the rationale is a methodological or epistemological stance which acknowledges a change in the type of knowledge created through mobility underpins this choice of method. Furthermore these two rationales may be distinct or inherently connected. An a priori discussion of the intention of a mobile method within this research will unravel these complexities, and resolve within this research the distinction between employing a mobile method or methodology.

Essentially the use of mobile methods in the form of recorded rides and participant observation reflects the wider conceptualisation and framing of the research through the relationship between lifestyle, identity and space. Adams’ (2001) account of the changing ideologies of walking instigated a methodological reflection on the different ideologies of mobility held by youth mountain bikers, and in essence how participants construct these spaces through a set of ideologies based upon particular types of mobility. To understand this place experience, Adams (2001:186) argued, is inherently complex; ‘...knowledge arises from actions and experiences thus present innumerable shades of differentiation depending on what one is doing in a place’. Whilst Spinney (2007:42) has claimed cycling, as an embodied practice, ‘emphasises a multisensory understanding of place’. In one sense, employment of a mobile methodology allows for the recognition of certain aspects of mobility that contribute to place experience, and as Adams (2001) has observed, that in turn create social differences and landscape meaning.

Second, a mobile methodology offers scope for recognising the changing social relations which occur through mobilities. Therefore, as Murray (2007) has argued, activities are sometimes so embedded that to take them out of context limits the data, and removes the relationship between interviews and the emotional and social space being discussed. For Anderson (2004:257), social identity is tied to particular places, and his methodology reflected this through his claims that ‘a process harnessing these placed-practices has the effect of developing social understandings of knowledge into socio-spatial understandings of knowledge’. In this way, observing, interviewing, and moving with participants in context acknowledges the relationship between participant and space whilst additionally providing new layers of understanding and interpretation.
In addition, researching in ‘place’ (Sin, 2003) can be effective for both recruiting participants, and for eliciting knowledge.

The thesis adopted a mobile methodological approach, utilising particular forms of mobile and space based methods for several clearly defined reasons. Whilst the method provided a means of eliciting additional data, its focus was on the constitutive co-ingredients of people and place (Adams, 2001; Casey, 2001), coupled with the change in social relations which occur through mobility. In addition, the utilisation of a mobile methodology facilitated an entrance into the cycling spaces of young people, but as is shown in section 5.4.5 mobility in its literal sense was only a part of this process.

Thus the thesis is informed by debates over researching with young people and influenced by a growing acknowledgement of the socio-spatial construction of research accounts. Section 5.4.1 – 4.7 illustrates how these theoretical foundations along with subtle realism and an ethnographic standpoint influenced the research design, but first the research site is introduced in section 5.3.1

5.3.1 The Bedgebury case study

Sustainable forestry in the UK now incorporates social and environmental dimensions, which are central to the principles of modern sustainable development and as a metatext reflect society and nature relations as a two way interaction between forestry and people (O’Brien, 2001). Whilst commentators and policy makers have addressed a discourse of social exclusion in the countryside more generally, the Forestry Commission has placed an increasing emphasis on the social dimension of forestry in what they broadly define as ‘social forestry’. This includes efforts to involve local communities in decision making; empower ownership and increase public participation in under-represented groups (O’Brien, 2001). Forestry has additionally been linked to social regeneration and rural development particularly within disadvantaged communities, shifting the focus from the environmental to the social dimensions of multi functional forestry (Kitchen et al., 2004). Bedgebury Forest in Kent represents an example of how social forestry policy has transformed a previously inaccessible timber forest, to a public health resource and leisure destination through the Active Woods scheme.
Bedgebury Forest is in a rural location on the border between Kent and East Sussex, approximately 16 miles northwest of the town of Hastings and 12 miles south east of Tunbridge Wells (see figure 5.1). The forest is next to the main A21 dual carriageway which links Hastings and the surrounding coastal area with London and the M25.

In 2005, the Forestry Commission received a £700,000 grant from Sport England and the Big Lottery fund to redevelop Bedgebury Forest under the Active Woods initiative to create what the Forestry Commission term ‘one of the largest, multi-activity, outdoor sport and healthy living sites in South East England’ (O’Brien, 2005b:39). Funding was used to convert the 850 ha timber producing forest into a centre for cycling, walking, equestrian, orienteering and adventure play, with particular emphasis on the healthy and active lifestyles for people of all ages and all abilities. Alongside the ‘active’ forest is Bedgebury Pinetum. Covering 320 hectares, with 10,000 trees it is heralded as one of the most comprehensive collections of conifers on one site in the world, listed as a category two landscape, meriting national importance, by English Heritage (Forestry Commission, 2008b). As one of two national arboreta, The Forestry Commission has claimed Bedgebury’s mission is ‘to connect people with trees and improve their quality of life’ (Forestry Commission, 2008c). These two landscapes it has been claimed interact, combining the peace and tranquillity of the Pinetum with the exciting and active forest to create a unique environment for visitors (Jennings, 2005).
Mountain biking has been one of the principal activities promoted as part of the ‘active’ forest at Bedgebury and has seen several infrastructural developments as shown in appendix 1. The site can be navigated by an all ability, all weather 10km family cycle track (see figure 5.2), with cycle hire, cycle washing facilities, cycle maintenance courses and riding skills tuition provided by an on-site cycle shop. A second route through the forest is provided by a more challenging 13km singletrack which weaves around the family trail (see figure 5.3). The site also hosts a freeride area combining raised wooden northshore sections (See figure 5.4 and 5.5), lower ‘baby’ northshore (see figure 5.6) for beginner riders, and a dirt jump area (see figure 5.7).

The Active England programme was created to fund projects which encourage new engagements with sport and recreation (with particular emphasis on groups recognised as under-represented identified as women, people over 45 years of age, black and ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities and young people); to create sustainable, multi activity environments for sport and physical activity; and to advance innovative approaches to achieving these goals (Hall Aitken, 2007). It is claimed the ultimate outcome for Active England is to ‘contribute to raising the number of times each week that people participate in 30 or 60 minutes of moderate physical activity (through sport)’ (Hall Aitken, 2007:33). 245 Active England projects were funded in 2005, five of which were within the woodlands sector delivered by the Forestry Commission as Active Woods projects.
Figure 5.2: Bedgebury Family Trail  
Source: Authors own

Figure 5.3: Bedgebury Single-track Trail  
Source: Authors own

Figure 5.4: Bedgebury Freeride Area (Northshore)  
Source: Authors own

Figure 5.5: Bedgebury Freeride Area (Northshore)  
Source: J.B. Graphics

Figure 5.6: Bedgebury Freeride Area (‘Baby’ Northshore)  
Source: Authors own

Figure 5.7: Bedgebury Freeride Area (Dirt Jumps)  
Source: jabonline.myfastforum.org
Active Woods projects have two principal aims; to increase physical activity levels in key under-represented groups and to increase participation in sport and physical activity more generally (O’Brien, 2005b). Through Active Woods the Forestry Commission and Sport England aimed to encourage new active engagements with woodlands and countryside spaces amongst target groups and importantly, seek to ensure these engagements are maintained. So, for example, Active England projects focussed on young people should offer new and unusual activities that involve learning and fun, are low cost, and are accessible (Hall Aitken, 2007) to encourage continued participation.

16% of Active England projects commissioned focussed specifically on young people (Hall Aitken, 2007), although Bedgebury Active Woods project was targeting under-represented groups more generally. Mountain biking developments at Bedgebury did, however, demonstrate a specific emphasis on engaging young people. Regular youth cycle training Go Ride courses were run by British Cycling trained coaches through the Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club. The cycle club also co-ordinated annual youth cross country mountain bike races and promoted youth membership through discounted fees. In addition the freeride area is orientated towards informal use by youth mountain biking styles of dirt jump, downhill and freeride yet also attracts some youth BMX riders. The developments were seeking to increase participation by both children and young people.

Monitoring and evaluation is a key part of the Active England initiatives to ensure the benefits of particular projects are known and the delivery of an initiative is of an appropriate standard. Whilst Sport England required projects to demonstrate ‘value for money’ (Hall Aitken, 2007:45), including measuring the success of sites by comparing key performance indicators for each £10,000 of spend, the Forestry Commission have been keen to demonstrate the benefits of outdoor recreation for health and wellbeing and secure public funding and investment in forms of forestry linked to the contemporary political concern over health and wellbeing (see Forestry Commission, 2005).

The Social Research Group of Forest Research co-ordinated the evaluative research on all Active Woods sites, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative work to
provide the most effective evaluation of the extent to which the project meets its initial aims. This thesis forms a qualitative element of the monitoring and evaluation of the Active Woods project at Bedgebury Forest in Kent. The following section documents and critiques the results of several on-site quantitative surveys performed by Forest Research at Bedgebury Forest during the period 2005 to 2007.

5.3.2 Quantitative evaluation at Bedgebury
To monitor the success of the Bedgebury Active Woods project, Forest Research conducted quantitative face to face questionnaires on site. In addition to the quantitative questionnaires, Forest Research conducted focus group research with 10 members of a health walk group at Bedgebury. 249 quantitative surveys were first undertaken before developments on site in 2005 to gain a baseline of information on the types of visitor to Bedgebury to reveal those visitor types who were currently absent. Subsequently, 149 questionnaires completed in August 2006 monitored the change in characteristics of visits to Bedgebury after infrastructure improvements were in place and Bedgebury Forest was officially opened to the public in May 2006. Forest Research claim almost 94,000 people were estimated to have visited Bedgebury in the year 2006/2007 (Forest Research, no date), and, therefore, the questionnaire results for this period are representative of less than 2% of the total estimated visitor numbers.

Results from the questionnaire survey showed Bedgebury was an important site for providing physical activity opportunities for some under-represented groups identified by Sport England. In 2006, over half of visitors were women and just under half of visitors were over 45 years of age (O’Brien, 2007). Both before and after developments, however, there were small numbers of visitors from black and ethnic minorities with 98% of respondents describing themselves as White British and only 18% of visitors had incomes of £20k a year or less (O’Brien, 2007). There are low numbers of black and ethnic minority communities in the local area\(^2\), and the area is

\(^2\) E.g. Data from the Census, 2001 shows 94% of residents in Tunbridge Wells local authority area are White British compared to the English national average of 87% (Office for National Statistics, 2001).
characterised by household incomes higher than the national average. In addition to these findings, the surveys reported low numbers of young people visiting the forest. This apparent absence of young people at Bedgebury is discussed below.

As part of the Active Woods developments, Bedgebury provided a number of activities which appealed to, and proved popular with young people. Although Forest Research identified young people, particularly those under than 16 years of age as a target visitor group, those under 16 years of age were not included in the quantitative survey. Of those who took part in the Bedgebury visitor survey in 2006 only 21% of respondents were under the age of 35, and three percent of the respondents (four people) were under the age of 25 (O’Brien, 2007). It is not known how many of these respondents were under 18 years of age. In 2005, prior to opening, none of the respondents were under 25 years of age (O’Brien, 2006).

Young people accessing the site for mountain biking were almost entirely absent from these surveys. Surveys were largely performed around the visitor centre and car park areas, rather than in the forest itself. As is shown in Chapter 3, young people often access leisure space through different means, via alternative routes or at unusual times (see Bell et al., 2003) and may not use the visitor centre facilities. Initial observations of mountain biking at Bedgebury revealed the visitor centre was not often used by young people (see section 6.2.1) and, therefore, users may not have been captured using this method of sampling.

It is claimed that being ‘in tune’ with the target group, knowing what motivates them to become involved in an activity is key to a successful Active England project (Hall Aitken, 2007:36), and thus it became important to investigate what shapes these engagements and how they are mediated through wider projects of lifestyle and identity. By exploring the lives of youth mountain bikers at Bedgebury employing qualitative research methods, this thesis is directly responding to the Active England agenda, capturing those who were absent from previous monitoring but yet who regularly participate in physical activity in local spaces.

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3 E.g. Gross annual pay in Tunbridge Wells local authority area is £31,000 compared to the English national average of £25,500 (Office for National Statistics, 2008).
5.3.3 Positionality and research relations

Neal and Walters (2006:185) have claimed who we are and how we are perceived has a direct relation to the ‘truths’ we are told by respondents in research. Aull Davies (1999) observed how positivist efforts towards objectivity have encouraged techniques to make the researcher inconspicuous so as to avoid the dangers of reactivity. Durkheim (1938:32) claimed that ‘...our political and religious beliefs and our moral standards carry with them an emotional tone that is not characteristic of our attitude toward physical objects; consequently, this emotional character infects our manner of conceiving and explaining them’.

Such arguments seem to encourage researchers to cover up their pasts, and hide their subjectivities, however, many have questioned whether hiding our selves would lead to objectivity, or indeed enhance the quality of research (Aull Davies, 1999; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). It appears problematic to assume researchers can become this detached. The processes of negotiation, sustained contact and a deep level of investigation move ethnography beyond professionalism to become personal and social tasks (Coffey, 1999). Thus, researchers should expose the ‘hidden scripts’ (Sachs, 1996:633) that shape understandings about the qualitative research by addressing the positionality of the thesis as part of a government funded project managed by Forest Research and my own personal researcher position. Thus the research is not a neutral, value-free process (Cheek, 2005).

As discussed in section 5.2.1 researchers are in some degree connected to the research object (Aull Davies, 1999) regardless of the paradigm within which they are situated. Connections are intrinsic in order to fully grasp a research topic and answer the questions which have led us there. Social research within constructivist paradigms has often been the result of an intersubjective research process and ethnography acknowledges that we are connected and involved in the social and cultural relations where other methods do not (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). These connections and involvements are inherently bound up in political networks of power, and consequently ethics and become increasingly important when undertaking ethnographic research with traditionally disempowered young people (Fraser et al., 2004).
Typically, control is placed in the hands of the researcher, who has power to define the field, the power to impose on the time/space of others, and the power within academic settings to define a field worthy of inquiry (Katz, 1994). Holt, (2004:13) has claimed, however, that some of these ethical complexities can be tackled through employing what she terms ‘empowering research relations’. Here, she has argued that the fluidity of role performance and identity positions during the research process represents a shifting of power relations, which, if harnessed, can be beneficial for the relationship between researcher and researched (Holt, 2004).

This research attempted to empower the respondents, allowing them freedom to define the research situation as much as possible. The respondents were responsible for setting the time, place and length of interview, for choosing their own pseudonyms, and for choosing the form as group or individual encounters. Mobile methods were employed to allow participants to ‘show’ the researcher how the forest was used by them and similarly the form of these recorded rides was largely defined by participants, through recording these experiences, the participants were, in some sense aware that the researcher was always there.

In an attempt to address the ethical issues surrounding power inequalities between researcher, researched, and gatekeepers in recruitment of participants, young people were approached directly, wherever possible, to empower young people as the key decision makers as to their involvement in the process (France, 2004). The process of meeting and recruiting respondents involved a dynamic and often blurred relationship between the ‘researcher’ and ‘mountain biker’ identities and an account of these role relationships follows.

Central to the power relations occurring in research with young people is the self identity of the researcher and the negotiation of roles. Researchers must engage in tactical and political role adoption in order to communicate effectively with various audiences and gain the maximum opportunity for the research. Maintaining these multiple self projects involves a careful balancing act between ethical and moral considerations and research benefits in order to avoid role conflicts, particularly when involving young people. Fleming (1995), for example, has discussed the problems of adopting a teacher-taught relationship with young people and the initial social distance
this caused. He goes on to explain how he overcame this through his appearance in similar clothing to those worn by his participants, and adaptation of speech and behaviour, through which he began to develop a rapport. Such techniques proved valuable within this context, and whilst acknowledging its effects must not be overemphasised; with groups of young people, appearance does matter.

As a young researcher, around ten years older than the youngest participants, aspects of identity supported a more natural entry into groups. This did not guarantee acceptance or indeed any form of privileged access or insider knowledge, but merely lent the opportunity to become involved in lifestyle activities that may not be so far from the researchers own.

The interplay between the roles of researcher, mountain biker and being female were particularly important during the research process. This ‘role playing’ (Crang and Cook, 1995:27) was a dynamic process where identities were made and remade through the research process. As a member of Bedgebury Cycle Club, the researcher experienced a largely male dominated culture, during the time of involvement there was only one other regularly participating female cycle club member and as an independent mountain biker, cycled only with other male riders.

For Wheaton (2002:252) her abilities as an accomplished windsurfer and, therefore, as an ‘insider’ were vital in gaining access to a male dominated world as a covert researcher, however, she claimed at times she was too involved in the core of the subculture to access particular subgroups. In this fieldwork experience, it is argued different processes were at work. As a fairly inexperienced mountain biker the researcher was able to understand the experiences of other novice riders but similarly able to connect with experienced riders through empowering young people to show how mountain biking performs for them. This research was less about accessing a culture of elites, but rather accessing and understanding a particular group of mountain bikers through research techniques which were sensitive to youth. As Holt (2004:13) has asserted ‘power relations between children and adults are not reducible to the powerless and powerful’. In some sense the researcher’s position as a less experienced rider shifted power to participants who acclaimed the authority on the topic, as such this naive identity was often invoked to encourage a more fluid interaction.
Although many members of Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club and indeed many actors in the field were aware of the researcher’s position interactions were approached through a mountain biking identity. The researcher joined the cycle club as a beginner mountain biker and the experiences reflect this position. When potential participants were approached, the researcher approached them as a mountain biker. It was important to evoke this identity as part of participant observation and share some of the experiences of those who participate and shape their identities and lifestyle around involvement in mountain biking at Bedgebury and in mountain biking culture more generally. As Wheaton (2002) has claimed, the methodological distinction between insider or outsider in ethnographic research is blurred, because identities are multiple and shifting.

Nevertheless, the researcher also had to address the fact that the research was funded by Forest Research and, therefore, linked with the Forestry Commission. Acting as a Forest Research representative was a position which required particularly sensitive negotiation. For example, when approaching participants the Forestry Commission was mentioned as a means of verifying the research, and some young people assumed that, subject to discussions the researcher had the power to make changes on site or implement some of their ideas discussed during interview or authorise behaviours. Similarly this role became a limitation when respondents may have held back on criticisms of the Forestry Commission or were unwilling to discuss any illicit behaviour. Fleming (1995) touched on this in his accounts of research with young people, and the conflict of roles which accompanied illicit or illegal activities. Within this research, there was undoubtedly the possibility of encountering activities such as illegal trespassing. This could have challenged the role as Forest Research researcher, the researcher’s moral standpoint or position as a mountain biking participant. Given these potential problems it became important that respondents were reassured by anonymity so and felt at ease to divulge particular types of information. Participant observation techniques were crucial in maintaining a level of trust before interviewing began.

Some have argued that there is the potential for published research reports to increase the stigma and shame for whole groups of children and young people, such as
teenagers (Alderson, 2004). Research may replicate the inequalities in power relations and act as reinforcement for stereotypes amongst these groups. This thesis intends to develop new understandings of young people, instead developing a debate over the role of countryside space in lifestyle and identity in youth. The thesis documents the forms and features of young people’s participation in forest recreation through mountain biking and in this way is providing young people with a voice so that relevant planning and policy makers will be better informed about the nature of youth engagements in countryside space.

As travel has been highlighted as a significant constraint to young people visiting countryside leisure space (Roker and Richardson, 2003; Community Heritage Initiative, 2004; Countryside Agency, 2005) each participant received a £10 bonus bond voucher to cover time spent during interviews and their travel costs.

5.4.1 Research design
To fully understand the meanings of mountain biking in countryside space for young people, the methodology employed a layering of methods, over an extended period of time, with the objective of achieving thick description from multiple perspectives. Rooted in subtle realism, these ethnographic techniques aim to represent the multiple realities and independent selective constructions of mountain bikers at Bedgebury. This section provides a description of the research design, with issues relating to particular research techniques discussed in more detail under their respective headings below. Broadly, the research aimed to examine the role of countryside recreation in the link between lifestyle, leisure practice and identity formation in young people. The research examines the leisure lifestyles of a range of young people between the ages of 13-25 years who engage in mountain biking to varying degrees and in multiple forms through three mains aims. This age range accounts for the extension of youth identified by (Roberts, 2006) but recognises the variations in the experience of youth occurring within this range.

The first aim was to examine the importance of leisure space in understandings of youth identity and lifestyle and the second aim was to address the neglect of countryside leisure in the theorisation of youth identity and lifestyle. These aims
required an approach which acknowledges the role of space in leisure experience and thus research was conducted in leisure space. This was achieved through participant observation and recorded rides with participants, which were further probed during follow up semi-structured interviews in cycle spaces.

The third aim, to understand the experiences of young people rather than adults in the performance of countryside leisure and specifically of mountain biking involves understanding the lived culture of young people involved in mountain biking and required a study of meanings. Therefore, the primary data collection method involved semi-structured in depth interviews with participants. These were reinforced by participant observation in both structured and unstructured engagements, as well as participation in online forum discussions. These methods represent central tenets of the ethnographic approach.

The outcome of this design was a mix of interview and participant observation types, interview locations and mobile methods discussed in sections 5.4.4 – 5.4.6. Thus the research has generated several types of data in the form of field notes, detailed transcripts, notes on participant observation, club meeting minutes, forums discussion board transcripts, pictures, posters and other media identified by participants through the differing research methods discussed individually and in more depth in the following sections.

5.4.2 The sample

The sample method reflected the issues discussed so far and was most akin to purposive sampling, and as determined by Bryman (2004) was achieved in two parts. Theoretical sampling (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967), where individuals were selected “according to their (expected) level of new insights for the developing theory, in relation to the state of theory elaboration so far” (Flick, 2005:126) was used as a reflexive approach. This allowed for flexibility and dynamism in the relationship between the research aims and theoretical debates within the literature and the data collected so far. Theoretical sampling was particularly relevant for gaining a broad spectrum of youth mountain bikers. As the data began to reveal important identity and
lifestyle differences between the different disciplines of mountain biking it became important to obtain a variety of mountain biker users.

Snowballing formed the second part of the sampling process as there was no accessible sampling frame for the population (Bryman, 2004). Recruitment of the participants was achieved primarily through participant observation through direct contact in cycling spaces within the forest. Participants were informed of the project through posters, leaflets and information sheets (see appendix 2 for an example) and invited to take part. Recruitment was performed secondarily through snowballing, local advertisements, online forums, cycle club meetings and events.

Initial contact with pilot interviewees was made through attendance at Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club meetings. A presentation about the research was made to the club committee and flyers and information sheets were distributed. Club members were valuable participants because of their strong links with cycling space at Bedgebury and, therefore, all club members were contacted via email regarding the research. Posters and flyers advertising for participants were displayed on site in the cycle hire shop and main visitor centre and additionally at local cycle shops and newsagents. Posters and flyers were also distributed by British Cycling to all affiliated cycle groups in the South East Region. In addition, contact was made with participants through posts on an online youth mountain biking forum (jabonline.myfastforum.org) with permission from site administrators. This forum is openly accessible to all, and thus represented an important online community of mountain bikers who had expressed an interest in mountain biking space in the Kent and wider South East area through participation in the forum.

The research strategy aimed to achieve both width and depth in the sample, gaining as many insights into experiences of youth mountain biking as possible, whilst focusing on obtaining an in depth understanding. To obtain the width it was particularly important to gain a broad range of ages, level of experience, degree of involvement and gender mix, however this was not a strict realist attempt at achieving a representative sample, rather accounts were acknowledged as selective constructions of reality. It was initially decided that the research would obtain a sample of around 20-25 participants, however, as cross country and DDF styles of youth mountain
biking emerged as different, this was increased to 40 participants, to gain sufficient breadth amongst each youth population at Bedgebury and achieve theoretical saturation. Categories and themes associated with the research aims were identified and explored through the research process until the properties of these themes were understood and the data replicated these findings. All participants must have visited Bedgebury Forest at least once. Participants between the ages of 13 and 25 years were included in the sample to accommodate a wide variety of ‘youth’ experiences.

Attendance at youth cycle course Go-Ride as well as involvement in the cycle club formed the pilot stage of the participant observation. These provided provisional information on the types of cycling spaces occurring at Bedgebury and the ways in which young people performed mountain biking and related identity and lifestyle activities in these spaces. Two initial pilot interviews were performed with members of the Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club, one group interview and one individual interview. The pilot interviews led to refining of the research themes and a review of the interview format to include the consideration of interview space, and the benefits of group interviews, discussed further in section 5.4.6.

5.4.3 The participants

In total, 40 participants between the ages of 13 and 25 participated in the research process, of whom 36 were male and 4 were female. Therefore, approximately 10% of the sample was female replicating similar profiles of participation of women in mountain biking in the UK (Ruff and Mellor, 1993).

Figure 5.8 shows the breakdown of participants by age. The mean age of participants was 17 years old; the majority were between the ages of 15 and 18 years old.
The sample included young people who had previously or who currently visited Bedgebury Forest for mountain biking. Twenty per cent of participants claimed to visit Bedgebury for mountain biking once a week or more and 38% scheduled a visit once or twice a month. Fifteen per cent of the sample had only visited the site on one occasion. The sample aimed to obtain a mix of formal and informal mountain bike participation, and this mix was achieved; ten participants were members of Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club, three participants were members of external cycle clubs and the remaining 27 participated in mountain biking independently. In addition, participants were differentiated according to their mountain biking discipline and included some BMX riders.

According to participants, mountain biking lifestyles were split into two veins; dirt jump, downhill and freeride forms of mountain biking (collectively referred to within this thesis as DDF) and cross country mountain bikers. 12 of the 40 respondents classified themselves as interested in a combination of dirt jumping, downhill or freeride mountain biking, with five of these respondents describing themselves solely as dirt jump riders and two as BMX dirt jumpers. Dirt jumping involved cycling at speed over a set of mud mounds and performing tricks in the air, downhill mountain biking was performed on steep slopes and on difficult terrain, and freeride mountain bikers negotiated high wooden structures and performed tricks. Young people grouped DDF forms of mountain biking because of the use of similar equipment and shared

![Figure 5.8: Age of Participants](image-url)
attitudes to competition, risk and the use of space. The BMXers who accessed Bedgebury freeride area were also considered a part of this community, although as part of the fringe because of the difference in equipment and performance of tricks, however the significance of BMX is explored further in Chapter 6 (6.3.3) and again in Chapter 7 (7.2.1 and 7.2.3).

Fourteen of the 40 respondents indicated that they practiced cross country mountain biking and seven of the 40 participants indicated an interest in a combination of both DDF and cross country mountain biking, but practised them as separate activities. Cross country mountain biking used ‘hardtail’\(^4\) mountain bikes and involved following a designated cycle trail often cycling over long distances. The table below shows the different leisure identities related to mountain biking disciplines indicated by participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>No of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMX Dirt Jumping</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirt Jumping</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirt Jumping, Freeride and Downhill (DDF)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country and DDF</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.1: Participant Leisure Identities*

These different youth mountain biking lifestyles were performed in a variety of different cycle spaces. Of those 40 mountain bikers who took part, 25 respondents maintained they participated in mountain biking at least once a week, with eight respondents claiming to use cycle spaces every day. The remaining seven participants participated less frequently accessing mountain biking spaces at least once a month.

\(^4\) ‘Hardtail’ mountain bikes have front suspension but no rear suspension.
All 40 participants took part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher either individually or in groups, which were performed in different cycling spaces as shown in Table 5.2. The advantages and justification for this strategy is discussed in section 5.4.6. In addition, each participant was observed during participant observation or took part in a recorded ride with the researcher according to their riding discipline (see section 5.4.5). The participant observation was performed in various settings as shown in Table 5.1. Most participant observation involved informal mountain biking in the freeride and single-track mountain biking areas of Bedgebury Forest. Formal participation in British Cycling organised Go Ride and Go Race events were also included in observations as well as observations through participation in organised club rides. In addition, Table 5.2 displays the spatial distribution and types of interviews performed in different cycling spaces.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnographic Technique</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview types</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Bedgebury Meeting Room</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Cycle shop</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews in Groups</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews in Groups</td>
<td>Bedgebury Meeting Room</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews in Cycle Space (Total)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation Observation types</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFCC meetings</td>
<td>Bedgebury Meeting Room</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFCC Rides</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFCC Open Day</td>
<td>Local School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go Ride PO</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go Race PO</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDF area observations</td>
<td>Forest (Freeride)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-track observations</td>
<td>Forest (Singletrack)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal leisure observations</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobile Methods</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanied Rides</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccompanied Rides</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompanied PO in Cycle Space</td>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO in Cycle Space (Total)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Data Collection Techniques

### 5.4.4 Performing participant observation

Participation observation within this research scoped the grounds upon which the research was based and was instrumental in shaping the direction of the research. Participation observation as ‘immersion in culture’ (Fetterman, 1998:35) was performed in a non-continuous form, with regular visits to the research setting extending over approximately two years and ranging in frequency from once a month to three or four times a week. The form of the participant observations and the
frequency of occurrence are listed in table 5.2. Between these visits, contact with the ‘researched’ community was maintained through participation in a local online forum (jabonline.myfastforum.com). Ward Thompson et al. (2006) have suggested using web blogs as an alternative to conventional survey methods, to encourage young people to share their experiences and fill a gap in knowledge on the role of youth leisure space. Discussion topics on the forum were often mentioned during interviews, and the forum was an important part of some youth mountain biking lifestyles and this is discussed further below.

The initial stage of any participant observation is gaining access into the particular culture to be studied. Access to a community of riders at Bedgebury was initially gained through membership of the Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club. The researcher attended monthly cycle club meetings, social events, and began to explore the field through attending weekly club cycle rides, as well as cycling at Bedgebury independently. Through Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club invitations were gained to join British Cycling organised youth mountain biking days ‘Go-Ride’ where the researcher participated as a ‘youth rider’ in coach led activities in Bedgebury Forest. These sessions provided a way into parts of the youth mountain biking community and allowed the researcher to understand the forest with young people, although none of the participants were recruited through participation in this course. In addition, through contacts made within the cycle club the researcher assisted (and participated) at youth cross country race events ‘Go Race’ and attended club events at local schools. The club provided a means to recruit several initial participants by which to snowball.

Participation in an online mountain biking forum (www.jaboline.myfastforum.org) provided a separate thread of research through participant observation. Participants invited the researcher to join the forum to discuss riding at Bedgebury as well as to advertise for potential participants. Participants of the forum discussed a range of local mountain biking issues, such as trail conditions, equipment or other lifestyle issues, commenting on discussion topics or ‘threads’ through individual ‘posts’. 14 participants in this research who also accessed the forum gave permission for their posts to be discussed during interviews and used as an additional layer of research (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). The forum was checked weekly for a period of
approximately 18 months, some participants would ‘post’ every day but usually once or twice a week.

During May to September 2007 the researcher was in the field at least once or twice a week, and almost every weekend. Through this sustained presence the researcher became familiar with popular youth mountain biking spaces at Bedgebury, and consequently many of the youth mountain bikers and began recruitment of participants through direct contact in the field. A research diary became the central instrument within the participant observation acting to contextualise the research experiences. It included notes taken at committee meetings, field notes, and the researchers post ride reflections. In addition, forum transcripts, posters and photographs added to the body of the participant observation.

Conducting participant observation in cycling spaces became crucial for exploring lifestyle and space particularly with riders involved in DDF forms of mountain biking, discussed in more depth in Chapter 6. Much of this participant observation was performed as a mobile researcher through cycling in multiple forest spaces. The mobility element of the research is discussed below.

### 5.4.5 Mobile methods in practice

In keeping with Spinney (2006:716) it was a central methodological concern ‘to keep the socialities of cycling in the context of their inherent mobility as far as possible’. As such all participants were asked if they would be happy to take part in a recorded cycle ride or participant observation session in Bedgebury Forest before the interview took place. Five participants took part in unaccompanied recorded rides and 10 participants participated in accompanied cycle rides. The remaining 25 participants took part in accompanied observation sessions in cycling space (see table 5.1).

Mobile methods were employed where appropriate, however, rides characterised by movement within the forest were restricted to approximately half of riders. Participants who chose to perform dirt jump, downhill or freeride (DDF) versions of mountain biking were not asked to participate in recorded rides due to a number of factors. First, these forms of mountain biking were characterised by high speed, skilled mobility followed by periods of inactivity, and observations of each other. Recording these
movements was considered an unnecessary distraction during an already high risk activity and, therefore, these methods were deemed too high a risk for both the participant and the researcher. The nature of mobility in this context made it important for respondent and researcher to be immobile. Instead, participants preferred to be static, in cycling space surrounded by equipment, lifestyle symbols and each other. This meant that participants were free to interact with other riders, perform tricks or show the researcher how they used the space. As such 17 youth mountain bikers participated in recorded participant observation performed in the freeride area of Bedgebury Forest followed by a semi-structured interview. Four riders participated in accompanied observation sessions in different parts of the forest such as in the cycle shop or in other forest cycle space where similar activities occurred including cycle tricks, and cycle maintenance but in different types of cycle space. All interviews were performed in a type of cycling space as Spinney (2006) has advocated, either indoor in a club room or cycle shop, or outdoor in forest cycle spaces.

Recorded rides were either accompanied by the researcher or unaccompanied when the participants preferred to ride with friends, without the researcher present. During these rides, the researcher was able to record their opinions through a ‘bike mic’, small microphones attached by a lapel to clothing and recorded using a small digital recording device. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their experience as they rode through different parts of the forest, for example, on accompanied rides, researcher and rider would visit particular forest spaces and discuss the characteristics of these spaces and the reasons for visiting particular spaces over others. Similarly, on unaccompanied rides participants would often discuss the negotiation of a route or exchange riding experiences.

The two forms of riding produced two different kinds of data. During accompanied rides, participants would often show and explain which spaces of Bedgebury Forest were important to them and in this way being mobile presented a technique for understanding use of space, and equally presented a useful method for engaging young people in conversation. On unaccompanied rides, transcripts provide very valuable insights into the changing social relations which occur through mobilities, how young people negotiate mountain biking independently and as a group, as well as providing
insight into the processes involved in choosing space for mountain biking. These mobile methods where hugely important for observing and understanding cross country forms of mountain biking as static participant observation techniques would have been inadequate for riders who travel through a large spatial area.

Conducting mobile methods with cyclists makes several requirements on the researcher assuming they are able bodied and physically and psychologically adept for immersed participation in the sport. In preparation, the researcher became involved in mountain biking at Bedgebury for several months prior to cycling with participants, as Spinney (2006:716) has commented, ‘physical training was equally important to the research and the methodology as both a means and object of insight’.

Participant observation is, however, often criticised as a technique for its failure to get at the intentions behind behaviour and also for its neglect of context (Bryman, 2004). This research overcomes these shortcomings through the employment of in depth semi-structured interviews, and accompanied and unaccompanied rides to question the processes that structured observed behaviour, whilst conducting the research in context. Essentially, the mobile methods and participant observation performed within the leisure space concurred with Kusenbach’s (2003:463) ethnographic principles of go-alongs, where ‘fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their ‘natural’ outings’, and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subject’s stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment’.

5.4.6 Reflections on semi-structured interviews
Semi-structured interviews represented the primary research method, ‘explaining and putting into context what the ethnographer sees and experiences’ (Fetterman, 1998:36). All participants were involved in face to face in depth individual or group interviews. This choice of group or individual interview was particularly appropriate for young people where some may feel more confident to talk as part of a group with their friends, whilst others prefer the privacy of an individual interview (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Principally, group interviews were employed for this behavioural dynamic, encouraging more fluid and forthcoming interactions between researcher and
participants. Group interviews were additionally valuable in maintaining the social context of the mountain biking experiences and performed organically, with groups of young people who performed particular leisure identities through their shared experience of the activity. Thus, as Burgess et al. (1988:310) have contended ‘the importance of small group interviews is that it enables individuals to share in a discussion within a social setting which in many ways mirrors those outside the group’. Abstracting individuals from a particular leisure setting for individual interviews would have ignored the importance of place and context in the experience of leisure. This said, individual interviews remained important for participants who performed leisure individually and allowed participants to reveal their own independent version of events in their own words (Crang and Cook, 1995).

Baxter and Eyles (1997:506) cast doubt over the employment of in depth interviews in research through their heavy emphasis on the employment of techniques to make findings ‘plausible and deserving of attention’. These opinions are overshadowed by others who express more positive opinions on the intrinsic value of these methods in geographical research ‘for investigating complex behaviours, opinions and emotions and for collecting a diversity of experiences (Longhurst, 2003:128).

Interviews adopted a flexible approach to data collection and by giving young people the freedom to choose the style of interaction allowed them more control of communication (Coleman et al., 2004) and facilitated more in depth discussion. Thus interviews were informal in style, in order to offer the most ‘natural’ situation (Fetterman, 1998). Each interview lasted between thirty and seventy minutes. The interview process was explained through an information sheet (see appendix 3) and digitally recorded, for which permission was gained through a consent form (see appendix 4).

Interview themes were identified, developed, mulled, refined and co-constructed through participant observation, pilot interviews and discussions within Chapters 1 - 4. Initial elicitation of key themes identified within Chapters 2, 3 and 4 formed the basis of the interview. Direct observations of youth cycling behaviours at Bedgebury through participation in British Cycling Go Ride courses were particularly influential in developing and adjusting these themes, applying them to the lived realities of youth
mountain bikers. The interview guide was then tested and scrutinised in two pilot interviews, resulting in a revised interview structure and subtle nuances.

Themes discussed in interviews included spaces of leisure, social networks and leisure activities in general, constraints and motivations for visiting Bedgebury, social networks at Bedgebury, attitudes to countryside space and ‘nature’ space, use of woodland space at Bedgebury and user conflict. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by prompt questions such as “how did you get involved in mountain biking?”, “what first attracted you to Bedgebury?”, “tell me about the best places to ride at Bedgebury...how did you discover these?” The interview guide (see appendix 5) provided general discussion points but was used flexibly. Participants were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences and so themes were sometimes addressed in a different order.

The interviews were held in various locations stipulated by the participant during daytime opening hours and recorded using a digital voice recorder. Some interviews were held in a meeting room or cycle shop at Bedgebury visitor centre, however, as recruitment of participants often occurred within the forest itself and logistically it was more feasible, most interviews were conducted in forest space. Interviews conducted in the forest, were shaped by more fluid, organic interactions than those performed in meeting room space consequently producing a more extensive data set, and thus the forest became the preferred primary interview location. Interviews in forest space captured a more embodied interview experience where participants would animate responses by pointing or showing different forest spaces, aspects of biking culture such as equipment, symbols, clothing and interact with other users in the cycling space. Other interviews in indoor forest cycle space such as club meeting rooms or in a cycle shop setting retained a contextual relevance through club affiliation, displays of cycling equipment, cycle maintenance activity and the presence of other mountain bike users. Wheaton (1997) found interviewing within the lifestyle setting constrained the process as participants were often distracted by signs of participation in the sport around them. Some participants became distracted during interviews, but often, exploring these distractions became an important part of building an understanding of the experience of symbols and spaces of mountain biking for young people.
Elwood and Martin (2000) have argued that the place of interviews can have direct implications on issues of positionality and power and that the interview itself produces “microgeographies” of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview. In addition, Sin (2003) has claimed that the interview site can influence the way in which respondents chose to present their identities, and the dynamics between interviewer and interviewee. Thus all forms of interviews were deliberately performed in a form of cycling space, on site, where participants were surrounded by cultural signs and symbols relevant to their own mountain biking lifestyles and identities.

5.4.7 Coding and analysis
All tape recordings of data were transcribed and a coding system developed as part of transcription as the first step in the conceptualisation of data (Bryman and Burgess, 1994). The data from interviews, participant observation and the recorded rides were analysed by developing categories guided by the theoretical literature and through a process of coding the themes and ideas arising from the material. As Flick (2005:297, original emphasis) contended “…the formulation of networks of categories or concepts and the relations between them’ will lead to the development of ‘new’ theory. Although themes began in the reading of theory it was important to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than enforcing predetermmed categories, privileging the voice of the respondent by letting individuals ‘speak for themselves’ (Robinson, 1998:430).

Initially, coding acted to contextualise the data and fieldnotes from participant observation and forum discussion topics were particularly useful in mapping the scene. Emergent themes were identified and coded and phenomena were grouped around three broad themes; identity and lifestyle, identity and space, and contextual codes such as how the sites were accessed or demographic information. Clear divisions became apparent between Dirt jump, downhill and freeriders (DDF) and cross country mountain biking identities and, therefore, themes were analysed and reanalysed according to these tenets. Code names would often reflect those terms identified by the researched community, such as ‘the lycras’ or ‘secret spots’ or reflected theoretical
debates such as conflict and control. A discussion of these themes is presented in the following chapters (6 and 7).

5.5 Ethical and reflexive ethnography: working with young people
Any research involving human subjects has the responsibility to ensure the participants are respected and treated in a moral and ethical way. The problematic relationship between power and knowledge within research is essentially a relationship conducted around ethics. Researchers have a responsibility to consider how respondents will be represented within the research, and how findings could impact on their lives in the future. Warren et al. (2000), for example, have highlighted on a simplistic level the tension between the desire for thick description and the ethical constraints of identity protection for respondents. They referred to the difficulties that occur in maintaining confidentiality, whilst retaining the contextualisation of research accounts. Although anonymity must be given, there is a fine line between changing details and changing the meaning of people’s lived experiences’ (2000:188) in light of the research findings.

In addition to standard ethical procedures, research with young people becomes complicated with complex ethical issues and processes which must be addressed (Valentine, 1999). The research proposal was approved by the University of Brighton Faculty of Science and Engineering Research Ethics Committee in May 2007. The research methodology was subject to rigorous consideration of the ethical implications of all parts of the research methodology to ensure the welfare of both the participants and the researcher. A Criminal Records Bureau check on the researcher was performed for the purpose of this research. The ethics committee considered all the public information used such as posters, flyers and information sheets (see appendices 2 - 5).

All potential participants were provided with written information on the research and the data collection and analysis processes in clear and simple terms (see appendix 3). The researcher and participant discussed this written information to allow the participant to raise any concerns about the interview process. On agreeing to be interviewed, written consent was then obtained from the participant. The consent form (see appendix 4) was verbally explained to participants and verbal consent of the participant was recorded. At the end of the interviews participants were asked if they
wished to discuss any issues further and were invited to comment on the interview process and suggest possible improvements. Members of the visitor service department on site at Bedgebury were also provided with information sheets should any other visitor express an interest in the research.

Confidentiality and the right to privacy are the moral responsibility of the researcher who must fulfil the subject’s expectations according to their informed consent (Kimmel, 1988). At the beginning of each interview the participant was reminded that everything they say would be treated confidentially and that their names and addresses or anything that could identify them and would not appear in the data. They were also reminded that they did not have to answer anything they were uncomfortable about and could stop the interview at any point without giving any reason. This confidentiality was particularly important for discussions with youth mountain bikers potentially involving illegal use of public space and issues of trespassing on private land. Valentine et al. (2001) have maintained that research should strive to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of young people who participate in research particularly where participants are discussing nonconformist behaviour. Thus, information referring to the location of these sites remains undisclosed, and sites have acquired pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Ethical recommendations state parental consent must be sought for conducting research with young people under 16 years of age. For those participants under 16 years of age written parental consent was sought where possible (See appendix 6). Alternatively verbal parental consent was obtained via a recorded telephone conversation between the researcher and the parent and parents were required to confirm their identity during the recorded telephone call. Any personal details such as email addresses were held in a password accessed account and destroyed on completion of the project. The interview records were stored in a locked drawer along with the digital transcriptions, which were stored on a separate disk and will be kept for 10 years as required by University of Brighton data storage policies (University of Brighton, 2006).

A risk assessment was completed (appendix 7) before research began. The researcher carried a mobile phone and a personal safety alarm at all times. A Forestry
Commission representative on site at Bedgebury was always informed of research activity and the researcher checked in and out the visitor centre on arrival and departure. On recorded rides, routes followed recognised trails within the Bedgebury Forest boundary. The researcher was experienced in all trails at Bedgebury and ascertained each individual’s experience prior to departure and requested they do not take undue risk. A first aid kit was carried as well as the contact details of the first aid provider who was always on duty at the site and who would have administered treatment if required. Participant confidentiality remained the main priority, however, participants were made aware that any information obtained that broke adult or child protection laws would be forwarded to other relevant agencies. The research diary acted as a log book, documenting any activities which were considered a potential risk, for example, when a participant commented on the fact the researcher was riding alone, this was recorded in the diary and discussed at a subsequent supervisory meeting.

5.6 Limitations

Whilst the theoretical justification for the number of female participants remains, this research cannot claim to represent an understanding of mountain biking in countryside spaces for young females. Rather the research explores a community of mountain bikers in a particular space and time, of which only a small proportion are female, and thus departs from a rigorous realist sampling strategy.

In addition, the partiality of the accounts which follow is acknowledged. Accounts are not pure, the researchers views and opinions are inherently bound up within research. By acknowledging the subjectivities of these interpretations, however, through reflexive practice, the research process becomes more transparent.

‘...ethnographers cannot take a naïve stance that what they are told is the absolute ‘truth’. Rather, they/we are involved in the struggle to produce inter-subjective truths, to understand why so many versions of events are produced and recited. It is the ways in which people make sense of events around them, and render them true in their own terms, that is most revealing
about how their / our lives are embroiled in larger, social, cultural, economic and political processes.’ (Crang and Cook, 1995:11)

By acknowledging that as an ethnographic researcher you ‘inscribe’ social discourse’ (Geertz 1973:19) and interpretations are made explicit, research can achieve thick description whilst retaining a robust and ethical approach. This practice reflects the subtle realist epistemology that dismisses the forms of realism which assume knowledge is based upon secure foundations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Participant observation and interviews are based upon researcher observation and, therefore, by definition are subject to inherent bias. The research process used observations to ‘refine, reject and reformulate ideas’ (Robinson, 1998:425) they did not aim to be representative, rather, they aimed to understand how individuals experience and understand their own lives (Valentine, 1997).

5.7 Conclusion
This chapter has outlined the methodological approach adopted within this research. It is positioned within the constructivist paradigm, adopting subtle realism as an ontological approach where interpretations and understandings act to make reality knowable. Thus this research privileges these interpretations and understandings over the pursuit of absolute truth.

The value of reflexive thinking is illustrated in Fleming’s (1995) reflections over the balance between ethical or moral choices and the quest for in depth understanding whilst researching young people within a school. He discussed the more controversial moments during researching, and through an acknowledgement of the tensions being faced, new meanings emerge, and choices become better understood. Critically engaging with reflexive methods and monitoring both our own, and others inferences provides additional interpretations and remains crucial to the subtle realist ethnographic project.

The employment of multiple methods reflects both debates within researching with young people, and an interest and justification for mobile methods, and is facilitated through an ethnographic approach. Through a combination of methods which
prioritised ‘conversations in place’ (Anderson, 2004:254) the research has succeeded in capturing a multitude of verbalised and embodied cultural significances which contribute to the understanding of lifestyle and identity of youth mountain bikers in relation to their use of countryside space. As such the research has produced a set of rich data which is now presented in the following chapters.
Chapter 6  Community and culture

6.1  Mapping the scene

This chapter presents an interpretation of youth mountain biking lifestyles through the insights of youth mountain bikers at Bedgebury Forest and outlines the key components of identity and lifestyle that emerged from the analysis of interviews, participant observation, recorded rides and online forum discussions. Exploring the lifestyle practices of youth mountain bikers reveals the norms and values of the youth mountain biking community and how certain tools act to create identity and difference between youth mountain bikers and other adult and youth leisure cultures. Each section explores the narratives of the participants and these accounts are then discussed in relation to wider academic debate at the end of each overall section.

The chapter begins in section 6.2.1 by contextualising the youth experience of mountain biking at Bedgebury introducing the research site, its geographical location and how participants situated Bedgebury within their wider leisure landscapes. This includes an analysis of some participants’ discussions on the local online forum mentioned in Chapter 5 before a discussion of the issues in section 6.2.3. Sections 6.3.1- 6.35 look more closely at how Bedgebury was used by youth mountain bikers, distinguishing between the various lifestyles, and their associated spaces. These sections explore the different spatial characteristics associated with each lifestyle, and the meanings inscribed on these spaces by participants in preparation for further in depth discussions of the issues in Chapter 7. They also identify the key issues which characterise the mountain biking lifestyle groups of DDF, cross country, female mountain bikers and BMX riders.

Sections 6.4.1 – 6.4.3 examine these lifestyles more closely, exploring how youth mountain bikers in general differentiate between themselves and mainstream sporting youth cultures and from adults as part of constructing their identities as ‘alternative’, notably in section 6.4.2 through attitudes towards competition, commitment and
community as part of a process of self othering, Sections 6.5.1 – 6.5.3 explore youth mountain bikers’ attitudes towards consumption, in section 6.5.1 through clothing, and in section 6.5.2 through their attitudes towards equipment. These sections consider the symbolic meaning attached to process of consumption and the resulting implications for youth identities and lifestyles. The final section (6.6), the conclusion, revisits and summarises these debates.

6.2.1 Situating Bedgebury
This section introduces the participants and the research site in relation to the wider locality. It explores how the cycle spaces were accessed, utilised and understood by them, and essentially how leisure was performed ‘in space’ to develop an understanding of how the organisation of cycling space at Bedgebury was experienced by young people. The community of mountain biking was played out in local spaces, but also in local online forums and websites, where riders would discuss equipment, riding techniques and exchange information about local trails or share photos and video sequences demonstrating their skills. This additional lifestyle space is analysed in 6.2.2 and discussed in section 6.2.3.

Living within easy access of countryside spaces, particularly woodlands was one of the most common ways in which young people became involved in mountain biking, as one participant commented: ‘we just wanted to do jumps and so the woods seemed like somewhere we could go and try it out’ [Damien, 18]. The respondents discussed an assemblage of cycling spaces which were visited according to different rationales based upon various factors such as accessibility, ownership, trail quality, and social scene.

Figure 6.1 shows the geographical distribution of the residential addresses of respondents interviewed at Bedgebury. Nineteen respondents lived in towns or cities, whilst the remaining 21 respondents lived in rural areas although these were often close to urban areas. Although participants visited a wide variety of spaces through mountain biking, for many, Bedgebury was considered their ‘local’ cycling spot representing an important woodland space for local mountain bikers and retained a small population of regular youth users.
‘I’m here all the time; it’s definitely my local riding spot’ [Jonny, 25].

Tony: ‘We always ride here. This is as local as it gets for us’

Kenny: ‘Yeah and we see a lot of the same people here who ride here a lot as well’ [Tony, 15 and Kenny, 15].

As discussed later in section 7.3.4, accessing a local spot was important within mountain biking lifestyles and Bedgebury was valued as a local leisure space, but also as a mountain biking destination for young people from further afield. Participants travelled from Dartford, Hastings and London and many of these were regular visitors. The facilities for various forms of mountain biking gave Bedgebury a distinctive status within the South East.
‘It’s the only proper all ability mountain bike park in the South East, before this there was only PORC and that only caters for downhill and dirt jumps and ‘cause the landscape round here, it’s not like Wales it doesn’t have any hills to have purpose built single-track makes it really kind of...unique’ [Jimmy, 18].

‘Round here is some of the best in the country, like I heard from someone who rides for Trek\(^5\) that the single-track are some of the best in the country, definitely like the local area’ [Russell, 16].

As mentioned in the quote above, and explained below in more detail, youth cyclists at Bedgebury described accessing other locally managed cycle spaces as part of their mountain biking lifestyles and compared these to their experiences at Bedgebury. Two sites in particular were mentioned by participants; all cross country participants had accessed Bewl Water, approximately three miles away from Bedgebury, and approximately 20 miles away, Penshurst Off Road Cycling (PORC) provided mountain biking facilities orientated towards dirt jump and downhill disciplines and almost all DDF riders had visited this site. Both of these sites were constructed as ‘non built-up’, ‘countryside’ or ‘rural’ by participants and had relevance and meaning for the respondents, but were frequently discussed in comparison to Bedgebury in terms of differences in the cycling landscapes, accessibility, cost, atmosphere and cycling communities at the sites.

Transport was cited as one of the main constraints by young people accessing mountain biking spaces. Respondents paid between £3 and £5 to enter the site at PORC, and Bewl Water charged £6 for parking. At Bedgebury, public transport was restricted to Etchingham train station situated approximately 4 miles away and although there was no charge for entering the site, car parking at Bedgebury was charged at £7.50 per car\(^6\). Consequently, many participants described using a range of alternative forms of access when using the site. Those who lived locally would usually cycle to Bedgebury including some of whom lived up to 13 miles away in Tunbridge Wells. Cycling represented the cheapest and most accessible form of transport and although issues were raised over the risks of cycling on main roads some participants

\(^5\) This refers to a professional mountain biking team sponsored by Trek mountain bikes.

\(^6\) Price as of 01.02.2009.
viewed this simply as part of the leisure experience, or commented on the fitness benefits of accessing the site in this way. Other methods included travelling by train, travelling by car, either their own, with friends or parents or a combination of these.

‘My mum’s partner drives past here on the way to work, I get the train and cycle or I get a lift with a friend. I basically grab a lift from anyone. To get to Wales a mate’s got a van and we just organise it so like six of us get a lift with him’ [Damien, 18].

In accessing Bedgebury respondents rarely used the formal entrances instead gaining entry through footpaths or from local lay-bys either to avoid the car parking charge or to travel the shortest distance to the freeride area from surrounding villages. The cost of accessing particular cycling spaces was important to respondents who valued mountain biking as a cheap form of leisure and few respondents mentioned paying for car parking at Bedgebury.

‘…..my mum brings me over we live about ten minutes away and I start early enough so that we don’t have to pay, because the car park doesn’t open until ten and it closes at four and I’m pretty sure they don’t check the tickets anymore’ [Arnie, 16].

‘Well we’re really tight so we parked our car in the lay-by near the entrance’ [Chrome Rider, 25].

These alternative forms of access meant some of the respondents avoided areas around the visitor centre keeping solely to forest spaces, and often detached their leisure experience from what they considered to be the more ‘tourist’ or ‘family’ spaces. The respondent below who was a regular visitor at Bedgebury was unaware of the facilities at the visitor centre and commented:

‘We’ve got no reason to go to the visitor centre, we come in down a back lane from Cranbrook, it takes about ten minutes to get here ‘cause another person we know from biking he told us about that back lane way, which is loads nearer for us ‘cause before we used to go in from the lay-by’ [Rowan, 16].

For some respondents particularly the younger youth group, accessing mountain biking space involved negotiation with parents, and nearby open spaces and woodlands were often an acceptable resolution for both. The respondents below discussed their use of countryside cycle space near to their homes:
Bill: ‘Yeah like if we’ve got any free time, we just go for a ride, like there’s some jumps on the Downs called the tank tracks, we just go up there and do some jumps there’

KK: ‘And your mum lets you do that on your own?’

Bill: ‘Yeah ‘cause they’re quite near as well so we can just ride there from our house. Just like call a mate, see if they wanna come’ [Bill, 13].

Similarly at Bedgebury younger respondents negotiated an acceptable arrangement for both parents and young people. For example, Joel describes how his parents would often walk in the Pinetum area of the forest, whilst he visited the freeride area, achieving a suitable balance between freedom and control.

‘we get dropped off at the top and they walk the dog and we get to come down here, and then we meet them up the top again at 12’ [Joel, 16].

When discussing mountain biking at Bedgebury, both cross country and DDF youth mountain bikers would frequently comment upon the social benefits of participating in mountain biking as Roberts (2006:140) argues, young people experience ‘intense camaraderie’ through membership of particular leisure cultures. The extract below shows the importance of Bedgebury as a setting for social interactions as well as a mountain biking destination:

Harry: ‘We…within our group are social, like we don’t just come here to bike we come to see each other’

Rowan: ‘yeah, we don’t all go to the same schools so we meet up here’ [Rowan, 16 and Harry, 16].

Bedgebury was considered to have a distinct atmosphere, particularly for less experienced mountain bikers providing a space to practice and improve their skills and to form social relationships with other mountain bikers. Respondents compared the community of mountain bikers at Bedgebury to that of PORC, for example, Bedgebury was described as a much quieter place than PORC, with respondents attributing these qualities to the family orientation of the site.

‘...there is more stuff for families here, and it’s got a shop and at PORC it’s more literally for people who are good at biking and if you’re not then you can’t do anything there’ [Kona Owner, 15].

Participants often associated the atmosphere at different cycling spots with the types of cycling spaces offered. Bewl Water was not considered as challenging as Bedgebury
for cross country riders and participants considered it was ‘somewhere you take your girlfriend’ [Jonny, 25] rather than Bedgebury which was for more serious riding.

‘Bewl water is a lot more open and more cross country-esque whereas here [Bedgebury] it’s a lot more technical’ [Raceface, 22].

‘We go round Bewl Water sometimes but it’s too slow and too boring’ [Jonny, 25].

In contrast PORC was classified as ‘a die-hard biker place’ [Rowan, 16] for highly skilled DDF mountain bikers and, therefore, was much more challenging for participants than Bedgebury freeride area. Thus, many respondents compared Bedgebury to other cycling sites because of the difference in cycling landscapes and also described how this influenced the social atmosphere at each of the sites.

Learning new skills in mountain biking was described as ‘a case of trial and error’ [Russell, 16] and young people commented on the importance of mountain biking communities for sharing tips and advice and encouraging riders to progress. Younger mountain bikers discussed the difference between Bedgebury and PORC’s provision for different abilities. The participants below explained how mountain biking at PORC could be an intimidating experience:

‘When you go to PORC you feel like you get people staring at you, they kind of rate you’ [Kona Owner, 15].

‘You can ride here without looking like an idiot in front of the like ‘we can do back flips’ kind of people’ [Rowan, 16].

Riders commented upon the surveillance at some spaces by either ‘the locals’ (see section 7.3.4) or by the owners who were unwelcoming to beginner mountain bikers. Instead, some claimed that Bedgebury fostered a more supportive atmosphere because of the lack of control imposed on the space.

KK: ‘Do you think mountain biking is accessible for people who are beginners?’

Rowan: ‘This place is because there’s not really anyone controlling it or in charge’

Harry: ‘Everyone’s very friendly here’ [Rowan, 16 and Harry, 16].

These extracts illustrate the difficulties of accessing particular mountain biking spaces for young people, particularly when this involves sharing a space with more
experienced riders. Respondents suggested that the pressure of performing was often a negative experience and felt that Bedgebury freeride area in particular offered a space to practice, away from the judgment of other riders. Crucially, respondents perceived Bedgebury as a site free from surveillance enabling them to assert their own controls over the space. This theme is revisited in more detail in section 7.3.4.

In addition to formally managed sites such as Bedgebury or Bewl Water and privately owned sites such as PORC, participants discussed accessing unmanaged ‘secret’ riding spots on private land with or without the owners’ consent as informal leisure in informal space. Participants living in urban areas also discussed ‘street riding’ or visiting skate parks. Young people gravitate towards those places which adults do not visit (Lieberg, 1995), and participants commented upon using derelict land, remote woodlands, back gardens, disused farmland and city streets or other marginal spaces in creative ways, constructing them as available leisure space for mountain biking.

‘…like I’ve been to loads of trails in the woods on the side of motorways, round the back of estates there’s always loads in places like that, if there’s trees there there’s always trails there’ [Chimp, 24].

‘I think there’s a jump spot everywhere, if you go out and look someone’s always got one. There’s one in Hassocks, Goring, Ditchling, the Snakepit, Hurstpierpoint, Deardrens...’ [Mike, 14].

Many youth mountain bikers created what they considered as ‘their own’ cycling spaces in local woodlands or other countryside spaces. The practice of creating cycle space was usually, but not exclusively performed as part of DDF lifestyles. These ‘secret spots’ were hugely important to those involved in youth mountain biking lifestyles, in simple terms for providing easily accessible cycle space.

‘Near where I live, there’s woods down the bottom and me and my mates build there all the time like pretty much most days, we’ve got these woods that no one has heard about’ [Minty, 17].

‘We’ve got a little plot of land over from our house so we build on that...and we’ve got secret spots in the common where dog walkers don’t go, they’re just like secret’ [Boris, 16].

Yet ‘secret spots’ also represented a space in which youth mountain bikers were directly involved in the making of leisure space and, therefore, they also had important implications for the performance of identity (see sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3). Young
people claimed ownership over ‘secret spots’ as an extension of their own mountain biking identities. They facilitated the display of riding skill and knowledge of building trails, and saw young people acting as gatekeepers, choosing who could and could not access the space. Information on the location of ‘secret spots’ or ‘invitations’ to use ‘secret spots’ were traded between mountain bikers and signified an insider or legitimate mountain biking identity to others.

‘I used to do a bit of magazine work a while ago, and you don’t get paid or anything but you just get your name about, you get known, and after that I got invited to these trials’ [Chimp, 24].

‘Secret spots’ provided a space upon which youth mountain bikers could inscribe their own meanings, create their own customised cycle space and operate their own policies for inclusion and exclusion. ‘Secret spots’ allowed young people to create new spaces for mountain biking, and operate some form of control over the type of space being made (see section 7.3.4).

‘...you can do what you want, ‘cause here [Bedgebury] we can’t really dig, it’s not our place to dig’ [Rowan, 16].

To those who accessed them, the significance of these ‘secret spots’ was also linked to risk as they were less restricted by what they considered to be health and safety issues in managed cycling spaces and thus offered more challenging mountain biking terrain.

‘...if it’s a secret place then it’s loads better cause like places that are open to the public often have like safety and stuff but the secret ones can make it as rad [radical] as they like’ [Boris, 16].

In addition to more risky cycling terrain, respondents would discuss visiting spaces created by other riders and the potential risks of ‘being found out’, and similarly the risk involved in using jumps which were essentially illegal. For DDF riders in particular, accessing ‘secret spots’ was crucial to the construction of a legitimate mountain biking identity.

KK: ‘So how many times have you discovered some secret spots?’

Boris: ‘Loads ‘cause we’re always looking...yeah it’s a good day when it happens’

Nichols ‘...well it’s not a good day until we’ve done it and we haven’t got told off’ [Boris, 16 and Nichols, 18].
Most respondents discussed accessing some form of ‘secret spot’ alongside spaces such as Bedgebury, Bewl Water or PORC and many, (largely DDF participants) had become directly involved in constructing these cycle spaces; shaping jumps, building wooden northshore, or digging trails. Constructing jumps on private land frequently resulted in ejection from space, the removal of jumps and the demolition of other cycling infrastructure. These issues are discussed in more detail in section 7.3.2.

6.2.2 Virtual cycle space: forum analysis

As Ingham and MacDonald (2003) have observed, members of certain sporting communities do not necessarily inhabit a shared geophysical space, yet can continue to form symbolic communities in other shared space. As well as discussing mountain biking venues in the local area, respondents were often involved in creating mountain biking lifestyles online, and a local forum (jabonline.myfastforum.org) run by participants is analysed here as participants indicated its importance as an additional lifestyle space. The forum offered a meeting place for disparate individuals and communities and was particularly important for cross country mountain bikers who had less social opportunities ‘in the field’ (see section 6.3.2).

‘I think what’s nice about them is getting to talk to other riders, because a lot of the time it’s difficult to talk to other riders, and some of the forums you get sort of regulars I suppose who I know, well I don’t know but you sort of get a feel for people and their opinions about stuff and get a bit of banter going it’s a good laugh’ [Sarah, 24].

Ravenscroft and Gilchrist (2008:131) for example, discussed the political and social function of internet chat rooms and forums, arguing that for canoeists, the internet has provided a site for exercising protest over access to leisure space as well as facilitating a collective identity ‘that would otherwise be difficult to generate or sustain’. For youth mountain bikers, this was particularly important and the forum provided a space where they could voice their own opinions and debate issues with other members. Forum members engaged in debate over the use of space, particularly associated with user conflict and trail etiquette (also see section 7.3.3). The extract below documents the start of a discussion topic over trial etiquette in ‘secret spots’, where riders debated the level of respect expected of other members of the mountain biking community:
‘We have some secret trails not far from our house, tucked away where no-one ever goes. Until recently that was the case anyway because a local stumbled across them and told all the other locals of their whereabouts. That's already not a very good thing to do considering they were told not to tell anyone. What's worse is most people now turn up, case7 every ramp and leave, leaving us to regularly have to repair ramps which others can't be bothered to sort out. I didn't think this scenario should occur in a mountain bike community...Look after each other's riding spots people and show respect to others' hard work!’

(No trail etiquette. 19.06.2007. jabonline.myfastforum.org)

Forums played an important role in building social relationships amongst riders and were a way of demonstrating trail etiquette and gaining invitations to ‘secret spots’. Sarah described how she gained an invitation to a ‘secret spot’ through involvement in a forum:

‘It was fairly easy to get to and I wanted to do it to meet other people who are into the same thing and you know, and then feeling like you’re sort of giving something to a group and then at the same time you earning their trust so you can use their trails’ [Sarah, 24].

Forums were not without their own codes of behaviour, and the respondent below describes how he needed to earn the trust of other forum participants before discussing ‘secret spots’:

‘At the moment I need people to build at mine but I’ve done 3 posts so I’m still new, it’s too early to ask’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

Some forum threads hinted at animosity between ‘the locals’ at different trails or debated the tensions between different users in shared leisure space.

‘Something a lot of our local spots seem to suffer from are riders who are more interested in talking about your bike/their bike etc and how great they are rather than riding. PORC is a prime example...it seems most people’s time is spent in the car park talking a good game. I think mummy and daddy have spent a lot of money on someone’s rig and they like to talk about it not only to their mates, but anyone that will listen to them about it’.  


Issues relating to Bedgebury were often central to discussions with members commenting on trail conditions or raising issues over the management of the cycle space. Some participants described feeling disenfranchised from what they considered were ‘government managed’ sites with young people, particularly the DDF riders

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7 To case is to ride over a dirt jump rather than jump over it.
claiming that ‘the main problem is the freeriders have always been in the minority’ (A show of hands. 09.12.2008. jabonline.myfastforum.org).

‘It’s kind of boring that in society bikers are the bad people who are told off wherever they ride. I'm getting tired of it...We are not allowed to ride on our local commons, but horses can. Why? Because we cause more erosion (?). Apparently we can ride on the road instead. Err no thanks...It seems that everyone in public is prepared to treat us like we are in the way and being a nuisance doing our own thing. Perhaps we better take up hiking instead?’ (Things you’ve been told. 14.07.2008. jabonline.myfastforum.org).

Forums also performed other functions with some participants using them to access information about trails or for discussing riding tips with other riders.

‘You can learn quite a lot of stuff about bike bits, trail building and people have written how to do stuff, like how to bunny hop and stuff’ [Arnie, 16].

Sarah describes how forums facilitated a connection with other mountain bikers who shared the spaces she rode:

‘ you’re not going to the actual official websites of the trails but you’re getting information on the trails from the people who use them, updates on the condition of the trails, if they’ve been trashed so it’s useful’ [Sarah, 24].

Forums were also valued for providing the opportunity to form new social relationships with other youth mountain bikers who shared mountain biking spaces, whilst for others it gave them access to a community of riders beyond their own locality.

‘I’ve joined some forum recently and there’s some guys on there I recognise their faces from their pictures and I know they come here [Bedgebury]. I’ll have a chat to them next time I see them’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

‘I chat to a few people, I mean I know bikers from Derbyshire, I know bikers from miles away’ [Paul, 16].

Forums were also used to post photos and videos of participants’ riding experiences; a method for both displaying riding skill, and showing the types of places in which they ride. For example, one forum thread called ‘your space’ invited members to post photos of their local ‘homegrown’ spot, stimulating a discussion between members over building techniques, etiquette and enabling performance and display of identity in a shared cultural space.
6.2.3 Discussion: spatialising youth mountain biking lifestyles

By positioning Bedgebury in this way, this section has begun to tease out the connections between space and identity, identifying a link between spatial and social relations (Crouch, 2000) and demonstrating how spaces that are ‘risky’ or restricted or involve unconventional methods for accessing the space can indicate core identity within the lifestyle (Beal and Wilson, 2004). By accessing marginal spaces in streets or in ‘secret spots’ or by accessing managed cycle spaces through marginal means, youth mountain bikers increased their invisibility (Bell et al., 2003) and distanced themselves from adults or other user groups in shared spaces.

Young people accessed an assemblage of spaces providing different cycling landscapes, social opportunities or accessibility. Bedgebury offered leisure facilities for both cross country and DDF disciplines, and respondents distinguished it from other managed sites because of a particular social atmosphere that welcomed all skill levels that was associated with the lack of external control. Yet spaces such as PORC, which provided a more challenging terrain for experienced DDF riders, or Bewl Water, which was more suitable for beginner cross country riders, supplemented visits to Bedgebury.

Participants demonstrated distinctive methods for accessing the sites and chose spaces according to individual constraints or opportunity. As Hendry (1981) has argued, young people perform leisure in those spaces available and accessible to them. Although Mulder et al., (2005) contested the significance of transport as a constraint to accessing countryside space in youth, transport was cited as one of the main constraints by young people accessing Bedgebury and other countryside cycle space. To overcome this, young people used ‘secret spots’ or street spaces closer to home, or employed distinct methods of accessing sites to reduce the constraints of transport and cost.

‘Secret spots’ emerged as key leisure spaces, particularly for DDF mountain bikers, allowing youth mountain bikers to become directly involved in the shaping of space, and facilitated a different type of risk experience often in local spaces that were more easily accessible for young people. Whilst participants would share information about building techniques or display photographs of ‘secret spots’ on forums, the location of
these sites was never revealed. Forums provided youth mountain bikers with an easily accessible social space to connect them to the wider mountain biking community where group norms and values were negotiated and explored, and identities were played out when these relationships were more difficult to sustain through face to face meeting. Forum leisure space was an important setting for mountain biking lifestyles, however, for the performance of mountain biking itself, young people relied almost exclusively upon the availability of countryside or non built-up space rather than urban locations (See section 7.2.1). The next section continues to explore the link between space and identity revealing how the meaning of space at Bedgebury varies for cross country and DDF mountain biking lifestyles. Lifestyle differences between cross country and DDF styles of mountain biking were in part linked to their differing spatial relationships and the performance of these activities in different cycle spaces and, therefore, the next section compares the experience of DDF cyclists and the freeride area to those of cross country riders at Bedgebury who perform their lifestyles largely on the single-track.

6.3.1 DDF lifestyles and the freeride area

Twenty six of the respondents indicated an interest in some form of DDF mountain biking and as discussed in Chapter 5 (5.4.3) it was commonly understood that these disciplines (dirt jumping, downhill riding and freeride) shared similar characteristics in terms of lifestyle values and similar spatial relations.

DDF forms of mountain biking were performed within the designated ‘freeride’ area of Bedgebury which comprised a dirt jumps area, northshore (freeride), and ‘baby’ northshore sections and, therefore, offered several different types of (DDF) riding experiences, as well as affording a social space within the forest in which groups of young people would congregate. Appendix 1 shows the freeride area was set between two cycle trails, but these trails did not run directly past the entrance to this area, thus the freeride area was valued by young people as an uninterrupted leisure space and had some ‘secret’ qualities. Essentially, for DDF riders, the freeride area was accessed as an independent leisure space, disassociated by the respondents from the rest of the forest.
Joel: ‘There’s loads of sort of families here, and its brilliant ‘cause they don’t come down here that much’

Paul: ‘Yeah that could be really annoying’ [Joel, 16 and Paul, 16].

During weekends and school holidays the freeride area was frequently populated with several different groups of DDF mountain bikers of varying ages and abilities. In addition to DDF riders, there was a small community of BMX riders who also used the freeride area and considered themselves a part of the DDF community (see section 6.3.2). Respondents would often compare this to a skate park environment in terms of its connotations as a ‘youth’ space. ‘...you get loads of bikers here, like you get loads of skaters there’ [Rowan, 16].

The freeride area afforded an informal leisure setting where DDF participants interspersed riding with periods of inactivity. Respondents recognised the separation of space occurring at Bedgebury and the difference in performances the spaces afforded, comparing the use of the freeride area with other types of cycling space such as the single-track (see section 7.2.2).

‘[the freeride area] is for just hanging around and then jumping on the bike and doing something, but if we’re doing the single-track we’re often quite competitive...we try and do it as fast as possible and try and beat each other’ [James, 17].

DDF riders would spend short amounts of time perfecting tricks or riding particular sections interspersed with periods watching others, socialising, or resting in what one respondent termed ‘sessioning’:

‘So sessioning you kind of stop and you’ve got a ledge or something to jump or to test your skill on so you need to spend a couple of times doing a jump going back and forth doing the same thing and it’s also with your mates as well so you’ve got people around you so you see them jump and they see me jump and then we might take photos of each other’ [Sarah, 24].

Borden (2001) describes sessioning in skateboarding as both a collective activity and an informal competition. During sessions at Bedgebury youth mountain bikers learnt new moves, exchanged technical knowledge, and improved and adjusted their own performances reaffirming their identities within the community. Thus the freeride area had a specific social function for youth mountain bikers and often saw different groups of young people interacting within a shared space. The freeride area provided a space
for DDF forms of mountain biking, as well as a main hub for both cross country and DDF youth mountain bikers to socialise. Youth mountain bikers would travel to the freeride area independently but with the intention of riding with others, relying upon a buoyant social scene for the opportunity to meet other mountain bikers.

‘Well I often come up here on my own, usually there’s a few people around, not today but yeah normally there’s people you can hook up with, have a ride. Yeah I normally talk to most people, before I know it I’m riding round with them’ [Jonny, 25].

Temporary social relationships were formed within the freeride area and facilitated through the sharing of a lifestyle; ‘Sometimes you don’t know each other but you respect the way they ride, so you just have a laugh with them’ [Chimp, 24]. Below is an example of this type of interaction which took place during participant observation between two dirt jumpers who had previously never met, and demonstrates the ease of interaction between those who shared a similar lifestyle:

Minty: ‘So do you come here often?’
Paul: ‘Yeah I came here yesterday’
Minty: ‘Is that the first time?’
Paul: ‘Yeah, it’s alright, jumps are good, I just do these ones’
Minty ‘I do the whole lot. I’m doing the 4 pack’,
Paul: ’I’ve just done the 6 pack
Minty: ‘yeah the 6 pack here’s quite nice, it’s nicer on a full sus than a 4 pack is….you go first…’ [Minty, 17 and Paul, 16].

These types of interaction were crucial for identifying with others and becoming involved in the social scene. In the extracts below participants explain how these relationships were formed and played out in practice:

Paul: ‘…when someone’s doing the same thing as you, you tend to get chatting with people and you won’t keep in contact with them but you might ride with them the whole day and won’t even know their name’

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8 The 4 pack is a set of 4 dirt jumps in a row, a 6 pack refers to a set of 6 jumps in a row.

9 ‘Full sus’ refers to a mountain bike with both front and back suspension used in DDF disciplines.
Davo: ‘Yeah I’ve met people here made friends with them for the day and then we all go home and never see them again, but we made friends here’ [Davo, 13 and Paul, 16].

DDF mountain bikers claimed social networks were crucial for progressing and learning new skills and the freeride area was considered an important setting for these interactions. Predominantly a youth space, the freeride area provided an area for respondents to practice cycling skills in a designated DDF space, away from adult surveillance.

For DDF riders, lifestyles were performed around thrill seeking and risk taking and identities were construed as those of ‘adrenaline addicts’ [Russell, 16]. Although participants indicated they were aware of the dangers involved in this type of riding, most claimed ‘it’s worth the risk’ [Harry, 16].

‘I love that for the adrenalin rush, for going far too fast, and cutting that fine edge between you and falling off and hitting a tree very hard’ [Pete, 22].

‘Um I probably enjoy downhill and things more because I’m a bit of an adrenaline junkie really’ [Bill, 13].

‘It’s scary, it’s brave it’s A.R.D10, [Mike, 14].

Youth mountain bikers described their experiences of risk as a form of play and often offered embodied accounts of the thrill experienced as part of DDF. The extract below echoes the sentiments of Le Breton (2000:9) who described ‘this sudden rush of sensation that overwhelms participants, gives them a feeling of internal strength, a feeling having grown that borders on ecstasy’:

‘…and the best feeling ever is when you’re sitting at a huge jump you’ve never done before and your sitting at the run in which goes down before you do the jump, and your hearts pounding and you suddenly just drop down and the minute you land it and you haven’t crashed it is the best feeling in the world, like your hands are shaking’ [Jumper Boy, 15].

Many of the participants choose DDF styles of riding because of the thrill involved in risk taking, and essentially, the way in which DDF negotiates the landscape is more high risk. Freeriders negotiated narrow wooden paths, seesaws and jumps high above the ground, dirt jumpers travelled at high speeds up to jumps, performing tricks in the

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10 A.R.D is a variation on the term ‘hard’.
air and downhill participants described large drops and tight paths, on uneven terrain at intense speeds (For illustration of terrain see figures 5.4 – 5.7 in Chapter 5).

KK: ‘So tell me what makes a good downhill course?’

Tim: Well lots of jumps, maybe like a road gap, a nice big drop or something, maybe some rock sections and some root sections, just generally like not a footpath, more like roughed and harsh….and its steep and its fast [Tim, 16].

In the extract below, a participant explained how the risk and thrill involved in DDF riding is what attracted young people to the sport as younger mountain bikers show a higher preference for more risky cycling landscapes (Symmonds et al., 2000). Participants viewed these kinds of activities as essentially non adult and described how adults were excluded from taking part because of a more tentative approach to taking risks.

‘….it’s for teenagers, teenagers who are looking for a bit of a thrill, who are young and fit do freeride, whereas adults, looking at the fitness aspect, would do cross country and simply because they don’t heal as fast they’re not quite as agile and you need very good reaction skills to be able to freeride so you need a youthful body really’ [Paul, 16].

For Le Breton (2000), commitment to extreme sports was demonstrated through a willingness to bear physical pain and became the proof of a participant’s sincerity and DDF riders shared a similar ideal. For example, Arnie [16] explains ‘…you have to crash sometimes, if you’re not crashing, you’re not pushing yourself, that’s what everyone seems to say’. Often the risk taking became essential for those who enter the lifestyle and risk taking activities were often traded and betted against each other. In the extracts below, two youth mountain bikers attempted to persuade another mountain biker to ride a seesaw style northshore section in the freeride area demonstrating their attitudes towards risk taking and mountain biking identities:

Robin: ‘Please just do it once, I’ll catch you on camera then your mum can see it. Oh come on have you even broken any bones yet? Blimey I’ve broken my elbow and I’ve smashed in my ankle’.

Kenny:’ Yeah look at this guy, did you see that last jump he did. He’s got more guts than skill….Is that blood down there?’ [Robin, 15 and Kenny, 15].
Risk taking often reached beyond physical risk and DDF lifestyles sometimes involved forms of illegal risk taking such as trespassing and vandalism. DDF riders in particular, described accessing mountain biking spaces on private land and creating mountain biking spaces by cutting down trees, digging jumps and building wooden northshore platforms without permission (see section 7.3.2).

KK: ‘So who owns Appleton [woods] then?’

Brian: ‘Someone who lives in Margate. We’re not really supposed to, we’re not really allowed in there. We’ve already been done once by the community officer, because we’d dug holes and we were undermining the trees or something’

KK: ‘What happened?’

Brian: ‘Well I was caught with a spade, so I just said yeah I’m doing it. They took our names down and said if we caught doing it again we’ll get an ASBO or something’ [Brian, 16].

Similarly, mountain bikers involved in ‘street riding’ described breaching the law by cycling on pavements and in no cycle zones, and using steps and stairways as jumps.

Tim: ‘Street ridings kind of like dirt jumping but it’s more of an urban thing, you just go out on the streets and find like ledges to jump off, banks to jump up and it’s kind of like using the natural environment of the streets and just playing around’.

KK: ‘Is it quite easy to find these things?’

Tim: ‘The best places to go are like schools and stuff although the people don’t like it when you go there, and mainly like all the pedestrians and normal people don’t like you doing it’ [Tim, 16].

This risky use of space was intrinsic to DDF lifestyles as one respondent described ‘It’s part of it...it’s quite funny being rebellious isn’t it?’ [Mike, 14]. DDF mountain biking was the most popular type of mountain biking for the participants and was perceived as a youth form of mountain biking, largely because of the associated risks. DDF forms of mountain biking were considered ‘hardcore’ [Rupert, 15] especially compared to cross country riding which was construed as a more passive form of mountain biking, this is discussed in the section below.
6.3.2 Cross country lifestyles and the single-track

Twenty one participants expressed an interest in cross country riding although for seven participants this was alongside participation in some form of DDF mountain biking. Bedgebury was valued by youth cross country cyclists for its technical single-track particularly in an area where the landscape was considered unsuitable for cross country mountain biking because it was fairly flat with poor drainage and, therefore, Bedgebury was understood as fairly ‘unique’ [Jimmy, 18]. The single-track followed a one way route around the forest, but was interspersed by sections of forest fire road or the family cycle track.

KK: ‘Do you cycle in any other woodlands?’

Tony: ‘Not anywhere else like this [Bedgebury]. There’s not much designated places for mountain biking round here that’s why this place is so attractive’ [Tony, 15].

Cross country riders exercised very different spatial relations to the DDF mountain biking disciplines, travelling over long distances and encountering a number of different forest spaces by following the designated single-track route around the forest as opposed to ‘sessioning’ or repeating sequences of movements within a bounded space (e.g. the freeride area). Cross country mountain biking at Bedgebury was often much more spatially structured than DDF styles as riders were largely following a pre-determined route around the forest rather than forming their own routes.

Cross country riders suggested social relationships were more problematic than in DDF communities due to these spatial relations. The single-track offered limited places for stopping, and participants were more spatially dispersed around the forest so opportunities to meet other riders were greatly reduced.

‘There is a distinct lack of benches round the single-track though I s’pose it doesn’t matter…find a stump and sit on it, but normally we just keep on going’ [Hank, 25].

Cross country riders were less likely to congregate in forest areas, and whilst some young people would visit the freeride area to experiment with dirt jumping or freeriding, riders would comment on the lack of a social scene compared to DDF forms of riding.
‘Single-track is just constant riding, riding, you’ve got to go for it, there’s not really time for stopping and chatting’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

Young people participating in cross country appeared to experience additional isolation because they generally encountered riders of an older age group.

‘It’s mostly 30-40 year old people, older than us lot and when you get to the far end of the single-track you hardly see anyone anyway’ [Hank, 25].

Youth cross country riders often resolved these issues through more formal involvement in mountain biking becoming members of the Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club or other external cycle clubs. Respondents described attending club events such as youth training sessions Go Ride, and racing events Go Race, which provided access to, and involvement with, other youth cyclists through existing social networks.

‘...I want to get into more racing, ‘cause there is no one else who can push me and make me ride faster, ‘cause I’d love that or to ride with more people who are as serious as me’ [Jimmy, 18].

Approaching mountain biking as a more organised leisure activity facilitated social relationships with other cross country riders, which would otherwise be more difficult. One participant described how the cycle club performed similar functions to online forums, for communicating and sharing ideas and experiences with others within the lifestyle, ‘...with people that are my equals’ [Russell, 16]. The participant below echoed these sentiments:

KK: ‘Why did you join the cycle club?’

Arnie: ‘They’re really good, ‘cause you’re with people who like cycling, so like the same as you, and I find that most cyclists always help you, they’re really friendly so if you’re stuck doing something you’re trying to do, like learning to jump even, they’ll just help you, and tell you how to do it’ [Arnie, 16].

Nevertheless, whilst some cross country riders joined a cycle club as part of their mountain biking lifestyles, others used the single-track with friends and performed mountain biking in a less structured manner. So similar to the freeride area, the single-track was often a leisure space free from adult surveillance, but as cross country riders were almost always mobile and experienced less opportunity for socialising or hanging around, this lack of adult presence appeared less significant than in the freeride area.
Cross country riders were considered less likely to engage in what DDF participants would consider ‘risky’ activities, however, the cross country participants drew upon some elements of risk in their discussions of their own lifestyles. Similar to DDF riders, the cross country rider below claimed that adrenaline was a motivation for participation. He differentiated this from the kind of adrenaline discussed in relation to DDF; instead the focus was on extreme physical endurance as opposed to risk taking:

‘I think most people my age want the adrenaline rush of downhill, but personally I think riding cross country needs so much more of a physical effort and it can be so much more demanding, that I find it’s a lot more extreme than even riding downhill was ever for me, like a different kind of adrenaline’ [Jimmy, 18].

In addition some cross country riders adopted the casual approach to leisure associated with DDF riding and distanced themselves from the ‘fitness freaks’ [Boris, 16] associated with adult forms of cross country (see section 6.3.3). The extract below shows how these mountain bikers believed their approach to riding was different to those who ride merely for fitness benefits:

KK: ‘So do you think mountain biking is quite popular amongst people your age?’

Tony: ‘I don’t know, there’s not a huge amount who do it’

Robin: ‘Well, there are but not like us’

Kenny:’ Yeah, they think about exercise…but we think about it like it will be a laugh’ [Tony, 15, Robin, 15 and Kenny 15].

In contrast to DDF and BMX, cross country riding was frequently understood as an adult activity which had little resonance with youth culture. ‘You don’t tend to see many younger cross-countryers, ‘cause it’s not seen to be cool’ [Pete, 22]. Youth cross country riders were often aware of the marginal status of cross country within wider youth mountain biking culture, as one participant commented ‘they might think I’m a bit of a loser for doing cross country... hardly anyone takes it seriously, not my age anyway’ [Jimmy, 18]. Therefore, youth cross country mountain bikers would often attempt to distance themselves from adult centred cross country identities and instead construct their own around traits more akin to those of DDF.

Russell: ‘I’d call myself a kind of trailrider really, aggressive cross country’

KK: ‘What does that mean...aggressive cross country?’
Russell: ‘It’s kind of like…normal cross country is more like fire roads, the bigger double tracks, so not so much kind of technical pieces, you’re basically a faster rider who’s on smaller trails, that’s aggressive cross country’ [Russell, 16].

The significance of these youth mountain biking identities is discussed in section 6.3.5, the next section, however, considers in more detail how participants constructed the key differences and similarities between the different lifestyles of youth mountain bikers at Bedgebury. BMX forms of cycling at Bedgebury are explored in more detail below before also considering the experience of mountain biking for young women.

6.3.3 Distinguishing lifestyles
Each mountain biking style encapsulates a different lifestyle approach and distinct riding philosophies. Similar to Henio’s (2000:176) accounts of animosity between skiers and snowboarders who ‘share the same playing fields’, these different approaches to mountain biking were considered incompatible by some and consequently would sometimes transpire into rivalry or conflict.

‘Well like downhill and cross country they don’t really mix, like cross country I’d say was more of a mellow, grownup personality, like a dad personality, whereas the more extreme stuff would be a more adventurous young type in a way’ [Damien, 18].

Some riders who participated in both styles of mountain biking recognised a difference in the ‘scenes’ of each, for example, Chimp [24] explained that at some mountain biking events whilst DDF riders were busy ‘getting pissed’, cross country riders were eating pasta in preparation for the following days riding. Cross country riders were considered ‘more civilised’ [Bill, 13] and ‘less crazy’ [Arnie, 16] than DDF riders. The participant below described how cross country riders were less likely to be confrontational in demonstrating their skill:

‘Yeah cross country is more laid back, in a way there isn’t bragging and stuff about it, where as downhill everyone’s like oh I learnt this amazing new jump, bigs it all up and then you get there and its nothing’ [Bill, 13].

Many of these controversies between youth mountain bikers could be explained through a difference in the approach or philosophy to riding. For example, Mike
explained the difference between the attitudes of cross country mountain bikers at a local cycle club and DDF riders at PORC:

‘...you talk to them about this huge road gap and at PORC they think you’re a woos if you don’t do something like that, whereas at the club they think you’re mental’ [Mike, 14].

Maintaining a formal commitment to a club, or essentially a club run by adult mountain bikers, was more common for cross country riders and some DDF riders refuted this organised approach to leisure.

KK: ‘Do you belong to any clubs or anything?’

Sarah: ‘No. I’ve thought about it but it seems like it would be deadly serious cross countryers, it doesn’t seem very approachable, it means organisation and I have a bit more of a relaxed attitude to riding my bike’ [Sarah, 24].

Thus DDF riders separated themselves from cross country riders through what they considered a more relaxed and hedonistic approach to cycling.

‘Cross country riders seem to be a lot more careful in the way they ride, they’re good at riding and they can do fast but they are more careful of what they’re doing, whereas the downhillers I know are just crazy’ [Arnie, 16].

Equipment was also an important tool for distinguishing between different types of mountain biker (also see section 6.5.2), for example, between cross country, DDF and BMX forms of cycling, and wheel size determined a particular cultural identity amongst youth cyclists.

‘...we’re the only BMXers although the others they ride 24 inch wheel bikes\textsuperscript{11}, you know the good ones’ [Rowan, 16].

In general BMXers were considered fundamentally different to mountain bikers in their equipment, use of space and their core values (see section 7.2.1). BMX bikes were referred to as ‘fake’ or ‘toy bikes’ [James, 17] by some youth mountain bikers, although some participants argued BMXing required a greater amount of skill and was less forgiving than mountain biking. BMXing was principally associated with urban or street based riding, nevertheless, some BMXers did access Bedgebury but considered

\textsuperscript{11} 24 inch bikes are more common in DDF disciplines than in cross country.
themselves part of the mountain biking community because they performed leisure in similar ways to dirt jumpers, choosing countryside spaces over urban spaces because they preferred the atmosphere, felt safer to perform tricks on dirt tracks rather than concrete and were able to shape the jumps themselves.

KK: ‘Is it quite unusual for you to come here as BMXers?’

Harry: ‘Yeah it is really, but it’s less dangerous in the woods, and I quite like being in the woods anyway...Yeah like if you fall off, it’s not like there’s concrete around and I haven’t ever really hurt myself falling off in the woods’

Rowan: ‘Yeah it’s cheaper than mountain biking anyway, ‘cause it’s not all the suspension and stuff to pay for and I did used to mountain bike like a year ago but BMX’s are more fun, you can do more tricks on them and stuff, they’re easier’ [Rowan, 16 and Harry, 16].

The BMX participants in this research were accepted as part of the community at Bedgebury freeride area, as a minority group who respected the authority and the precedence of the mountain bikers and acknowledged the freeride area essentially as a mountain biking space. There were, however, other BMXers who visited Bedgebury or other mountain biking spaces less frequently and were seen as a threat as shown in Chapter 7 (section 7.3.3).

Although there were clear tensions between these different lifestyle groups, youth mountain bikers played down the intensity of the animosity labelling it ‘a friendly sort of hate’ [James, 17]. They described a mutual respect for each discipline because cross country involved a test of endurance, BMXing in countryside space required a high level of skill and DDF involved a heightened negotiation of risk.

‘...like we all take the piss out of them [cross country] ‘cause they’re all pansies ‘cause they don’t like going fast down hills and they think we’re pansies because we don’t go up hills, but we all get on with each other because we respect each others’ sports, I mean I’ve got the upmost respect for cross country riders because they can just pile up hills that I have to get off for and they have respect for us because we can go fast down hills that they would slow down for’ [James, 17].

Yet these lifestyle groups also overcame their differences through a shared distancing from adult forms of mountain biking. As discussed above youth cross country riders disassociated from the adult element of the lifestyle and were more likely to join youth
DDF riders in their objections to the embodied style of a largely adult group known as ‘the lycras’ they associated with ‘slippery, streamlined account men’ [Chrome Rider, 25].

‘… they look and they ride really bad, their style is really bad, and they shave their legs and things like that for streamlining or whatever’ [Damien, 18].

Youth mountain bikers and DDF mountain bikers in particular, criticised the ‘serious’ attitude to leisure adopted by ‘the lycras’. Whilst DDF riders privileged knowledge about equipment, technique and building jumps, this was part of being committed (see section 6.4.2) and they differentiated this from adults through maintaining a relaxed and informal approach to ‘doing’ mountain biking. A preoccupation with expensive equipment and clothing (see sections 6.5.1 and 6.5.2) and an austere and less risky attitude to mountain biking characterised a cross country lifestyle as serious, and consequently as adult.

‘It’s a bit uncool, cross country because it’s been given a bad name by the all the ground-saving, lycra clad men. Like some people they’re just obsessed about the weight of their bike, they will always wear lycra which I don’t like at all and they’re just getting completely too serious about it when they should just get out and ride’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

The issues associated with an adult and serious attitude to leisure are explored in more detail in section 6.4.2. For many DDF and youth cross country mountain bikers, the perceived philosophical approach to leisure adopted by adult cross country riders clashed with their own ideals associated with attitudes to risk, freedom, and consumption.

The sections above have illustrated how youth mountain bikers have marked out their identities through a process of integration and differentiation, yet for the large part these lifestyles have been explored through the voices of male youth mountain bikers. The next section explores the lifestyles and identities of women within the youth mountain biking community.
6.3.4 Mountain biking and masculinities

‘...it’s too muddy for girls’ [Chimp, 24].

Mountain biking was regarded by male participants as ‘a bit of a macho sport’ [Sharpshooter, 21] and female participation was considered a rarity (also see Ruff and Mellors, 1993; Cessford, 1995; Countryside Access and Activities Network, 2007). Nevertheless, six of the participants were female and as this section shows, in part their role within the mountain biking community was gendered.

Some aspects of female participation in mountain biking revealed similar perceived experiences to those of male participants. For example, some young women, like some of the men (see section 7.2.1), participated in mountain biking as a fitness activity and linked their participation with potential health benefits. Female mountain bikers drew upon the ideal of losing weight as an important aspect of this.

‘I just prefer to be more active I suppose because I drive everywhere, and so I need to balance it out or I’ll become a big fat lump’ [Anne-Marie, 19].

‘Getting out in the countryside’ [Hayley, 23] was cited as part of this perception of a healthy activity, particularly for young women who lived in urban areas, who described visiting Bedgebury as an escape (also see section 7.2.1). For male participants, the emphasis females placed on health and fitness actually distinguished them from the rest of the (male) youth mountain biking community. Many male mountain bikers believed that young women’s only reason for participation was for these benefits to health and that they did not necessarily become involved in the lifestyle aspects of mountain biking.

‘...they do it for fitness. It’s like running: they don’t do it ‘cause they like it, they do it for fitness’ [Minty, 17].

Some male participants also believed mountain biking was not suitable for girls and did not fit with their understandings of a ‘girly identity’ [Mike, 14]. For example, Jimmy, [18] claimed ‘I just think so many girls think it’s un-ladylike to be out in a wood, well, girls my age’. Damien, [18] commented ‘I think too many girls are bought up all clean and indoors and it would take a massive change to do it and it doesn’t appeal to them’.
Whilst some young men often made sexist assumptions about the motivations for women’s participation in mountain biking, there were often contradictions in these readings. One participant represented the views of many when claiming ‘It’d be good if they did do it’ [Rowan, 16], however, sometimes support was still marred by sexist undertones where women’s legitimacy is based on the potential to fulfil heterosexual desires (Waitt, 2008).

‘They are more interested in going in to town and stuff which is a shame because I actually think it’s quite an attractive thing’ [Jimmy, 18].

‘I’ll just get a girl who likes riding. That’s what I’m trying to do with the one I’ve got now...I’m working on it’ [Minty, 17].

These opinions were often formulated through the construction of risk and competition as traditionally masculine. For example, one participant claimed mountain biking is ‘pretty boring if you don’t think you’re gonna come off at some point, hurt yourself, especially if you’re male’ [Hank, 25], and, therefore, it was deemed too risky for young women to participate. In addition the attitude towards competition was constructed as masculine.

‘Well it’s a bit of a macho sport really isn’t it….you think oh you can’t do that, I can do it better, quicker, stronger, faster [Sharpshooter, 21].

The competitive nature of male mountain biking lifestyles was discussed negatively by some young women who chose to ride with other female riders so they could go at their own pace.

‘I know that my boyfriend, I won’t go with him because he’s more of a competitive rider, its puts me off because I just like to go on at my own pace, like I if wanted to stop, stop and not feel guilty and so because most of the people that do that ride are men I opt out of doing it because I wouldn’t want to be the person holding everyone else up’ [Claire, 24].

These attitudes were linked to the ways in which women chose to use space at Bedgebury. Women were more private than men in their performance of youth mountain biking, echoing Tucker and Matthews’ (2001) claims that for young women some spaces within the countryside are ‘gendered’. Some female participants disclosed that they felt embarrassed or unconfident about performing in front of male participants for fear of being judged. They, therefore, chose mountain biking spaces away from other male mountain bikers.
‘Yeah sometimes I get scared, its mainly if people watch me, feel a bit self conscious and get more scared, my boyfriend tried to get me doing some of the northshore, but I wouldn’t in case I fall off, but last time I tried this bit (Dirt jumps) ‘cause I said I wouldn’t do it, but when they went off down the bottom I did it on my own, because I don’t like people watching me’ [Anne-Marie, 19].

Nevertheless, some female youth mountain bikers found being part of a male dominated culture was part of the appeal of mountain biking, allowing them to distance themselves from a traditional feminine identity and distinguish themselves from other young women. Thus part of the experience for women was to be accepted as ‘one of the lads’ [Sarah, 24].

‘I don’t like to follow the crowd all the time, I like to be different. I don’t know any other girls who do it, like people think I’m a tom boy but I’m not I just don’t like stuff like other girls’ [Anne-Marie, 19].

The participant below found that riding with other males contributed to a more legitimate riding identity, and improved her skill, whereas riding with other women may have been less challenging:

‘It made me more determined to catch up with them. It made me a better rider, so like with the boys you’re always learning from them, so like I became a much better rider instead of hanging out with girls who, I don’t know who ‘cause I’ve never ridden with girls but are like probably chill out and don’t really push themselves [Sarah, 24].

The lack of other female participants appealed to some women, similar to Beal and Wilson’s (2004) findings in skateboarding culture where females deliberately articulated skateboarding as a masculine space to distinguish themselves from other females, and mountain biking, therefore, provided a transgression from dominant feminine identities (Thornton, 2004).

6.3.5 Discussion: linking lifestyles and leisure space

So far this chapter has highlighted the importance of different types of spaces for the performance of mountain biking lifestyles and the formation of youth mountain biking identities. In addition to exploring the identities and lifestyles associated with the disciplines of cross country, DDF and BMX it has also highlighted how female mountain bikers perform their lifestyles in different ways to young males. Previous research on mountain biking revealed obvious tensions with other user groups such as
those concerning the sharing of space (e.g. Chavez, 1993; Carothers, 2001; Bowker and English, 2002; Cessford, 2002), similarly Booth’s (2001) study of surfers unearthed hostilities between short and longboard surfers were manifested in part through having to compete for waves. Space was certainly important in the distinction between different lifestyles of youth mountain bikers, but youth mountain bikers were not competing over the sharing of space as they used different locations and different topography with steeper slopes, jumps or northshore being more suitable for DDF and having less appeal to cross country mountain bikers. Rather, distinction was based on different approaches to the use of space and was an important part of these tensions (also see section 7.2.3).

For example, DDF forms of mountain biking were based on the privileging of risk in their choice of spaces and as part of the performance of identity yet some youth cross country riders appeared to exaggerate risk in their own narratives, essentially to differentiate between an adult approach and a youth approach to cross country. Both youth forms of mountain biking incorporated notions of extremity in their choice of spaces; risky behaviour was central to DDF lifestyles and the freeride area provided a more risky terrain, whilst cross country riders valued physical and mental endurance and chose the challenge of single-track. In line with Beal and Wilson’s (2004) readings of skateboarding cultures, the level of risk associated with spaces indicated a more core identity amongst DDF riders, whilst within cross country communities, being able to cycle up ‘heartattack hill’¹² without stopping communicated a similar insider status. As Le Breton (2000:1) has remarked ‘legitimacy is found in ‘surviving a symbolic game with pain, death and bodily injury’ and, therefore, both employed similar symbolic meanings although these meanings were explored in very different ways.

Some commentators have argued that leisure activities are a response to risk consciousness in everyday life (Beck, 1992). Indeed Rojek (2000) would claim this testing of boundaries is performed by those seeking escape. Yet symptomatic of wider discourses of youth leisure which advance the role of risk in youth leisure practice (Nichols, 1999; Bunton et al., 2004; Mitchell, 2004), risk taking is considered a largely

¹² ‘Heartattack hill’ was a steep incline in the first section of single-track and was referred to by members of Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club and some participants as noted in the fieldnotes.
youth activity (Hendry et al., 1993), and for male participants, attitudes to risk were crucial for distinguishing themselves from adult forms of mountain biking. Howe (2003:356), for example, describes how youth skateboarding ‘feels exactly like something they’re not supposed to be doing, thus satisfying a crucial adolescent need to defy the pack and express the nascent self’. For women, however, the relationship between risk and identity in mountain biking was often more complex.

Resonating with Wheaton’s (1997) sexist conception of ‘laddish men’ in windsurfing and as Beal and Wilson (2004:50) argued in relation to skateboarding culture, ‘women are marginalised because of the assumption that they are unwilling to take risks’. Gender has received the attention of several commentators within studies of lifestyle sports (e.g. Wheaton, 1997,2002; Borden, 2001; Robinson, 2004; Kay and Laberge, 2004; Waitt, 2008) as Wheaton (2004b:18) explained:

‘the central question lifestyle sport researchers have sought to answer is whether these newer non-traditional sports offer different and potentially more transformatory scripts for male and female physicality than hegemonic masculinities and femininities characteristic of traditional sports cultures and identities’.

The gender roles as part of youth mountain biking appear to conform with the findings of other studies of gender in lifestyle sports. Despite the claims of male mountain bikers that should women choose to participate they would be welcomed, supported and respected, women were accepted as another category of rider, as DDF, adult or cross country, with different norms and group values. Therefore, in line with Wheaton’s (1997:159) observations of windsurfers, female youth mountain bikers could gain status as participants, ‘albeit gendered participants’. One participant described how female mountain bikers fit within the youth mountain biking culture: ‘obviously you’d get all the jokes but I think it’s much more accepted now’ [Damien, 18]. As Wheaton (1997:163) made further comment, even the ‘laddish’ men within windsurfing lifestyles wavered between ‘hostility, sexist attitudes, and support towards women windsurfers’. Thus as Thornton (2004:181) has argued, in relation to snowboarders ‘many men will accept that ‘some women’ are good athletes but that men are just ‘bigger and stronger’’.
In addition to opportunities for risk and the importance of space, this section has shown how youth mountain biking provided opportunities for social relationships which were often dependent upon the type of youth mountain biking lifestyle. DDF communities in the freeride area were characterised by impromptu get-togethers, or 'sessioning'. As Crouch and Tomlinson (1994) have argued in relation to self-generated forms of leisure, meetings of these kinds were regular and organised, not as is normatively understood, but through patterns of actions known to members of the community. For cross country riders the lack of opportunity for socialising on the single-track meant that forums and joining organised clubs were crucial to their involvement in the lifestyle although forums appeared to be important to all types of mountain biking. The lack of young females in the youth mountain biking scene was also discussed, and young women performed mountain biking alongside other male riders through either choice or necessity. For the large part, women’s involvement within the lifestyle, for those who chose it was not restricted by gender, rather male participants made the assumption that women chose not to take part.

Youth mountain biking lifestyles were, therefore, formed through the drawing of boundaries between themselves and others. Cross country and DDF groups embodied their own separate individual values and practices, as Booth (2001) has observed, cultural diversity can occur among seemingly homogeneous groups. The differences between disciplines of mountain bikers were a combination of both different lifestyle values and attitudes towards the negotiation of space. The rest of this chapter is devoted to understanding the way in which youth mountain bikers, despite differences based on discipline, collectively repositioned themselves through their lifestyles as ‘youth’ mountain bikers. The next section considers how these different lifestyle groups maintained these distinctions between themselves, adults and other forms of youth leisure through expressing and consuming identity.

6.4.1 Youth mountain biking lifestyles: ‘just messing around’

‘If you can pedal then you’re part of the community’ [James, 17].

Being a mountain biker was a significant marker of identity for participants of both DDF and cross country disciplines, although as discussed in the section above,
participants explored this identity in different ways. Whilst difference between disciplines mattered to participants, this did not prevent young people developing a more collective identity based on a certain type of lifestyle and as shown below, youth mountain bikers collectively distinguished themselves from adult mountain bikers and from other youth who followed different leisure pursuits.

Within youth mountain biking lifestyles young people formed individual and group identities but as part of a collective culture. For example, some participants were hesitant about ‘putting themselves in one box’ [Arnie, 16] rejecting either a DDF or cross country identity, instead claiming ‘everyone’s got their own style of how they do it themselves’ [Jumper Boy, 15].

‘I think people get too serious about separating all the types of mountain biking because you have to do a bit of cross country to do dirt jumps and you have to do a bit of jumping in cross country so I’d say I do a bit of everything. I do a bit of northshore, I’ll do cross country; I get bored if I do the same thing all the time’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

Rather, some respondents saw themselves as part of a wider mountain biking culture within which they negotiated their own identities and asserted their own style of riding.

‘I think there’s a whole range of different lifestyles people lead through mountain biking, and I just think mine...I don’t know, I just make it my own’ [Jimmy, 18].

Constructing legitimate identities as part of youth mountain biking lifestyles would often depend upon an intense immersion within the lifestyle and the community, accessing ‘secret spots’ and displaying particular types of knowledge. Participants talked passionately about their own experiences of mountain biking culture and the ways in which these were imprinted on their own identities.

For example, all forms of mountain biking were symbolic in the formation of youth identities and lifestyles and represented a leisure choice which distinguished the participants from other youth activities, in particular from what they considered to be mainstream sports. Youth mountain bikers rejected the notion of a ‘sporty’ identity in relation to mountain biking. For participants, mountain biking was more meaningful for personal identity than other more traditional sporting forms and disassociated from sports that they considered to have a competitive or serious approach to participation.
Several riders described feeling disenfranchised from mainstream sports, because of a lack of skill and discussed avoiding team or mainstream sports at school because of an overly competitive ethic. For example, Arnie [16] claimed ‘mountain biking is the only thing I’ve really been any good at sport wise’. In contrast to organised or mainstream sports, mountain biking lifestyles celebrated the freedom of ‘just messing around’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

‘I don’t like mainstream sports, I don’t like it, I find it...god this is one of those subjects I could talk for ages, like my brothers are in a hockey team, roller hockey, and they like try it all the time, they’re always doing it, but there are people in the team that are better than them and they never get to play and it’s just not my idea of fun, like I can go out on my bike and ride when I want and whatever, how I want’ [Minty, 17].

For Minty, mainstream sports were exclusionary and constrained whereas mountain biking was self regulated and free from external controls. Similar to skateboarding (see Beal and Weidman, 2003) and unlike many other youth sports, mountain biking is not generally organised or run by adults. The participant below describes the lack of adult presence in the freeride area at Bedgebury:

‘We can do what we want ‘cause half the time the adults don’t even know that we’re here or they just stay away anyway’ [Robin, 15].

Mountain biking was valued for its casual approach to leisure, and its onus on participant made rules and the absence of ‘adult’ authority. Observations at Bedgebury revealed that competition was still an integral part of the mountain biking community yet it was self organised and unimpeded by adults or sporting authorities. Riders would race each other, or set time records, perform trick competitions or compete through knowledge of equipment. It was, however, the attitudes expressed towards competition that contributed to the signification of a legitimate mountain biking identity.

‘I’ve never been very good at team sports at school or anything, I’m not really into competitive stuff, but it’s [mountain biking] actually quite a really nice kind of competitive atmosphere’ [Russell, 16].

Youth mountain bikers were often critical of those who became too competitive, or displayed ‘jock-ism’ [Nichols, 18] because this represented a departure from the anti-competition ethic. Respondents took part in what they termed ‘friendly competition’ [Chimp, 24] without pressure from outsiders. It was deemed acceptable to exert
competitiveness with friends, as long as this was not the sole reason for participating. The participant below illustrates how the subtleties of this friendly competition were played out in practice:

‘...it’s this kid, I don’t like him because he hasn’t got any trail etiquette or anything, just shows up doesn’t talk to anyone just pulls out really big tricks just to show off and then blows out the landings...like if you are trying to do a trick over a jump and you keep messing it up the worst you can do is like snaking it, where another lad comes in tries the same trick on the same jump and pulls it off and then rides off, it’s just taking the piss really, like if you’re riding somewhere new, like when I ride with Jim, we’re like spurring each other on all the time, and we’re constantly giving each other shit and it makes you ride better, and you just get better and better, but if someone I didn’t know did it...it’s just not on’ [Chimp, 24].

In the excerpt above, Chimp identifies what he terms a ‘trail etiquette’ in relation to the circumstances in which competition is asserted (also see section 7.3.3 on trail etiquette). Here, the participant described how ‘snaking’ involved an explicit but inappropriate display of skill and an unacceptable form of competition. Snaking is an issue over the sharing of space and involves stealing another rider’s line and performing the same trick or cutting in as another rider is ‘dropping in’. This form of competition was only acceptable as part of a reciprocal relationship between friends.

In addition to these perceived differences from mainstream sports in terms of attitudes towards competition, participants separated mountain biking from mainstream sports, framing mountain biking as an alternative cultural construct.

KK: ‘So why do you want to learn to mountain bike?’

Anne-Marie: ‘Because it’s different, everyone can kick a ball around a field and stuff but can’t do jumps on a bike, and I wanna be able to do that’ [Anne-Marie, 19].

Similar to the resistance performed by punk rock communities in Hebdige’s (1979) study, some youth mountain bikers were very explicit about their divergence from what they considered to be mainstream. For example, Boris [16] stated ‘I like doing something that not everyone else does ‘cause you’re not mainstream then are you’. For youth mountain bikers, attitudes towards being alternative or nonconformist changed as riders increased in age or as participants became more involved in the lifestyle, adopting a more subtle oppositional stance. Some explored this identity in more subtle
and implicit ways than others by playing down the importance of this alternative status and refuting the idea of participating ‘just ‘cause it’s different’ [Damien, 18], instead, Damien claimed, ‘I do it ‘cause I got hooked’. Youth mountain biking identities were diverse and myriad, but in part the identities of the participants involved some form of opposition towards mainstream youth sport or leisure practice. An alternative identity was important for distinguishing youth mountain biking from other forms of youth leisure but also for asserting difference from adult mountain bikers which is discussed further in section 6.4.3

6.4.2 Lifestyle, community, and commitment

‘If I didn’t have biking then I actually wouldn’t have anything’ [Jumper Boy, 15].

The importance of distinguishing themselves from adults or other youth leisure groups also revealed the social significance of youth mountain biking as a collective social identity. For all forms of mountain biking (although less so for cross country) much of the activity took part collectively through ‘sessioning’, building or riding trails together. Youth mountain biking lifestyles were often lived through shared social worlds where participants were considered to have similar values, attitudes and outlooks.

Mountain biking lifestyles involved a community ethic which valued commitment and participants asserted the status of being a serious or ‘proper’ rider. Being a ‘proper’ rider was part of a personal identity process based upon individually held values, and, therefore, was not uncontested. It usually referred to a high level of commitment, regular participation, an understanding of equipment, a reasonable level of skill, and use of particular mountain biking spaces.

There was a strong ethic of long term commitment as part of being a ‘proper’ rider, as Paul [16] asserted ‘I’m gonna be riding my whole life’. Riders differentiated themselves according to how committed they were. Below, Damien describes how his brother lacks commitment as a ‘fair weather rider’:

‘If you’re like half in to it, like my brother is, but you have to think I can just not do anything or I’ve got to get up, get my bike out, you’ve got to work at it.
Sometimes you’ve got to work at it. A lot of people do it really seriously or half seriously like do it every other day or won’t do it when it was wet’ [Damien, 18]. Many of the participants discussed how some of their friends had given up when they were old enough to drive or blamed getting a girlfriend for a loss of interest but were quick to differentiate themselves from this type of uncommitted attitude. Youth mountain bikers identified those who would maintain a commitment to the sport whilst others would drop out: ‘When you’re sort of 18-21 a lot of people drop out, they stop riding, and then there are people I know, I can tell they’ll always bike’ [Mike, 14]. The participants below demonstrated their commitment to the sport:

Harry: ‘...cause as soon as someone gets a car, they can’t be bothered like I started off biking in the first place just to go places, and then when you’ve got a car you don’t need it to go places, so unless you’re really committed you’re not gonna use your bike to go places anymore are you, and it’ll just slowly go away. But we’ve got a single track mind for biking haven’t we…’

Rowan: ‘yeah so much it destroys your imagination for anything else’ [Harry, 16 and Rowan, 16].

For young people, participation in mountain biking was participation in both a sport and a lifestyle which valued dedication and commitment. Part of this commitment was played out through consumption of equipment, clothing, media and other cultural signifiers (see sections 6.5.1 – 6.5.3 below), for example, Nelson (2006) argued that for BMX riders, magazines are a primary connection to the lifestyle.

‘Over the years I’ve got so committed to it I don’t really do anything else, I read the magazines, I’m not even that in to reading but I read them and look at the pictures and all the DVDs, I watch all the DVDs’ [Damien, 18].

‘Proper’ riding was also linked to the types of landscapes ridden where accessing a wider range of mountain biking spaces and using dedicated mountain biking trails was sometimes an indicator of a committed mountain biker. As Minty [17] claimed, ‘[riding] properly is going places all the time’. Similarly, other riders identified riding in well known, or dedicated mountain biking spaces was a component of their identity as a ‘proper’ rider. In addition to this link to cycle spaces, the participant below asserted his commitment through his membership of the cycle club:

‘Well when I was young I always had a bike, that I’ve always fiddled with but I’ve never really had anywhere to ride it, and then Bedgebury came along and
then that was what made me really get in to it, proper riding, was the trails here and joining the club’ [Arnie, 16].

The lifestyle of commitment amongst both DDF and cross country youth mountain bikers also focussed upon progression and improving skills. For example, Boris [16] claimed that ‘it’s progression and that makes you want to keep riding’.

‘Riding is just riding round for fun. [serious riding] it’s trying to get involved in all the…you know, buying the parts and going to big races stuff like that…progression yeah’ [Nichols, 18].

Progression was linked to serious or proper riding as opposed to’ just messing around’, however, fun was still an important part of their involvement; more important than progression or achievement.

Harry: ‘Every weekend, you’ve got to keep doing it, otherwise you get out of it if you leave it for a bit’

Rowan: ‘Yeah you’ve got to keep progressing’

KK: ‘So is progression one of the main aims of biking for you?’

Rowan: ‘Yeah it can get quite frustrating, although I wouldn’t say it was the main aim. Cos we’re not like incredible bikers it’s just fun, it doesn’t really matter how good you are to be honest, it’s just riding’ [Rowan, 16 and Harry, 16].

Participants emphasised the fun and relaxed elements of participation to differentiate themselves from adults who it was believed took mountain biking too seriously. Youth mountain bikers felt they experienced a different connection to mountain biking than adults who did not recognise the importance of their participation in the sport and crucially the meanings attached to the lifestyle.

‘I think a lot of people that don’t know just think its cycling, adults just think he’s just riding a bike and that’s it’ [Damien, 18].

‘A lot of people think they’re too old or too mature or something. They think it’s for kiddies’ [Boris, 16].

‘…a lot of people when they ask what you do and you say I’ m a mountain biker they’re like oh right but they don’t really know much about it, they don’t have a clue ‘ [Nichols, 18].

Understanding the meaning of participating in the various mountain biking lifestyles was asserted through an identity as a ‘proper’ rider. Being a ‘proper’ rider through all
of these elements had a serious dimension, but was largely about being involved in a particular lifestyle characterised by a youth approach to leisure. Participant accounts revealed tensions between a serious approach to leisure and showing commitment to the lifestyle but also the importance of fun.

6.4.3 Discussion: expressing alternative identity
Youth mountain bikers at Bedgebury expressed their identities through the adoption of specific value systems which, when explored, have revealed subtleties in their attitudes towards mainstream sports, competition, and commitment. These value systems served to distinguish them from other youth or adult groups in a process of self othering and, therefore, adherence to these norms was important in asserting participants’ own identities as ‘proper’ riders and maintaining the stability of the community. The community was based on what they perceived to be an alternative approach to doing leisure which embraced a friendly approach to competition, a commitment to the community that demonstrated their dedication to the lifestyle, but yet which distanced them from an adult interpretation of leisure. Participants considered these elements clearly distinguished them from traditional youth sports and from adult forms of mountain biking.

Writers on lifestyle sports have conceptualised these leisure activities as alternative sporting forms (Rinehart, 2002; Beal and Weidman, 2003; Tomlinson et al., 2005; Wheaton, 2004a) and this was also an important theme within the narratives of participants; although ‘being alternative’ was not uncontested within the community. In skateboarding culture, Beal and Weidman (2003) argued that nonconformity had nuances of ‘authenticity’, only considered valid if it was a statement of self expression and creativity, rather than a meaningless act of rebellion or differentiation, a view shared by youth mountain bikers. Nevertheless, whereas within other theorisations of lifestyle sports such as windsurfing culture these ‘core’ or ‘elites’ would censure those who overtly expressed comparisons to mainstream sports and attributed them an outsider status (Wheaton, 2004b), youth mountain bikers were less condemning, and accepted that being alternative was an important identity for some, but many explored this in more subtle ways.
Wheaton (2004a) has argued that alternative or lifestyle sports offer opportunities to participate in sport for those who have been alienated from traditional or institutionalised sporting forms and participant narratives echoed this sentiment. In part, mountain biking offered young people a different value system to that of mainstream sports whereby the approval of one’s peers as opposed to that of an adult or external organisation was the measure of prestige (Midol, 1999). Yet as discussed in section 6.3.4, young females experienced similar constraints to those of mainstream sports.

Youth mountain bikers differentiated themselves from other leisure cultures through what they considered to be a more casual approach to leisure shunning those who were overly competitive or too serious. Yet, paradoxically, serious attitudes to leisure formed an important part of their own leisure identities as ‘proper’ riders and so similar to those of windsurfers (Wheaton, 1997) or BMX riders (Kusz, 2003) youth mountain biking lifestyles involved a community ethic which placed importance on making a serious commitment. Youth mountain bikers criticised others because their involvement was defined by this serious approach, whereby their own leisure identities were formed around having fun. Youth mountain bikers differentiated between their experiences of riding characterised by continuous involvement and being a’ proper’ rider and the kind of serious approach to mountain biking riding that was associated with adults (also see section 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 below).

6.5.1 Distinction through clothing
Consumption was an important process in the formation of youth mountain biking identities, and attitudes towards consumption served to further distinguish youth mountain bikers from adults. Clothing and equipment were attributed most symbolic value as part of youth mountain biking lifestyles and represented the most important method for displaying and communicating identity within the community.

Respondents used clothing to express identity and, in particular, clothing was used to differentiate between different mountain biking disciplines and identify mountain bikers as either cross country or DDF riders.
DDF riders wore a style of clothing similar to those seen in other youth lifestyle activities ‘in between skater and grunge clothes’ [Paul, 16]. In contrast, cross country mountain bikers wore what one participant termed ‘a sort of higher end of mountain bike clothing where you get people walking around in lycra’ [Joel, 16]. Yet youth cross country riders were aware of the connotations of wearing lycra and often shunned this type of clothing choosing to adopt a style more similar to DDF riders.

DDF mountain bikers described how they valued a more casual approach to leisure (see section 6.3.3) expressing this in their choice of clothing. Boris described how choice of clothing symbolises the differences between the disciplines of freeriding and cross country mountain biking:

‘freeriders are more kind of casual….jeans, t-shirt it doesn’t matter what you wear as long as you’re riding and well riding yourself around. Well you know what I mean and like the lycra’s they’ll be like competitive cross-countryers who are all like…serious’ [Boris, 16].

Thornton (1995) claims clothing is a marker of status within youth lifestyles and for participants, choice of clothing indicated a mountain biking identity to those who were not involved the lifestyle. Participants displayed their lifestyles to other youth through their choice of clothing.

‘Like with biking, I always seem to buy bike brands, I don’t mean to, I don’t see them as bike clothing, I just see them as clothes but all my friends are like why are you wearing bike shoes and I’m like ‘cause I just like them, I think I just like biking in general’ [Arnie, 16].

Clothing can also act to communicate authenticity and legitimate identities. During participant observation, one respondent was stopped by another group of mountain bikers who recognised the exclusivity of a cycle jersey affiliated with a well known mountain biker. Jonny explained:

‘...everyone likes that top, I don’t know whether you know, but you can’t buy Animal clothes for biking, Dan Atherton is one of the world cup riders, and he gave it to me’[Jonny, 25].

When probed about this comment in a later discussion the mountain bikers who stopped Jonny claimed:
‘we just saw his top and was like I want it ‘cause like the Atherton’s are like my favourite team, I just love the Atherton’s and I love their bikes and I just think their tops are so cool’ [Anne-Marie, 19].

Both participants shared a similar understanding of the cultural value of the clothing and its authenticity through the affiliation with the Atherton mountain bike team. In this context the participant’s recognition of the authenticity of the clothing and the exchange of this shared knowledge acted as a tool for the co-construction of legitimate mountain biking identities. In addition to the role of clothing, attitudes towards equipment were crucial for communicating different mountain biking identities.

6.5.2 Attitudes to equipment
Youth mountain biking lifestyles placed importance on equipment as a marker of identity. Both cross country and DDF disciplines used different types of bike, and different safety equipment, yet, youth mountain bikers used equipment to denote authenticity in two additional ways; through the ways in which equipment was acquired and through the demonstration of equipment knowledge.

Often young people described what they termed ‘an etiquette’ to accessing particular mountain bike lifestyles, associated with the ways in which cycling equipment was acquired, used and displayed. Pete, for example, explains how some mountain bikers had entered the sport in ways which he considered were inappropriate:

‘...they like to buy their way in to the sport rather than starting where everybody else starts with a rubbish bike, breaking it, upgrading it and getting in that way and they don’t know the etiquette of being there’ [Pete, 22].

This behaviour was attached to a particular adult group of mountain bikers known as the ‘weekend warriors’. Several participants commented on the ‘weekend warriors’ who placed an emphasis on expensive equipment, but had ‘all the gear and no idea’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

‘The weekend warriors, that like to think that they’re proper riders when they’re not. They’re just a bit stuck up really’ [Raceface, 22].

Wheaton (1997, 2000) also identified this concept within the windsurfing culture where having ‘all the gear and no idea’ was understood as a mismanagement of the identity construction process and the sign of a novice participant. Indeed, for younger
youth mountain bikers, having the right equipment was hugely important to performing a particular identity and was seen as crucial to being accepted into the scene.

‘Yeah like if you have a really nice bike, you’re like respected in a way, if you have a bad bike, they’re like that’s an appalling bike you’re classed as bad, that’s why when we had bad bikes we’d go to PORC and people would look at you and think you’re rubbish but we’ve got good bikes now so we’re ok’ [Kona Owner, 15].

As discussed in section 6.2.2, youth mountain bikers used forums and websites as part of their lifestyles, an element of which included displaying equipment and the ‘set up’ of their bikes. Riders posted photos of their bikes and invited others to comment and discuss how this ‘set up’ was achieved. Nevertheless, youth mountain bikers consistently refuted the need for expensive equipment and the negative aspects of having ‘all the gear and no idea’ were constructed in two ways. First they identified some riders with expensive equipment as promoting an exclusionary practice particularly to those who don’t have enough money to keep up, and second some riders with expensive equipment may have had a less involved approach to leisure.

‘Rich people I just can’t stand. I see too many people that are rich riding round here, I just don’t like the atmosphere, I just don’t think its extreme enough, I just don’t find it fun’ [Minty, 17].

The notion that mountain biking required a significant economic investment was a contested issue for youth mountain bikers. Participants described a savvy approach to leisure based on what they could afford or acquire, for example, Joel [16] claims ‘you have to save up and buy one big thing, I don’t buy lots of little things, you don’t need to buy all that stuff’. Often participants viewed other forms of consumption as unnecessary and elitist.

‘Some people are like oh you can’t ride that bike or you need this bit of kit and then it gets quite elitist you have to have expensive bikes and all the right kit and I always see people who’ve got loads of expensive kit but they can’t ride for shit when they should’ve started riding whatever they’ve got and then when they get good they should buy better stuff’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

‘Mountain biking you get middle class chavs…yeah, chavs with money, you get the rich kids obviously, and then you get people like me who just do it ‘cause they like it’ [Minty, 17].
In contrast, however, some participants displayed equally elitist principles in their discussions of ‘other’ youth leisure participants. Using stigmatising labels such as ‘pikeys’ or ‘chavs’ (see section 7.3.3 and 7.3.4), participants identified those who didn’t mountain bike ‘because they can’t afford it’ [Minty, 17]. Others commented on the differences between youth mountain bikers and other youth lifestyle sports such as skateboarding, ‘because we spent some money’ [Chrome Rider, 25]. The ‘weekend warriors’ were problematic, however, because they accessed the lifestyle through expensive equipment and overlooked the principles of involvement for youth riders such as building and modifying bikes, building trails, or ‘just messing around’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

Some youth mountain bikers placed importance on knowing how to enhance the bike without spare parts, having mechanical knowledge of the workings of bikes and methods for acquiring equipment incurring minimal cost:

‘I’ve always loved the mechanical stuff. I’m always looking after my bikes, and maintenance, I like to know how stuff works. I like to be very involved in what I’m doing, some people will just buy a bike that’s had a good review in a magazine and go to trails that have been built by someone else and go home at the end of the day. I’d much rather buy bits of a bike make a bike how I feel is good or what I can afford, build the trails, modify the trails, ride the trails, its more involved’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

‘...I mainly built them [bikes] myself....I think everyone should know how a bike works, ‘cause if something breaks you know what’s wrong with it and you might be able to fix it yourself, and if you put your bike together yourself you know exactly how everything works and how good or bad it is. ‘cause your riding, it’s your thing isn’t it, you should look after it and have it ride the way you want it to’ [Arnie, 16].

The participants above described this focus on building bikes as a particular approach to leisure that facilitated a deeper connection to the experience, and in turn was an important element of their mountain biking identity. Building, modifying and customising bikes allowed participants to personalise the experience and communicate their own biking identity to others. Some youth mountain bikers demonstrated their insider status through the relaying of knowledge about ‘set ups’ to others as part of an exchange.
‘I mean everyone knows about biking now, like you go down the skate park and kids that don’t even have bikes know everything about biking and they come up and say like ‘oh how much travel has this fork got, or oh are those hydraulic brakes. They know all the makes’ [Mike, 14].

Attitudes towards commitment distinguished youth mountain bikers from other youth groups or from adult mountain bikers. For example, unnecessarily buying expensive equipment signified an adult outsider status, whilst young people who had the wrong equipment or chose not to participate in mountain biking were consequently stigmatised. Attitudes towards buying, displaying, discussing and using equipment were nuanced and often used to exclude.

6.5.3 Discussion: consuming identity

Young people consume identifiable styles through leisure choice and exploring these symbolic choices is crucial for understanding contemporary youth cultures (Hollands, 2002). As Chaney (1996:30) has claimed ‘consumption provides a language or code upon which lifestyles are constructed’ and writers on other lifestyle sports have also commented on the importance of consumption as part of these activities (Wheaton, 1997; Tomlinson et al., 2005). Wheaton and Beal (2003:155), for example, described the role of magazines for ‘circulating cultural knowledge’ and displaying cultural capital in alternative sporting cultures and youth cultures more generally have been theorised through their consumption of media (Thornton, 1995). Yet although participants mentioned reading magazines or watching DVD’s as part of their own mountain biking lifestyles the focus was on the experience of riding for youth mountain bikers and the consumption of equipment and clothing as part of the activity of mountain biking was most significant.

The notion of consumption communities has been applied to youth leisure groups whose group identity is negotiated through the process of symbolic consumption (Ferguson and Todd, 2005). Within the youth mountain biking communities examined in this thesis the consumption of clothing and equipment in particular served to distinguish between DDF, cross country, (BMX) and adult forms of mountain biking. Youth mountain bikers explored attitudes towards the consumption of these items to identify outsiders as novice or younger participants and to other youth who did not participate in mountain biking or adult mountain bikers. Echoing the findings of
Donnelly and Young (1988) in sport culture more generally, within youth mountain biking lifestyles overt display of clothing or equipment could indicate a novice identity to the wider sporting community whereas an insider would claim ‘that stuff doesn’t matter to me now’ [Chimp, 24].

Thus, consumption was a complex concept within youth mountain biking and similar to Wheaton’s (2000) contentions, whilst image and style were important to identity construction as part of lifestyle sports; for youth mountain biking, it was the less visible characteristics such as etiquette and ethos (see section 7.3.3) that were often more important parts of the process of identity formation. For example, within surfing communities Lanagan (2003:179) has claimed ‘it is the area in which the product was born, and by whom the product has been worn and promoted, that determines genuine surfwear’. Within youth mountain biking lifestyles it was the role of clothing in distinguishing between disciplines and separating them from adult forms of leisure along with the ethos of anti consumerism formed around equipment that emerged as key consumption themes within youth mountain biking culture.

Observations of youth mountain bikers showed that identities were informed, in part, by an anti consumption ethos because of the difficulties experienced in obtaining equipment with limited economic capital. Thus acquiring bits of equipment on a piecemeal basis could be part of identity. Similarly Wheaton (1997, 2000) recognised the problems, in terms of identity, of ‘buying into’ a style through conspicuous consumption and acknowledged an anti consumption ethos particularly in the least wealthy windsurfing areas. Authenticity and identity is a contentious issue within lifestyle sports (Donelly and Young, 1988; Beal and Weidman, 2003) and for youth mountain bikers, consumption was problematic because obtaining the correct equipment and clothing was often beyond their means.

In part, the participants echo Butterfield (2000:6) who has argued that too much of our leisure can be characterised as a ‘joyless treadmill of consumption’ requiring a readily available income to sustain it, yet youth mountain bikers desired this equipment and felt more entitled to it than the ‘weekend warriors’ whose experience of mountain biking was considered less legitimate. In essence, the youth mountain bikers rejected what Eassom (2003:200) has captured as an identity which says ‘I might ride my bike
around town during the week, but hey, on the weekends I’m an all action, outdoors, thrill-seeking hedonist who lives life on the edge’. For Eassom (2003:200), the trend towards conspicuous lifestyle choices has seen the mountain bike become another victim of techno fetishism, ‘a gear freaks heaven...a tool of both social differentiation and identification’. For youth mountain bikers attitudes to consumption were far more complex, where although they celebrated the technical knowledge surrounding cycle equipment, they distanced themselves from the contention that expensive equipment was important for social identity and associated this ideal with adult mountain bikers.

Whilst equipment was still considered important to those involved, they employed other codes and values placed upon modification, equipment knowledge, and a ‘do it yourself’ attitude that did not require such economic capital investment and, therefore, was a more accessible approach to leisure than what they considered to be adult forms of the sport.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how young people negotiate the variety of choices available between different lifestyles and different communities and the role of these choices and related spaces in the shaping of youth identity. Whilst Ramthun (1997) highlighted the heterogeneity of mountain biking populations, previous literature on mountain biking has treated mountain bikers as one homogeneous group. This chapter has shown how mountain biking identities are importantly divided and heterogeneous, identifying and exploring several different types of lifestyle within mountain biking culture. This chapter has discussed how youth mountain bikers distinguish themselves from other disciplines in their sport, from other youth lifestyle sports and other adult mountain bikers as part of their various mountain biking lifestyles. Identities were formed through differentiation from, or affiliation with, particular lifestyle groups signified by the clothing worn, the equipment used, the spaces visited and the performance of different tricks, jumps or cycling styles. Yet, importantly, attitudes towards these attributes were nuanced and youth mountain bikers employed an informal etiquette in their performances of mountain biking.
DDF and cross country forms of mountain biking clearly pursue different lifestyles through their involvement in mountain biking, for example, there was a perceived difference over clothing style, attitudes towards competition and risk, with DDF riders assuming cross country riders were too serious about competition. In particular risk emerged as a central feature of this process of differentiation as DDF, cross country, BMX and female mountain bikers all embodied different perceived attitudes to risk. For DDF and BMX participants risk and notions of extremity were important in their accounts of lifestyles, whereas for cross country riders, risk was much less significant. Risk was perceived as a masculine ideal and female mountain bikers either retreated from male dominated spaces and from risk, or challenged these stereotypes as part of their own lifestyles.

Cross country riding identities were constructed as adult through their serious approach to leisure and their attitudes to risk and, therefore, young people who did participate adapted their own identities incorporating elements of DDF lifestyles as part of their own. For example, as Thorpe (2004) observed, young skiers would adopt a style similar to snowboarders to distinguish themselves from adult skiers; ‘rather than embracing the discipline and control of skiing they embodied freedom, hedonism and irresponsibility (Thorpe, 2004). Therefore, similar to ‘young’ skiers who adopted the same clothing styles as snowboarders, youth cross country mountain bikers borrowed certain styles associated with DDF identities to echo this division.

Youth mountain bikers, however, were united over a shared view of adults’ participation in leisure and in part the leisure identities of these different forms of mountain biking did overlap. The different lifestyle groups shared similar attitudes towards consumption, placing new values on equipment where symbolic meaning was based on a ‘do it yourself’ attitude and refuting ‘buying into’ the lifestyle. Within this chapter symbolic consumption of styles and attitudes to risk and leisure not only distinguish youth mountain bikers them from other disciplines but crucially from adult forms of leisure.

Despite the emphasis on differentiation, the participants also stressed the importance of shared communities and the social significance of participation in lifestyle communities. Youth mountain bikers shared a strong sense of community both within
and between the different lifestyle groupings. As Ingham and Mcdonald (2003:19) have argued, within some sporting cultures, “community” suggests both an appeal to the included and an often unspoken understanding of just who is not a part of our “community”. Youth mountain biking identities were formed through the integration of particular norms and values into one lifestyle in an attempt to differentiate from another.

Crucially then, this chapter has illustrated the importance of maintaining difference from adult mountain bikers as part of youth mountain biking lifestyles. Participant control and non adult ideals are crucial to participation whereby the sport is judged by peers rather than by external ‘adult’ authorities. This chapter has shown how the meanings of leisure may be different to that of adults, for example, through attitudes to commitment, consumption and risk. Within youth mountain biking lifestyles commitment was seen as different to adult forms because they adopted a relaxed approach to ‘doing’ mountain biking, maintained an emphasis on ‘fun’, attitudes to consumption were nuanced, and risk was constructed as youthful. Yet as it was argued in Chapter 3, youth leisure is also fundamentally different from adult forms because of the relationships with public and private space. Therefore, readings of youth mountain biking differ from those of other adult inclusive lifestyle sports because through their leisure, young people were frequently seeking spaces away from adult surveillance and control.

Youth mountain biking lifestyles were formed through attitudes towards commitment, competition, and consumption of particular equipment, clothing and in opposition to adults, yet lifestyles happen in particular locations, spaces and environments that are significant in the shared identity of the group, and in the degree to which the activity bears important symbolism in people’s lived experience (Crouch and Tomlinson, 1994). Similar to Downs’ (2003:148) observations of BMX culture, within mountain biking, emphasis was not on competition or celebrity, ‘but in digging jumps in secluded locations and riding for the sheer enjoyment of it’.

This chapter has shown how different groups of youth mountain bikers negotiate and understand different spaces at Bedgebury and elsewhere, and how the distinctions between these groups were also manifested in space. At Bedgebury, the lifestyle
practices of the different forms of youth mountain biking were spatialised, occupying different and distinct spaces within the forest, creating different types of leisure experiences and social identities for those who took part. Bedgebury provided a different type of cycle space to those found at PORC or Bewl Water. At Bedgebury young people avoided the formal spaces of adults and could perform mountain biking away from the surveillance of others. Thus space is central to the expression of identity, and the performance of different mountain biking lifestyles. The links between lifestyle, space and identity will be continued in the next chapter.
Chapter 7  Lifestyle spaces: placing the scene

7.1  Placing the scene
The previous chapter identified the factors which were important in the construction of identities associated with youth mountain biking lifestyles and the role of space emerged as crucial to understanding the performance of the different lifestyles and identities. This chapter explores these spatialities in more detail, unveiling particular social and spatial practices within mountain biking culture which link the participant with leisure space whilst also revealing important relationships between space and power.

This chapter adopts a similar style to Chapter 6 whereby each major section is followed by an interpretative discussion and the chapter is divided into two parts. The first part considers how youth mountain bikers constructed the countryside as part of their own mountain biking identities and the role of countryside space in the performance of mountain biking lifestyles. It explores the way in which young people formed knowledge about countryside space and how youth mountain biking identities were articulated in relation to nature and space.

The second part explores the lived realities of youth leisure lifestyles and the relationship between space and identity through the interwoven processes of power and control. Youth mountain bikers experienced some tension in their use of cycle spaces with both other youth and adults, and employed codes and rules of behaviour as part of a process of ownership. The chapter concludes by reviewing the ways in which youth mountain bikers negotiated these power relationships and were empowered to create and access different forms of cycle space.
7.2.1 The countryside: ‘alternative leisure space’

‘I always get tired in cities, I don’t like them’ [Sharpshooter, 21]

Crouch (1992:238) has claimed that through some leisure practices, particular landscapes are given meaning and ‘experienced as an endorsement of the culture that it represents and becomes part of the surrounding symbols of that everyday culture’. This section analyses the relevance of countryside space for youth mountain bikers and how countryside space acts with the lifestyle and is entwined in mountain biking identities. As outlined in Chapter 1 and discussed again Chapter 3, the countryside within this thesis refers to those spaces identified as ‘natural’, ‘non built-up’ or ‘countryside’ by young people, both urban and rural dwellers, but as Chapter 3 demonstrated, urban and rural are not suitable terms for the categorisation of leisure practices and performances.

As discussed in the previous chapter (section 6.4.1 -6.4.3), youth mountain bikers often manifested difference from other youth leisure cultures or mainstream approaches to sport particularly through attitudes to competition, however, this alternative identity was also connected to their choice of leisure space. Youth mountain bikers favoured countryside or non built-up spaces in opposition to those in urban or built-up environments. As was shown in figure 6.1, the majority of participants lived in close proximity to towns or cities but often in villages or rural suburbs.

The participant below describes the use of countryside spaces as youth meeting places within and around the town of Tunbridge Wells as part of the local youth mountain biking scene:

‘…there are so many more people that do it, like downhill, jumps and that kind of thing and there used to be loads of places round Tunbridge Wells where everyone would just go and where everyone would meet up and it was kind of about meeting new people and you’d just chat, they were just like local forests’ [Jimmy, 18].

For participants living in rural areas surrounding Bedgebury, mountain biking was an integral part of their ‘rural’ (residential as opposed to leisure) identity and represented a response to the lack of leisure opportunities available to young people who lived in rural areas. Mountain biking offered a way of overcoming isolation and gave them what they termed a ‘freedom’ as both a form of transport and as a leisure activity in itself.
‘When you live in the countryside you tend to have a bike before a car because it’s the only way of getting around and doing anything and it’s also something you can take off road and have a bit of a laugh’ [Hank, 25].

‘I’ve got two friends where I live ‘cause we live in a little village, and we’ve been building stuff for like three years...having fun, wasting time, ‘cause we’ve got nothing else to do, we’ve got a post office and a phone box, so yeah everyone I know really rides’ [Minty, 17].

Links between mountain biking and the countryside were not limited to those from rural areas, many participants made connections between mountain biking identities and countryside space. The countryside featured in the construction of many participants’ identities as mountain bikers.

‘I s’pose I’m a country bumpkin like that, just hang around out here with my mates...it’s just what we do’ [Cheech, 16].

‘You won’t find anyone more woodlandy than me’ [Jimmy, 18].

Being in countryside or non built-up spaces appealed to youth mountain bikers as a landscape which offered significant visual attraction whilst riding, with participants commenting in particular on the importance of trees and the appeal of woodlands. For example, one respondent commented ‘it’s better than being surrounded by bricks’ [Hank, 25]. Freedom was a quality youth mountain bikers associated with countryside spaces, and visiting countryside spaces provided a sense of escapism for young people. Harry described the seclusion of woodlands providing a place to escape and relax with friends:

‘Jumps always tend to be in woodlands, I don’t know why I guess it’s ‘cause it’s secluded, ‘cause the thing is you don’t really want to be surrounded by loads of people when your biking you do want to do your own thing. We say it’s a bit of an escape really, like you can come here and relax and we don’t always bike all the time, like in the summer when it’s a really hot day we just come out here and sit in the woods really’ [Harry, 16].

Urban, or more specifically built-up leisure spaces did not offer the same sense of escapism and were drawn upon in comparison to mountain biking in the countryside. Respondents often mentioned the atmosphere of countryside spaces associated with being ‘out of the town and tucked away’ [Nichols, 18]. The respondents below described how the atmosphere at Bedgebury was different from a skate park in a town or city:
James: ‘it’s an escape, if you’re outdoors somewhere away from a town or a city it’s just more relaxing because you’re away from people and cars all trying to get somewhere so you can sit there and nothing is happening, its not all built-up...part of the draw is being away from everything, like skate parks are in a town so you kind of lose some of that kind of escape, and so you have to instead escape in your mind and just focus solely on the riding, whereas if you’re outside you can withdraw your mind from the problems’

Joner: ‘It’s like a group escape’

James: ‘You go out and have fun away from everything else, just chill out and ride’ [James, 17 and Joner, 17].

For young people that lived in rural areas, mountain biking was perceived as a ‘rural’ sport. For the respondent below, urban youth occupied specific spaces within Bedgebury that he considered were more akin to an urban lifestyle, whereas those who lived in a rural area, and thus were what he considered to be ‘proper’ mountain bikers (see section 6.4.2) were more adventurous in their use of cycle space:

‘I bet if you did a survey most of the people from towns and cities would be on that family track and people from the country would be going down the single-track, I bet you’d find that, ‘cause like people who cycle in towns are more used to cycling on concrete, whereas I live in the countryside so I’m looking for something more off road, a bit more exciting’ [Chrome Rider, 25].

Much of this was associated with the availability of leisure space with respondents assuming mountain biking was an activity pursued by young people who lived in rural areas whereas urban youth were more likely to perform BMX or activities associated with street spaces.

‘You look at the people that ride and the people in the magazines and a lot of the people that did the big jumps and the cross country, I think, were people that lived out in the countryside. I think the people that did the BMXing and tricks and all the rest of it, they were much more town based, just ‘cause it was easier for them to hop on a back wheel down some steps’ [Hugh, 25].

Although some BMX riders did access countryside mountain biking spaces as part of their own lifestyles (see section 6.3.3), participants (including the BMX riders who took part in the research) identified a lifestyle division between BMX and youth mountain bikers based on their use of countryside and urban space respectively. Conflicts arose over the occupation of these different spaces and the perceived attitudes of some BMX riders towards countryside space.
‘A lot of the BMXers hate the mountain bikers for some reason. It’s the sort of country and urban thing going on isn’t it. Most BMXers are in towns aren’t they, they don’t like or know country stuff. It’s a different style and for some reason they clash a bit’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

Despite the association with countryside space, as mentioned in Chapter 6 (section 6.2.1), youth mountain bikers, particularly DDF participants did discuss the use of urban spaces or ‘street riding’ and sometimes accessed skate parks as part of their mountain biking lifestyles but separated these experiences from those in countryside cycle space. Youth mountain bikers generally considered urban areas were unsuitable for mountain biking as experiences often included episodes of conflict or feelings of threat. Young people also felt excluded from safe cycling spaces in urban areas and described contention with pedestrians and the police and reprimand for using pavements or other no cycle zones, yet felt cycling on the road was too dangerous.

‘I have to ride down the road where I’m likely to get killed or I ride down the pavement and I’m likely to get shouted at’ [Damien, 18].

Respondents claimed mountain biking in urban areas was constructed as particularly deviant by adults and authorities. Therefore, youth mountain bikers living in urban or more built-up areas described accessing the countryside as a safe space, free from surveillance or confrontation with adults, and away from the restrictions experienced in urban space.

‘Cause like sometimes I’ll just go down on my own and it’s just like quiet and you do what you wanna do and there’s no-one telling you what to do, there’s no-one for miles around. It’s much more freer sort of thing...that’s part of the reason we’re in the woods though...is to get away from other people’ [Damien, 18].

‘…I prefer woodland stuff ‘cause you’re out in nature, open space fresh air, and also it’s a designated space you don’t have to worry about ooh I shouldn’t be riding here’ [Robin, 15].

Skate parks in particular were often employed by participants as a comparative tool to contextualise their experiences of other largely countryside mountain biking spaces. Skate parks did not support what they considered to be a ‘proper’ cycling experience in terms of location, spatial organisation, control and social cohesiveness.
The spatialities of the countryside afforded a sense of freedom for youth mountain bikers, and also a particular type of social atmosphere that was specific to a non built-up environment, affecting the way in which participants performed their identities.

‘I quite like being in the woods I don’t know what it is about it, it’s like that other guy said earlier it’s a better atmosphere’ (Minty, 17).

The participant below described the jeering at skate parks, and the pressure of performing in these spaces as opposed to the freedom he experienced cycling at the freeride area at Bedgebury:

‘Skate parks are one of those places which I would go to if there was no one else there, because you get people there that….I prefer, like freeride, means free ride…go where you want, whereas going to a skate park, I’ve been to one in Hastings and you get loads of people who just stand there and do nothing they just watch, you think you’re just getting rated, and you just think I’m not having fun really I’m just trying not to fall off, I’m not trying anything new ‘cause I don’t want to look like an idiot’ [Minty 17].

Skate parks were labelled as ‘chavvy’ [Joel, 16] referring negatively to an atmosphere associated with an urban user group. For Paul, skate parks did not embody his own leisure space ideals, and he associated this explicitly with the accessibility of skate parks for a variety of (urban) youth groups:

‘It’s closer to home and I mean it’s just easier to get there, and like a couple of ramps in a small place I just don’t like the atmosphere, like we don’t really like going to places where people get in fights and stuff and that would never happen on the dirt scene I don’t think’ [Paul, 16].

Other riders, however, commented upon the lack of social cohesion in skate parks which accommodated several different groups of young people. In contrast, Bedgebury and many other mountain biking spaces were only accessed by those involved in mountain biking lifestyles.

‘Cause at a skate park you’ve got skaters, BMXers, bladers, skooterers, pikeys, people that just hang around and smoke and at biking at PORC and this place [Bedgebury] you’ve just got one thing…you’ve got biking, just jumpers’ [Kona Owner, 15].

Many of the conflicts between different groups of young people resulted from disputes over space. Youth mountain bikers indicated they felt out of place in skate parks, where skateboarders remained the dominant and intended user group. Conflicts
between mountain bikers and skateboarders saw skateboarders assert more rights and control over space.

‘...so long as you give them room it’s ok, but if you get in their way they lose it really fast’ [Bill, 13].

For many participants, including those who lived in towns or more urban areas, conflicts in skate parks were reminiscent of the wider urban environment and some participants expressed a general distaste towards using urban spaces for leisure.

‘I don’t do it [BMX] because you have to go to skate parks in town and that’s where a lot of pikeys hang out and you get bothered when you’re in town and stuff gets broken more...Cos towns are just so bad, you go down the high street and you just get hassle from so many people, like old people whinge at you ‘cause your riding on the pavement or like there’s such a clash of cultures of old people who want everything really peaceful and then like townies who think oh its really cool to smash that window or what not’ [Damien, 18].

‘Yeah like the other people I used to spend time with like I don’t really find it that much fun just like hanging around in towns, I hate towns...I like to be out there digging trails’ [Nichols 18].

Thus young people, including those who lived in towns or cities, constructed countryside leisure space as free, and as hidden away and urban leisure space as congested and hostile. Furthermore, participants distinguished themselves from the activities associated with urban space such as ‘picking fights’, ‘smoking’, or ‘hanging around’. Below, Bill discusses his own experiences of visiting skate parks for mountain biking:

‘...like there’s this guy who doesn’t do anything just hangs around there, and he’s always asking me stuff about my bike, asking about my tyres, but he doesn’t do anything, he just goes down there to have a fag’ [Bill, 13].

Whereas Lieberg (1995:727) discussed the use of public space by teenagers whose ‘patterns of action were characterized by an informal and a nonrational “doing nothing”’ within youth mountain biking lifestyles hanging around was only acceptable as part of mountain biking and may have involved talking about equipment, performing bike maintenance or ‘sessioning’. Instead emphasis was placed on activity, and whilst some participants discussed hanging around, it was not ‘doing nothing’, but ‘doing mountain biking’.
As discussed in Chapter 3, identity is linked to space and youth mountain bikers associated symbolic meaning with being active outdoors, and in particular being in the countryside. Some participants linked this directly to their identities as mountain bikers; as Jimmy explains [18] ‘...all my friends are like really outdoorsy people’. In mountain biking communities, the body distinguished those who were ‘outdoorsy’ from those who weren’t. For the participant below there was something recognisable and embodied in mountain biking identities, which distinguished them from other youth leisure identities primarily through their association with ‘active’ or extreme forms of leisure:

‘You can just tell who rides... you can see someone walking down the street and they look like they ride or they do something extreme, even if its rollerblading. You can more tell people were into sports, as opposed to not, like if they do something half extreme or if they just sit around playing play station’ [Damien, 18].

Participants described how mountain bikers embodied a particular identity that portrayed an active lifestyle and placed this with a particular outdoor ethic.

Kenny: ‘You can tell some people just watch TV and some people come out and do stuff like this’ [Kenny, 15].

Robin: ‘We spend a lot of time outside it beats watching TV...it’s like how d’you get adrenaline out of TV’ [Robin, 15].

Being ‘outdoorsy’ was also linked with attitudes towards health and well being. Youth mountain bikers, both male and female, often cited health benefits to participating in mountain biking that some associated with being outdoors.

‘Being outdoors, I hate being indoors it makes me ill-ish, like you know when you’re inside in the winter, and sort of all day for a week you just sort of feel rubbish and tired and I sort of get that in the summer so I’m always outside’ [Arnie, 16 ].

Some participants associated mountain biking with improving and advancing their own physicalities, although fitness was often associated with an adult attitude to leisure, and, therefore, young people were often careful not to over emphasise this point.

‘I’m always petrified that I’m gonna get obese when I’m older so I’m always like stay riding, stay riding. I’m not exactly a fitness freak but I know that it does me good’ [Boris, 16].
Indeed, young people’s relationships with adult users of countryside space affected the impressions participants formed about the countryside. Attitudes towards countryside space were nuanced to distinguish themselves from adult countryside users and adult appreciation of countryside space. For example, participants were dismissive of any outward appreciation of nature. Despite the importance of the countryside as part of mountain biking identities, appreciation of nature was not considered relevant to the leisure experience and nature appreciation was considered a more adult ideal, one respondent claiming ‘maybe I’ll be more into it when I’m older’ [Jimmy, 18].

Despite the penchant for the countryside as a leisure space, discussing nature or attitudes to the countryside was often problematic and uncomfortable for participants who did not associate their lifestyle with nature or the natural environment and who claimed ‘we’re not tree huggers’ [Chimp 24].

KK: ‘How important is the surrounding environment to you when you ride?’
Cheech: ‘What like flowers and stuff?’
KK: ‘Well, What I was trying to get at is whether what’s around you matters to you when you ride, or is it not really something you think about?’
Cheech: ‘Um...(long pause)...I just ride a bike’ [Cheech, 15]

The quote below shows the participant constructs his own interpretation of nature; acknowledging the role of nature in the experience but as a background to the activity:

KK: ‘Do you appreciate the environment around you?’
Boris: ‘I enjoy it whilst I’m riding’
Nichols: ‘Yeah we like saying that looks like a jungle, or build a line through there so that nature comes in to the set up when we’re building quite a lot, like to make it more impressive when you ride through’
Boris: ‘…but it’s not like I walk through the trees all the time going ‘oh this is nice’. I don’t enjoy nature like that’ [Boris, 16 and Nichols, 18].

Nature was not significant for youth mountain bikers, but was something they associated with an adult mountain biking identity. The quotes below suggest, however, that some participants considered mountain biking to be a sport that held ‘green’ values and this was something that appealed to them:
Russell: ‘Like that’s the problem when people build their own trails like unofficially, they kind of end up destroying the landscape, it doesn’t look as nice, it kind of goes against it in a way’

KK: ‘What does it go against?’

Russell: ‘I think it’s quite a green sport really, it’s about being kind to the environment’ [Russell, 16]

KK: ‘So why do you ride then? Why is it important to you?’

Rowan: ‘I dunno its more modern isn’t it like not using a car, less polluting and stuff’ [Rowan, 16].

Participants’ identities were negotiated according to complex and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards the countryside. Participants accessed countryside space explicitly identifying various qualities that contributed to the enjoyment of the space such as free, tranquil, relaxing, exciting and sociable. Most importantly the capacity for the shaping of space increased the significance of countryside spaces for young people where urban areas did not offer the same opportunities.

‘I’ve got a mate who lives in Brighton and he knows all the spots so when I ride street I try and go with him……but then on the downs its totally different ‘cause it’s not all built-up is it, like you can change it there how you like’ [Mike, 14].

Therefore, youth mountain bikers assessed the value of leisure space in terms of being built-up or non built-up because of the possibilities for shaping and modifying areas of non built-up or countryside space for mountain biking. Nevertheless, most participants rejected an outward appreciation of nature as part of this relationship with the countryside, yet they found themselves associating with ‘outdoorsy’ and active types rather than with ‘pikeys’ or ‘chavs’ that they associated with more deviant or sedentary urban leisure activity. Instead, being active in non built-up spaces was a central tenet of youth mountain biking lifestyles. A discussion of how these findings advance understandings of youth leisure and the countryside is located in section 7.2.3, first, however, the next section explores the significance of the performance of youth leisure in countryside space and how the activity of mountain biking facilitated symbolic connections with cycle space.
7.2.2 Connecting with the countryside through leisure performance

‘It’s a big part of how you ride isn’t it, where you ride’ [Boris, 16].

The relationship between participant and place was a crucial part of the leisure experience and of youth mountain biking lifestyles. In addition to the explicit links between space and identity discussed above, young people made important connections with a variety of countryside spaces through participation in mountain biking in more subtle ways. Youth mountain bikers formed important place relationships with cycling spaces, for example, localism was an important part of youth mountain biking lifestyles (see section 7.3.4). Regular mountain bikers would often express a particularly significant connection to local cycling landscapes, for example, Jimmy [18] claimed ‘I probably know every corner I come so often’ when discussing his use of Bedgebury cycling space. Participants demonstrated an intimate knowledge of various cycling spaces and the techniques required for producing the optimum cycling experience and knowledge of these spaces was important to the performance of leisure.

Discussing the negotiation of different types of landscapes was an important part of mountain biking culture. As mentioned in Chapter 6 (section 6.3.1), at Bedgebury, the freeride area provided the setting for ‘sessioning’, with youth mountain bikers congregating around particular sections to observe other riders, critiquing and exchanging styles of riding and re-enacting them later. An important element of these sessions was the demonstration of spatial awareness and ‘local’ knowledge of cycle space. Regular dirt jump riders at Bedgebury demonstrated a tacit knowledge of how particular sections produce particular riding experiences, passing on their knowledge to other riders.

Kona Owner: ‘Oh look at that [points to dirt jumper] he did that well nicely, he pulled out the berm’

KK: ‘How can you tell that he’s done that well?’

Jumper Boy: ‘Cause normally if you come round the corner and if you don’t get it right you fly out, like that berm isn’t the best because it exits at the wrong bit’ he pulled out and got it right in the middle which I’m gonna do in a minute ‘cause it looked cool’ [Kona Owner, 15 and Jumper Boy, 15].
Respondents often discussed either discovering or creating new cycling spaces at Bedgebury and in other countryside cycle spaces with cross country and DDF riders displaying subtle differences in the extent to which they were involved in these two processes.

Cross country mountain biking often involved travelling long distances and participants were eager to experience a variety of different terrains and routes, describing explorations of woodlands or the wider countryside as an attempt to uncover new cycle space. The extract below documents the discovery of a new route by some cross country riders on an unaccompanied recorded ride:

Tony: ‘Oi look...Robin there’s a well nice bit just there, look we can cut down there, there’s some nice bits, its well cool through here its well bumpy its really cool through there’

Robin: ‘Yeah it’s good for corners...is this like a little hidden route or something. (shouts to others) I think we’ve found something…it’s a mud mound’ [Tony, 15 and Robin, 15].

The process of discovering new spaces experienced as part of cross country mountain biking appeared to be an integral part of the mountain biking experience but it was also important for DDF participants. The DDF cyclist below describes discovering some jumps made by other cyclists in a remote area at Bedgebury. It indicates that youth mountain bikers were persistently assessing the play potential of particular woodland features:

‘It’s cool like here, I don’t know whether you’ve noticed but like on paths you might see like a little track and you can just go off and make your own little freeride bits there, and up the top here there’s some logs so you can jump over them, and there’s a concrete platform up the top which I’ve always been tempted to jump off” [Jonny, 25].

For DDF riders, the performance of mountain biking involved finding new cycling spaces or, more often, reinventing existing cycling space. Almost all DDF participants had been involved in some form of jump building from small jumps in their back gardens to large scale woodland excavations. This usually involved assessing the spatial properties of an area before customising a cycling space.
'For building downhill tracks you look for natural things, things that are already there like if there’s a hill or a natural dip or some tree roots, to make it all bumpy and stuff. It’s kind of hard to explain, but you look for the way it’s gonna line up, like the corners have to line up so if you come out of one corner, its got to have good speed, it’s whatever is gonna make the best fun, the best track’ [Damien, 18].

Perceptions of countryside space were dependent upon the potential cycling opportunities. The respondents appreciated woodland environments for the challenge and the variety of terrain they offered; ‘the natural dips and curves’ [Sharpshooter, 21]. The quotes below illustrate how the ‘natural’ features of woodlands made them preferable cycling spaces to open fields, for example:

‘Woods and stuff...it gives you the right terrain, if you’re looking to make a technical track you need the trees you need the roots you need everything that comes with a forest to make it good, otherwise you just have a field’ [Tim 16].

Other responses indicated an appreciation of woodlands for creating a particular type of atmosphere. Discussions surrounding the atmosphere created within woodlands were often linked to the seclusion they offered as a ‘hidden’ space.

‘The way I see it with woodlands, having a trail in woods, you don’t get the same feeling, the same vibes, if its built on open land, well I don’t anyway, not the same atmosphere, not the same feeling when you’re rolling through’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

Some participants explained a preference for places which they considered were more ‘natural’ criticising PORC for a lack of trees and claiming Bedgebury had a more ‘natural’ appeal. The respondents exhibited mixed ideas and understandings about the ‘naturalness’ of trails, for example, one rider considered cycling spaces in the South Downs to the south of Bedgebury to be more ‘natural’ than the single-track at Bedgebury, whilst another commented upon the difference between the ‘naturalness’ of trails in the Peak District and those at Bedgebury:

‘I think it’s looking more natural the older it gets. Like some of the single-track looks more natural now. When it was first done it was loads of coloured stones but now it seems to fit in with the forest. Like I’ve been to the Peak District and that was real natural no man-made stuff just a waylaid trail through’ [Jonny, 25].

Young people accentuated the naturalness of cycling spaces in videos and photographs and the retelling of riding, and thus the retelling of themselves. As Chapter 6 (section 6.2.3) demonstrated, using forums to post videos and photos of bike ‘set ups’, tricks
and trails was an important display of identity, and was an important format for communicating with other riders. Participants discussed making video sequences inspired by natural events or processes such as seasonal changes, or framed shots using trees and ferns commenting on an appreciation of their ‘natural’ appeal.

‘In winter time you can get nice long shots ‘cause there’s not so much ground foliage and the summer shots you can get the dusty kind of thing so you get different stuff at different times of year like in the autumn one we were really trying to get the autumn colours. It became that the backdrops of the shots and was the most important bit, more than the riding was in the end’ [Nichols, 18].

Exploring these dimensions of countryside space was considered distinctive to the way in which mountain bikers ‘see’ spaces, and different to that of other users in the same space. Respondents described the way in which a mountain biker would ‘look’ at a landscape, assess the terrain and visualise a route.

‘I dunno you just sort of cruise round and if you spot a line or like a bank onto a wall or something, I dunno you get an eye for it. You just see stuff and you think oh I could pop off that and land over there or I could go over there, its brilliant, I was there with a mate, and I just saw this line and I just went for it, it didn’t click with me before but once I saw it that was it’ [Chimp, 24].

A similar theme termed ‘instrumental viewing’ has been discussed by Brown et al. (2007:4), yet these distinct relationships with space also respond to Spencer et al.’s (1989) notion of alternative scripts discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.2). Youth mountain bikers looked beyond the original function of space to its potential for new leisure performances. For youth mountain bikers, embodied experiences were the basis of these place relationships, and the capacity for ‘flow’ dictated the meaning and the value of cycle spaces. Jimmy described the flow experienced as part of cross country below:

‘you can get a certain momentum going and just carry it the whole way through without breaking too much on the corners, and when you just don’t have to think about pedalling and you can just flow through the landscape, that’s the real thrill of mountain biking for me…’ [Jimmy, 18].

Some participants had very distinct ideas about their requirements from particular types of space, often gained from their experiences of designing and building cycle space and usually organised around achieving ‘flow’.
For Shields (1997:3), ‘flows signal pure movement, without the suggesting a point of origin or a destination, only a certain character of movement, fluidity and direction’. Youth mountain bikers, particularly DDF participants sought landscapes that tested their own abilities, included an element of risk and stimulated embodied sensations such as adrenaline or thrill.

Tony: ‘Yeah that buzz…’

Robin: ‘…It flows over you’ [Tony, 15 and Robin, 15].

Performing a sequence of actions and achieving flow was an integral part of the identity formation process in mountain biking, and meanings were articulated through ‘kinetic expression’ (Howe 2003:359). For example, DDF riders described how ‘everyone has their own style in the air’ [Minty, 17] signifying not only a level of skill, but also a cultural identity to others inside the lifestyle.

‘Like freeride is about free style, making your own style of riding, having your own style in the air, moving at speed, moving through the air and having your own style in the air, it’s just a really, really thrilling experience’ [Paul, 16].

Yet the connections to countryside space through leisure performances were further enhanced by the involvement of youth mountain bikers in the direct shaping of these spaces. For participants involved in building jumps and creating new forms of cycle space, they acknowledged a personal investment which gave the landscape further significance through ‘placing’ as well as performing their own riding style. Participation in building and shaping cycle spaces facilitated a deeper personal connection to these spaces.

‘Well every trail you ride is personal isn’t it. Everybody’ll make them different, make curves different, more berms, less berms, some people wanna make zigzags, some people wanna go straight and so every track is gonna be different and have a different feel’ [Sharpshooter, 21].
Participants claimed to feel more involved in the sport through either build days at Bedgebury, where mountain bikers would help with the maintenance and rebuilding of trails or through creating ‘secret spots’ in private woodlands.

‘...I used to have my own downhill track where I was more involved in it, you know working with the woods, cutting up bits of wood, shaping the environment’ [Jimmy, 18].

At Bedgebury, participants expressed enthusiasm for becoming involved in the production of cycling space, particularly within the local DDF community and without these opportunities some participants indicated feelings of exclusion from decision making, and from the shaping of space.

KK: ‘So do you think you get much say in what happens here?’
Nichols: ‘Um not as much as I’d like, just put it like that’ [Nichols, 18].

For youth mountain bikers, building trails and taking an active role in the layout of cycling space was an integral part of the experience. As discussed in Chapter 6 (section 6.5.2), youth mountain bikers were critical of the ‘weekend warriors’ not only for their attitudes towards equipment but also because of what was perceived to be a less involved approach to leisure. Part of the rebuke of this approach to leisure was because of the distance they placed between themselves and the landscape. Weekend warriors ‘just turn up and ride’ [Tim, 16], whereas youth mountain bikers described spending much of their time repairing, maintaining or forming new trials.

‘Well like what I was saying with you know, knowing how the bike works, if you help build something in a place you sort of learn about the place as well and what works best where, what materials are best’ [Arnie, 16].

Figure 7.1 below is a copy of an advertisement in a mountain biking magazine a participant bought to an interview and he had previously displayed on his bedroom wall. The participant felt it captured his own connection with mountain biking, and his passion for building jumps:
‘It’s hard to explain, I dunno you just wanna shape them nice, symmetrical round the sides, shaped nice, just try and make them blend in with the surroundings, you know if you dig a big hole it just looks all shitty, it just not what you do, like a nice shaped jump there’s something about it. You take pride in it, if you make a nice one, its brilliant, especially, like when you make jumps you need to bulk them out in the middle so when you land off one, and you take off for another you keep your speed and you can spend like a whole day just shaping out the bowl in the middle but once you get that perfect that’s it you won’t ever have to touch it again’ [Chimp, 24].

Figure 7.1: Advertisement for Howies clothing in Dirt magazine (2002) 13
Source: Participants own [Chimp, 24]

These relationships with cycling space relied upon knowledge of the environments in which they built. According to one participant this was acquired by ‘just by taking a

13 The text in the advertisement reads: ‘On a farm you have to first fallow the field, tend to it, plough it, sow it, then wait. You can’t rush the seasons and there is no stage that you can miss out. It’s hard work and sometimes you wonder if you will ever see a return on all that effort. One time you let by and you begin to see your crop growing. Then before you know it, it’s harvest time.’
spade and digging a hole” [Joel, 16] rather than through any formal training. Respondents developed a distinctive knowledge about the ‘nature’ of these environments, for example, describing the best topography or trees for supporting trails. These kinds of nature knowledge’s were informal and did not extend beyond the activity of building trails, many of the respondents talked, for example, about different types of ‘muds’ and worked this in to their understandings of how different landscapes provided different riding environments.

‘Being in the woods, you learn a lot like what kind of muds and stuff you need to build jumps and if it’s really rooty it’s really hard to build stuff’ [Tim, 16].

‘Jumps can be done anywhere that’s got soil and you’ve got people willing to dig. Clay is good. It [jumps] tends to be in forests ’cause then it’s protected and it’s not out in the elements’ [Brian 16, and Cheech, 16].

There was also an awareness of the importance of good drainage so trails could be accessed all year round, with some participants expressing a preference for pine forests which provide good drainage: ‘If there’s no drainage then you can’t jump just after it’s been raining’ [Tim, 16]. Young people had an inherent awareness of the environmental qualities of cycling space through their involvement in mountain biking and this became an important part of their cultural identity. One beginner mountain biker observed how knowledge was shared and exchanged amongst the community and claimed ‘I’d like to get know the forest a bit better as well’ [Eddie, 19]. Yet participants did not display an explicit or formal ecological or biological knowledge of countryside or forest space instead these forms of nature knowledge were gained through taking part in constructing spaces.

In general, participants took a very pragmatic stance to nature and the environment and the relationships with the countryside were based upon an appreciation of the landscape through function and contribution to the performance of mountain biking. The countryside provided specific landscapes or infrastructure which supported mountain biking. For example, woodlands also offered the preferred environment for riding because of the proliferation of shade: ‘Open woods are probably the best, sheltered by the trees otherwise you get boiling hot’ [Joel, 16]. As shown in Chapter 6, the countryside or non built-up spaces also provided seclusion and a space away from adults. Crucially, countryside spaces provided the raw materials for cycling, and
facilitated the building of trails. Youth mountain bikers described maintaining a ‘respect’ for the countryside but prioritised the cycling capabilities of the space over any appreciation of nature.

‘...whatever like that Ray Mears bloke might say like you’ve got to save that branch I don’t really think about that, and if people say you’re gonna kill that tree by digging its roots up, I hadn’t really thought about killing it, but like, taking away a bush I wouldn’t be upset about it, id just say that’s where the track goes so the bush gets it!...I don’t really mind about all that saving the trees and that, I don’t really care about all that stuff as long as the trees are there my woodlands are there and the space is there’ [Damien, 18].

Young people experienced a connection to countryside space through performing mountain biking and these connections become crucial to their identities as knowledge about cycling spaces was shared and exchanged amongst other lifestyle members. Yet preserving ‘nature’ was not a priority for youth mountain bikers particularly when trees or bushes prevented trail and jump building. The capacity for accessing self-made cycle space represented a further dimension to youth mountain biking lifestyles and increased the significance of countryside space.

7.2.3 Discussion: mountain biking identities and countryside space
This section has highlighted the importance of space in the performance of leisure. In this instance, countryside space provided a platform upon which youth mountain bikers could perform their lifestyles in the most appropriate manner.

Youth mountain bikers distinguished themselves from other leisure cultures through their performance and use of space, specifically from sedentary or indoor leisure activities; inflating the significance of outdoor space and being ‘outdoorsy’ as part of their own identities. These findings echo those of Leyshon (2008) who explored the construction of rural youth identities as wholesome or decent and the juxtaposition of urban youth as deviant, inferior and unsophisticated. For those who lived in rural areas mountain biking was associated with a rural residential identity, and in keeping with the work of Matthews et al. (2000a), participants described how mountain biking offered them an escape from the inhibitions and restrictions some young people experience by living in the countryside. Yet many youth mountain bikers also lived in non rural areas and crucially it was the use of non rural or non built-up ‘leisure’ as
opposed to ‘living’ spaces that signified a countryside identity amongst youth mountain biking communities and, therefore, the countryside was an important component of the leisure identities of all participants.

Macnaghten et al., (1998) recognised the opportunities for different types of socialising and relating to each other afforded by being outdoors and participants within this research discussed the countryside as a setting for socialising for young people who lived in both rural and urban areas. The countryside was an important part of their identities as mountain bikers and, as Dougill and Stroh (2001) argued, as users of countryside space, participants felt part of a community of ‘outdoor types’. In contrast, within urban leisure space, some participants indicated they felt out of place when mountain biking. Whereas Nairn et al. (2003) and Lægran (2002) argued that young people often valued the more urban features of rural leisure spaces associated with a ‘cosmopolitanism’, within this thesis youth mountain bikers who lived in rural and urban areas associated urban leisure space with confrontation and restriction. Therefore, whilst youth mountain bikers did access urban spaces for mountain biking, it was usually secondary, at night or when access to countryside spaces was unavailable.

Space was also important in delineating between different youth lifestyles, for example, participants hinted that the tensions between some BMX and youth mountain bikers were due to their preference for different types of space. Nelson (2006) has commented upon the ‘tribal animosity’ between BMX riders and mountain bikers claiming that mountain biking is seen as a more adult activity and monopolised the bicycle industry whereas BMX is considered juvenile, yet crucially, he recognised that these tensions are also about space; ‘In 2000’s, the mountain bikers began to engage in what they call ‘urban assault’ or ‘street’ riding on mountain bikes. As they have moved into the skate parks, there is now a tribal tension between the two cycling cultures (essentially BMX freestyle versus MTB freestyle), as space is limited’ (2006:100).

Youth mountain bikers avoided these tribal tensions by performing leisure in the countryside and this may have added to the sense of escapism associated with using countryside space as part of their lifestyles. Also, skate parks are often managed or controlled by adults, enforce excessive safety requirements and were constructed by
participants as controlled (also see Beal and Wilson, 2004). Rinehart and Grenfall (2002) commented on the importance of the atmosphere or sense of space in performing lifestyle sports, comparing the leisure experience for BMXers at a managed commercial space and an unmanaged self-made, marginal space. They claimed that ‘the leisurely pace and feel’ of the marginal space allowed participants to form a more meaningful connection (2002:305). The countryside provided participants with the opportunity to create cycle space, free from conflicts with other youth leisure groups, away from adults and, therefore, was valued as an intrinsic and explicit element of their leisure identities.

Space was directly related to the performance of leisure, and the experience of mobility (also see Edensor, 2000), which youth mountain bikers referred to as ‘flow’. This performance of leisure and the experience of flow was also an important element of identity formation. Le Breton (2000:8), for example, has commented ‘certain physical or sports activities are developed in the passionate search for emotion, sensation and physical contact with the world and they provide intense moments of pleasure and a sense of fusion with the world’. Youth mountain biking involved a dialectic between body and space, where space was produced through movements of the body and the body was produced by these movements in space. Borden (2001:111) refers to a skateboarder’s body as ‘an assertive act constituted out of the activity of skateboarding’. Mountain biking bodies were similarly, made through mountain biking, and stylising movement often through DDF jumps or northshore whilst displaying a mountain biking body maintained and asserted a mountain biking identity. Therefore, for youth mountain bikers as Howe (2003:356) has argued in relation to skateboarding, ‘it’s not just a thing I do, it’s something I am’.

In skateboarding, theorists have understood these performances as a dance ‘whose choreography emerges with its execution’ (Howe, 2003:355) and which connects participant and place. Indeed Borden (2001) has discussed how skateboarders imprint their identities on city space, redefining it through their performances and inscribing it through the traces they leave behind. He also argued that space is produced through movement of the body and direct engagement with the terrain. Yet the relationship between participant and terrain is more meaningful for youth mountain bikers who go
beyond these performances dictating the performativity of space through the creation of new forms of cycle space. Participants described building jumps, shaping trails, arranging rocks and utilising tree roots in countryside spaces as part of their mountain biking leisure lifestyles.

Crouch (1992) has claimed that the making of leisure landscapes reinforces a sense of identity for all those who share the experience of making that space and, therefore, the readings of other theorists on the relationships between participants and leisure space are insufficient for characterising the relationship between youth mountain bikers and space. Whilst contributing understandings of the importance of these connections with leisure space, Le Breton (2000), Borden (2001) and Howe (2003), for example, are unable to account for the meanings which transpire when the participants of extreme or alternative ‘lifestyle’ sports become involved in the shaping of leisure spaces. Le Breton (2000:8) talked of a ‘sense of fusion’ between participant and place yet this reading is too simplistic as this ‘fusion’ was heightened and became more meaningful when participants were involved in the shaping of space. Youth mountain bikers experienced an increased significance of space, expressing their identities and personalising their riding experiences through direct engagement with the cycle terrain. Whilst Rinehart and Grenfall (2002) have discussed the act of constructing a site for BMX riders as ‘playful behaviour’ as an environment of freer play and risk compared to a commercially run BMX site, they explored this creative symbolic work in comparison to commercialisation rather than as a phenomena in its own right. Therefore, this study of mountain biking reaffirms the significance of space in the formation of youth identities, but shows the limitations of literature based on other youth lifestyle sports of skateboarding and BMX. In youth mountain biking, the capacity for creating space is highly valued and contributes to identity formation. In addition the potential to create and shape space raises important arguments discussed in the literature review about nature and youth.

Chapter 3 explored the complex connections occurring between young people and nature. Whilst some have claimed young people have a distaste for nature or a lack of interest in the countryside (Roker and Richardson, 2003; Countryside Agency, 2005; Henley Centre, 2005) others argued that in general, active participation in bodily
pursuits amongst nature facilitated an intimate and interactive relationship (e.g. Macnaghten, 2003; Becker, 2003; Franklin, 2003). Indeed in Chapter 4, nature emerged as an important element of participation in mountain biking (Cessford, 1995; Ruff and Mellors, 1993; Hollenhorst et al., 1995; Goeft and Alder, 2001) and mountain bikers demonstrated distinct preferences for mountain biking landscapes in relation to scenery or the presence of natural features and the effect these had on the riding experience. This section has revealed that young people experience some form of connection with ‘naturalness’ through their occupation of ‘natural’ spaces, yet not in ways that are normatively understood. The ‘nature’ of these relationships with countryside spaces was, widely contested amongst participants.

In their investigations of the place attachment of recreationists, Kyle et al. (2004) found relationships with place settings varied between different groups of recreationists, but overall, sustained involvement in an activity was considered to form an emotional bond with a natural resource. Youth mountain bikers engaged in lengthy discussions about the techniques used for cycling different types of landscapes, and the ways in which riders must negotiate a landscape to achieve the optimum riding experience, similar to Macnaghten’s (2003:76) research with anglers who described having to ‘tune in’ to the river environment. Youth mountain bikers displayed, for example, a distinct form of nature knowledge relevant to their own interactions with countryside space as part of making cycle space and performing mountain biking. Yet within the literature, nature knowledge was accounted for in terms of naming forest species and identifying leaves (e.g. Heer et al., 2003). Within this research, participants demonstrated a less formal, but no less valid type of nature knowledge which allowed them to learn how to use resources such as tree roots, rocks or ‘muds’, to create cycle space.

In addition, this section unearthed interesting, often paradoxical relationships with nature in countryside spaces. For youth mountain bikers ‘naturalness’ was a desirable feature of cycle space, and participants drew upon notions of the natural to describe how cycle space appealed to them. Thus as Macnaghten’s (2003:75) research also showed, countryside leisure is often used to experience a ‘raw and unmediated nature’ free from human interference and control. In their study of users of countryside leisure
space, Dougill and Stroh (2001) unearthed similar cultural conceptions of naturalness to those discussed here, associated with the aesthetics of the management of trails claiming that in part, these were linked with issues of disenfranchisement and lack of control over the way in which spaces were maintained. As Brown et al. (2007) have argued, engagement with nature is not just determined by regularity of participation but also the degree to which landscape values reflect leisure identities. By involving themselves in the construction of spaces, the connections between youth mountain bikers and the ‘nature’ of these spaces became more significant, and, therefore, Macnaghten (2003) and Brown et al., (2007) do not adequately capture the extent of these relationships between participant and leisure space.

Nevertheless, appreciation of nature was not considered relevant to the leisure experience of youth mountain bikers. This is particularly important given the findings from mountain biking literature on the importance of nature. Many (e.g. Cessford, 1995; Ruff and Mellors, 1993; Hollenhorst et al., 1995, Goeft and Alder, 2001) have claimed that mountain bikers appreciate nature as part of their participation, yet these represent the views of largely adult cross country riders failing to account for a youth element, or to distinguish between the different disciplines of mountain biking (e.g. Bowker and English, 2001; Carothers et al., Ruff and Mellors, 1993).

The following sections will continue to explore how countryside space was used and understood by youth biking communities and considers the power relations which affect youth mountain bikers’ experiences of leisure space.

7.3.1 The influence of others

Young people’s use of leisure space is lived through a dynamic between the inclusion and exclusion from space and involves the negotiation of various power relations, which is an integral part of the leisure lifestyles of young people, and has emerged as a central theme within this research. The narratives of youth mountain bikers showed that their identities and lifestyle were also crucially informed by the presence of landowners, institutions or ‘other’ youth who threatened their use of various cycle spaces. Youth mountain bikers relied on a complex set of rules and codes governing behaviour to protect ‘secret spots’ from being discovered and consequently destroyed.
by other youths, landowners or institutions, many of which were associated with etiquette and the management of a legitimate mountain biking identity. For example, in ‘secret spots’ youth mountain bikers operated their own modes of social ordering as part of an attempt to reduce the risk of ‘being found out’ by landowners, but also as part of a wider social dynamic within both managed and unmanaged spaces based on perceived social difference and ‘othering’.

Participants identified two youth groups of ‘others’ who challenged their own stake in cycle spaces. The first, younger riders or ‘the kiddies’ were complexly defined but for participants aged 14 – 16 years, mountain bikers around 10 or 11 years of age were considered ‘kiddies’, whereas for older riders aged 18 and over, those under 16 years old were also part of this group. Boris explained how he managed to dispel his own identity as a kiddie:

Boris: ‘I’m lucky ‘cause I’m tall for my age and I hang around with you [Nichols] so I get away with it’

Nichols: ‘yeah like at that place in London he’s like the youngest rider there, every other riders sort of my age and older but he’s allowed ‘cause he’s my brother and he’s big’

Boris: ‘yeah if you’ve got the right mindset, ‘cause generally older riders do have that right mindset’

Nichols: ‘the kids just don’t understand it yet’ [Boris, 16 and Nichols, 18].

The second group, referred to dismissively as ‘the pikeys’ chose to access cycle spaces in their leisure time but not for mountain biking. Both of these groups failed to adhere to the ethos or the etiquette of youth mountain biking lifestyles.

Both Leyshon (2008) and Massey (1998) have claimed youth cultures engage in attempts to territorialise and claim space and as Massey (1998:128) has argued ‘can be as excluding and defensive about them as any nation state’. For example, Chavez et al. (1993) claimed conflicts between countryside user groups were formed through an attachment and perceived entitlement to space as ‘turf’. When places are small or limited, the claiming of autonomous space is often a tumultuous process. Debates within rural geographies also identified conflicts between rival groups over the use of social space. Matthews et al. (2000a:146) have noted that for youth in rural spaces more generally, ‘a complex turf politics is evident whereby ‘territory’ and social
identity often went hand in hand’. Similarly, Tucker and Matthews (2002:32) have observed that ‘...where there is a lack of sanctioned space for children to play and congregate, some groups may become ‘excluded’ as rival groups claim territory’.

The following section considers the dynamic between power and space in youth mountain bikers’ understandings of space, investigating managed and unmanaged countryside, or non built-up spaces through the relationship between youth mountain bikers and landowners.

7.3.2 Landowners: power and control in cycle space

Youth mountain bikers described some tensions with landowners in both private and public countryside space claiming that many landowners constructed youth mountain biking as deviant. Some participants discussed how mountain biking in spaces outside Bedgebury often involved tensions with landowners who prevented access to some spaces.

‘...there’s quite a few jump spots round here, but when people say oh Kent’s scenery and countryside is so nice but you find out at the end of the day it’s all landowners who’d probably shoot you if you rode’ [Nichols, 18].

Chrome Rider: ‘It’s like the countryside, what else is there to do in the countryside apart from walking through farmers fields...’

Hank: ‘...getting shot at’ [Chrome Rider, 25 and Hank, 25].

Participants described feelings of frustration over a lack of power in countryside cycle space manifested when they attempted to access private land to build jumps and trails as ‘secret spots’. ‘Secret spots’ were built away from main paths or areas and sheltered from members of the public to avoid being found out and to maintain a sense of privacy.

‘We’ve got this place...it’s really well hidden, it’s out of the way but near to a town, so it’s easy to get to but hidden away’ [Joner, 17].

Yet despite efforts to hide these activities, ‘secret spots’ were usually established without landowners’ permission and all of the respondents who accessed ‘secret spots’ had experienced some form of conflict in private space ‘cause usually we’re trespassing’ [Bill, 13].
Young people described various steps taken by both private landowners and local councils to prevent this practice. For example, youth mountain bikers claimed they were prevented from accessing woodlands owned by the local council, but which participants believed to be public land. For Jonny, the use of barriers to prevent cycle access to this space reduced the opportunities for mountain biking in the local area:

‘...they sort of put you off down there ‘cause now it's hard to get the bikes in, you feel like you’re not wanted’ [Jonny, 25].

Conflicts between youth mountain bikers and landowners usually occurred when jump spots had been discovered and landowners had removed any structures built by mountain bikers, flattened jumps or prevented further access.

‘Every time we built something someone would come along and knock them down so we’d start again and build them twice the size’ [Pete, 22].

Damien: ‘...these were the first woods we rode in, we started making loads more stuff in them, and then that got trashed, that got chainsawed up, and then we moved further in the forest to a more hidden place, built there, built loads more stuff, we started building northshore and that all got chainsawed down as well’

KK: ‘So who owned the woods?’

Damien: ‘Forestry Commission. Basically they used to leave all the dirt stuff but chainsaw all the wooden stuff’ [Damien, 18].

At Bedgebury, tensions were much less apparent, particularly for cross country riders who were positive about the access to facilities provided by the Forestry Commission and derived a sense of power over cycle space through membership of Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club. Some cross country riders compared their experiences at Bedgebury to those in unauthorised cycle spaces claiming ‘...because it’s Forestry Commission we’ve always been able to go wherever we want in the forest’ [Russell, 16].

Yet other participants, largely DDF mountain bikers, were less enthusiastic about the provision of youth cycle space at Bedgebury, and indicated a sense of under representation compared to other user groups at Bedgebury. One participant felt that Bedgebury freeride area was part of a wider measure to control and segregate youth leisure space claiming:
‘most of the jumps sites are in the countryside ‘cause that’s where they get permission an’ that, they’re out the way so it keeps us out of trouble an’ that, keeps us out their way’ [Brian, 16].

Some DDF participants considered the freeride area was low priority for the Forestry Commission because families and other adult (car park paying) users produced the highest revenues and, therefore, attention focussed on the maintenance and improvement of adult and family spaces such as the single-track or the Pinetum rather than the freeride facilities aimed at young people.

In order to overcome these issues with landowners, participants displayed considerable agency in addressing these problems, and made significant attempts to negotiate with landowners over access and control of cycle space. For example, in ‘secret spots’ some participants sought out the informal permission of landowners, exposing their activity in the hope of gaining some informal rights to the land and reducing the loss of space. Often this involved a process of trial and error where respondents learnt what was and was not acceptable for particular landowners.

KK: ‘Have you ever had problems with the Forestry Commission?’

Tim: ‘Yeah a bit, we’ve had our stuff cut down once. I think the problem is we cut down trees to make the northshore and I don’t think they like that very much, and it’s not that they don’t mind us digging and stuff I think they prefer us doing that though. We don’t cut down trees they’re gonna harvest though we just cut down little ones’ [Tim, 16].

One respondent described how jumps at his ‘secret spot’ were knocked down and so he sought out the landowner in an attempt to gain permission to create something more permanent.

KK: ‘So you’ve got permission from a local landowner how did you manage that?’

Pete: ‘We went to the local council found out the name of the person who owned the land and knocked on her door basically, and she was just like it keeps you off the street, keeps you out of trouble so go for it, well this was when we were about 14’ [Pete, 22].

Some participants described accessing spaces by obtaining membership to youth run cycle clubs. Youth mountain bikers set up a membership club for accessing cycle space on private land as part of an agreement with the landowners, which transferred
liability from landowner to the club. The respondent below described an agreement reached with the landowners over a ‘secret spot’:

‘The only reason they can keep them [secret spot] is if they set up a proper membership club, and there’s loads of signs up there saying if you’re not a member you can’t ride, and stuff. I think they get a lot of kids saying they hurt themselves, and then blaming the National Trust so you can only go if you’re a member or you’ve been invited’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

Those who negotiated these informal rights to cycle space were perceived to have inherited the rights to invite those they chose to access these spaces and to exclude certain others. For the most part, however, these relationships with landowners or institutions did not prevent most youth mountain bikers from accessing countryside cycle space.

7.3.3 Etiquette, the ethos and ‘other’ youth
In addition to conflicts with landowners over access and control in cycle space, participants also discussed issues of power and control relating to groups of ‘other’ youth in both public and private cycle space. As discussed in section 7.3.1, participants identified other youth as either younger mountain bikers often referred to as ‘kiddies’, or second, as young people who visited mountain biking spaces for activities other than mountain biking and were known as the ‘pikeys’. The ‘pikeys’ were identified as young people who lived in social rented housing estates and were subject to class based discrimination, but participants also constructed them as ‘other’ because of the non mountain biking activities they chose to pursue such as smoking, drinking or damaging trails. Yet younger mountain bikers were included in this group of ‘other’ youth because they were also considered to lack an understanding of the etiquette and ethos of youth mountain biking lifestyles. Demonstrating an understanding of etiquette and ethos was crucial to gaining access or obtaining ‘invitations’ to ‘secret spots’ on private land. Rules for behaviour in these spaces were not explicit, and individually interpreted but one respondent described bad etiquette in cycle space as ‘...when people come along and ride it, break it and then don’t repair it or just come down and destroy it when they can’t ride’ [Joner, 17].
Trust was essential for maintaining the privacy and thus the longevity of ‘secret spots’ and was, therefore, a crucial element of trail etiquette. Respondents described the process of getting and giving invitation which were seen as an exchange of trust:

‘Well it’s about trust, you know one of the guys that was building the trails felt kind of let down because one guy who was helping, his mates were BMXers and they came along and trashed it and that was the circle of trust breaking down, it is quite hard to get yourself involved’ [Sarah, 24].

Younger riders, for example, did not display the same attitudes towards trust. They were more conspicuous and did not respect the vulnerability of ‘secret spots’.

‘The kids just don’t understand it yet like one person found our secret jumps and we said don’t go tell anyone and then we go up there later and hear loads of noise and there’s loads of people up there and he’d told everyone basically. Like it’s still there now but it’s really badly damaged because he went and blew the cover so you can’t trust younger people’ [Nichols, 18].

Although many mountain bikers were keen to introduce new, younger riders to mountain biking, to ‘step into our footsteps’ [Damien, 18] they were perceived as a high risk group who often had the wrong attitude towards using cycle space and poor trial etiquette.

‘….sometimes people trash a few jumps, its only little kids though who come up and they can’t ride it or jump it so they smash it so they can, do it for a laugh and that, well sometimes its ‘cause they can’t do it, so they smash up the lip so they can get over it when what they should do is try the smaller ones and work up to it rather than go straight in that happens a lot, that’s some of the reasons we stopped doing jumps in one place, ‘cause we’d spend all day doing them and then get up the next day and they’d all be gone’ [Chimp, 24].

Trail etiquette also involved a sense of nature respect in the use of cycle spaces. For example, Chimp [24] explained ‘littering is one of my big no, no’s’ and unnecessary damage to the environment through littering or trampling plants was condemned by the community. The respondent below, for example, described how showing respect for the environment was also important for reducing the possibility of expulsion from a private woodland site:

‘ we go down there every other week and clear up litter and stuff, it’s important for it to look alright because we’ll get kicked out otherwise, if someone comes down and its really scruffy then it’s gonna look so bad. Cos if we weren’t there then the litter wouldn’t be I think that’s the way they’d look at it’ [Damien, 18].
Younger riders were often blamed for damaging jump spots and participants believed they showed little respect for the environment. The respondent below described how younger riders lacked an understanding of the vulnerability of ‘secret spots’, the importance of maintaining their secrecy and showed little respect for the environment, all of which opposed the core values of ‘trail etiquette’:

KK: ‘Have you had any problems?’

Sarah: ‘Yeah I have especially some of the younger ones. I’ve seen some BMXers they come in and get out a shovel and start digging at roots just to make a little jump that they’ll probably only jump a couple of times, and I’m like why are you doing that? I tend to think little kids don’t really appreciate the woodland and don’t really care about the forest, unlike the older people who realise if you start to trash the place there isn’t going to be anywhere to ride’ [Sarah, 24].

The second group of young people who threatened cycling space were young people from ‘other’ social backgrounds labelled as ‘pikeys’ or ‘chavs’. As MacRae (2004) suggests older traditional social divisions may underpin new forms of cultural hierarchies associated with youth leisure lifestyles. Respondents distributed these labels to young people who disrupted the order of cycle space and were considered to be non cyclists: ‘They’re pikeys that’s what they do, they just wanna wreck stuff’ [Damien, 18]. As discussed in section 7.2.1, respondents associated some forms of deviant activities with an urban attitude to leisure.

‘….recently, we got all these, recently not being horrible to people from London but we’ve had all these chavvy people move down from London and if you build something they destroy it, so if you build one thing and we plan to build another five, there’s no point doing it ‘cause there’s like a lack of motivation for building something you know is going to be destroyed’ [Minty, 17].

KK: ‘So who is destroying these areas?’

James: ‘A bunch of pikeys basically. They don’t ride and I think it’s just because they don’t appreciate because they can’t ride it they don’t think other people shouldn’t or something, some kind of superiority complex’ [James 17].

These young people did not usually take part in mountain biking but were blamed for destroying cycle space at ‘secret spots’ and were unwelcome in managed cycle space. The respondent below discussed an encounter with what he termed ‘pikeys’ at
Bedgebury and explained how he was uncomfortable with the types of risks they pursued as part of their own leisure activities in these spaces:

Kona Owner: ‘We get loads of pikeys here’

KK: ‘What do you mean by that?’

Kona Owner: ‘Loads and loads of pikeys came and they were like do this, do that’

KK: ‘So who are they, are they your age?’

Kona Owner: ‘Yes you know Angley and Goudhurst? there’s a pikey estate round there, you know a council estate, and they all come from over there.’

KK: ‘So they’re not welcome here?’

Kona Owner: ‘Well yeah they are but they’re rubbish and I’m not kidding there was this kid and he was 9, 8 and he had a fag in his mouth. They come to Appledown as well, they follow us. It annoys me a lot because they stand in the way and there’s loads of them and they kind of watch, and they make loads of noise and stuff’ [Kona Owner, 15].

Within mountain biking culture, the attitudes of these groups towards cycle space challenged not only the core values, ‘ethos’, or etiquette privileged by participants, but also directly threatened the availability of leisure space for mountain bikers. Thus respondents tried to alleviate some of these tensions by spatially segregating themselves from others, moving to other spaces after conflicts had occurred ‘… you just have to make sure the people who are undesirable don’t come back again [James, 17]’. This was a tactic to deal with threat but also to exclude others and young people exhibited territorialism when defending their local space from others (Waitt, 2008). The next section describes how youth mountain bikers asserted ownership over cycling spaces through asserting their identities as ‘the locals’.

7.3.4 Cycle space: ownership and empowerment

‘It’s kinda like your place or mine’ [Cheech, 18].

Participants often indicated they felt a sense of ownership over cycling spaces, particularly those involved in DDF. Often this sense of ownership was manifested because of a contribution to the formation of a particular place through the building of jumps, trails or northshore, but ownership was also linked to a group of riders who
maintained sustained contact with a particular place. Thus amongst participants there was a category of riders in cycling spaces recognised as ‘the locals’.

The meaning of being a local was subjective and complex, and an individually interpreted identity. The respondent below explained his relationship with a ‘secret spot’ in his local area and how this differed from the identity of a local:

‘A local is someone who probably rides there every day or tries to make an effort to go there as often as they can and they maintain it, go up there and build new lines and that, whereas I live quite a distance away they are the nearest trails that I ride, and I go there quite a bit, but not enough, I don’t really build or anything......I’m not a local but they are my local trails if you see what I mean’ [Chimp, 24].

‘The locals’ were constructed as a powerful group, and respondents discussed behaving in appropriate, respectful ways towards ‘the locals’.

‘Like at the trails, if the locals are there you should always make an effort to say hello, you say alright just be courteous really......even if you don’t know them’ [Chimp, 24].

‘The locals’ asserted certain rights over spaces which they had discovered, contributed to, accessed most often, and demonstrated the most skill at: ‘word gets around that you don’t mess with our trails basically, don’t screw ‘em up’ [Pete, 22]. For younger riders, ‘the locals’ were an intimidating group.

‘Yeah it’s alright if you know ‘em because like a group I go with they go there [PORC] all the time they’re locals there. And there’s this guy called Bill there and he builds all the jumps and I remember the first time I went there he just stares at you kind of like why’ve you come here this is our track sort of thing’ [Kona Owner, 15].

This passage illustrates how some youth mountain bikers feel excluded from essentially ‘public’ cycling spaces by ‘the locals’. These kinds of power relationships were frequently commented upon, and usually ‘the locals’ would appropriate and reprimand particular types of behaviour deciding who could and could not access particular cycling spaces. When accessing ‘secret spots’, for example, some participants disclosed that they remained fearful of being found out by ‘the locals’.
KK: ‘Have you ever stumbled upon any jumps?’

Jumper Boy: ‘Yeah, it was good but then it’s pretty scary because you could be riding the jumps and then they’ll come and they’ll go ‘why the hell you are on my jumps’ and they’ll go crazy and they’ll throw their bikes at you’ [Jumper Boy, 15].

In addition, participants discussed a dynamic between demonstrating an awareness and respect for ownership of particular ‘secret spots’ ‘because you don’t wanna tread on anyone’s toes’ [Mike, 14] but showing an interest in maintaining and contributing to the space.

‘…. we got this one guy who came along and we thought he was going to be annoying and we were sort of riding around, and building and stuff and he actually came up to us and asked if he could help at all, and that’s the type of people we like to come along, people who come along and repair damage and help us build it’ [Joner, 17].

Those who did access ‘secret spots’ earned themselves only limited rights to the space, for example, the respondent below discussed his own interpretation of trail etiquette which refutes the modification of cycle space by those who do not own or control the space:

‘nobody has got any right to dig or change anyone else’s jumps they should ask and be part of it and have a second opinion before they do anything, I think I’d be very angry if anyone modified my stuff. I would always ask someone very nicely if I wanted to do x,y,z….it’s like etiquette’ [Sharpshooter, 21].

This sense of ownership was not exclusive to ‘secret spots’ as young people also described feeling ownership and control over other spaces, for example, at Bedgebury and at PORC. Several riders identified themselves as ‘locals’ in relation to Bedgebury, one claiming ‘...it’s definitely my local riding spot’ [Jonny, 25]. During participant observation the freeride area was dominated by youth mountain bikers, with adults and young children accessing it sporadically. DDF riders would congregate in the freeride area, and some indicated feelings of empowerment within this particular space, for example, Brian [16] claimed ‘...we kinda rule it here’.

Figure 7.2 shows some graffiti discovered on a section of northshore platform in the freeride area during early participant observation. The participant who drew this claimed it displayed to other mountain bikers that this was their local spot:
‘There’s probably 15 of us who go there who….we’re all pretty good friends, there’s a few of us we’re Team Sarcasm, it’s like we just do some bike stuff together like in the summer, there was a few riders around here I don’t know I guess we just wanted people to know we were about’ [Pete, 22].

The respondent discussed the importance of showing a presence in this area, illustrating how the freeride area was perceived by some as an area to display and share mountain biking lifestyles, because of its popularity with youth mountain bikers. As well as demonstrating the presence of ‘the locals’ to other youth mountain bikers, these acts at Bedgebury, akin to processes of territorialisation, were linked in part to a perceived invasion of space by other user groups and young people became frustrated when these power relationships were tested.

Rowan: ‘It’s quite irritating ‘cause you get walkers going up and down it, they don’t really know what it’s about. Like there was this dad with a kid on his shoulders just walking up and down here, it’s quite irritating actually’

KK: ‘Why is that?’

Rowan: ‘Because they’ve got a path to walk on and this is our track to ride on’ [Rowan, 16].
Conflict with other non mountain biking recreational groups were considered rare, but usually manifested in space that had been clearly designated for a sole user group such as horse riders, walkers or mountain bikers. In designated cycle space, respondents would defend what they considered to be ‘their space’ and became frustrated when others crossed the boundaries.

‘...there was a weird one the other day like there’s a forest track and I think it’s just for bikes like it’s not for horses it’s not a bridleway, and everything in that area is especially for mountain bikers so we’re like the top dog and there’s people doing jumps and everyone’s watching and a horse rider came up and she had a young girl on a smaller pony with her and we were going up and down and she goes and shouts at me, saying keep the noise down, and I was just like well you’re not supposed to be here anyway it’s not a bridleway’ [Sarah, 24].

Respondents valued the spatial separation between user groups at Bedgebury because they believed it prioritised cycle space which facilitated a sense of empowerment

‘….here this is your space and walkers don’t go on your track’ [Jonny, 25]. But both cross country and DDF riders had similar attitudes towards ‘other’ users impinging on their own individual spaces and sometimes exhibited exclusive tendencies towards the opposing discipline. In the freeride area, whilst cross country riders were welcomed to watch or ‘have a go’ at some northshore sections, cross country riders who ‘had a go’ by rolling over the dirt jumps were met with disdain as this caused erosion of the jump, ruining it for the ‘real jumpers’. On the single-track, DDF riders on DDF style ‘heavy’ bikes were usually ridiculed by cross country riders who described them as ‘slow’ or ‘lazy’ as they tended to walk up hills and block the way for others.

Beyond the mountain biking community, ‘the locals’ were also recognised as an important group by landowners and other authorities and sometimes became involved in negotiating agreements over the occupation of these spaces. ‘The locals’ would sometimes act as custodians over mountain biking spaces, enforcing often unspoken rules and reaching a compromise with land owners or ‘adult’ authorities over use of particular spaces.

‘It’s kind of like an unsaid agreement between the rangers and the builders, and as long as the builders don’t build anything that you can’t roll over then it’s ok, anything else gets flattened, it’s kind of a weird relationship that’s not really legitimate but it sort of works for both sides’ [Sarah, 24].
Ownership, whilst hugely important in maintaining a connection with a lifestyle was experienced to varying degrees. At the extreme, ‘the locals’ were a group of riders who represented the core values of mountain biking culture, policing the space as overseers of particular local cycling ‘territories’. Youth mountain bikers were either empowered or excluded through these relationships in different types of cycle space yet the creation of territories through localism was crucial to the formation of a strong sense of self (Waitt, 2008). Youth mountain biking lifestyles and identities involved etiquette and ethos and threats to both were dealt with by a range of actions to maintain those spaces central to lifestyle and identity.

7.3.5 Discussion: negotiating power relations in countryside space

As Jenkins (2005) has argued, individual identity is always embodied and collective identities are usually located in territories or regions. The views of participants at Bedgebury clearly suggest that cycle spaces in countryside and urban environments must also be conceptualised according to power relations in space associated with adults, other youth groups, landowners and institutions.

Youth mountain bikers displayed territorial behaviour, distinguishing between insiders and outsiders in cycle spaces and through the symbolic meaning they placed on these spaces, as in other readings (e.g. Delaney, 2005; Waitt, 2008) these territories informed key aspects of their lifestyles and identities. Countryside space offered the opportunity to develop symbolic ownership over space (Eubanks Owens, 1988).

Youth mountain bikers marked their territories such as the freeride area in two ways; through their physical presence there and by leaving evidence of activities such as drawing graffiti or crafting jumps which Tucker and Matthews (2001:165) would describe as acts of ‘social scenting’. For Borden (2001), this type of counter inscription is employed by young people and children to represent ownership.

Through their identities as ‘the locals’, youth mountain bikers asserted rights over space, policing behaviour, identifying the ‘undesirables’ and either working out ways to avoid these groups or using ethos and etiquette to impose restrictions on their access. ‘The locals’ in youth mountain biking communities appear similar to those in Lieberg’s (1995:722) research on local youths in neighbourhood space which found
‘there were no special ways to join or explicit rules for membership. But there were still quite clear requirements for participation and recognition by the group’. In addition, and similar to Lanagon’s (2003) research on localism and surfers, being a ‘local’ unified the leisure community and a legitimate mountain biking identity for many of the participants at Bedgebury relied upon being recognised as a mountain biker at a particular place and time. ‘The locals’ felt an innate sense of ownership over leisure space (see Waitt, 2008) determining who was and wasn’t excluded, enforcing trail etiquette and they were instrumental in negotiating rights to space. Similar to the findings of Wheaton (2005) and Waitt (2008) discussed in Chapter 4, however, this could be exclusive and what would often underlay was the social stigmatisation of other young people as ‘kiddies’, ‘chavs’ or ‘pikeys’.

Youth mountain bikers often accessed private land to create ‘secret spots’ as part of their lifestyles yet this often resulted in contestation with landowners. Davis and Ridge (1997) commented that private landowners and farmers could exert a ‘jealous stranglehold’ over their land and as a result, access to countryside space for many young people is frequently denied. Yet youth mountain bikers were able to respond to these restrictions and create meaningful spaces for themselves (Hill and Bessant, 1999).

In Chapter 4 previous research on social conflicts between mountain bikers and other social groups was explored, and this focussed on the differences in social values (Hollenhorst et al., 1995; Carothers et al., 2001), resource specificity (Jacob and Schreyer, 1980), overcrowding (Ruff and Mellors, 1993; Chavez, 1997; Symmonds et al., 2000; Carothers et al., 2001), and differences in the form of mobility (Chavez et al., 1993; Cessford, 2002) as the causes of conflict. Yet the narratives of youth mountain bikers were less concerned with potential conflict with other types of recreationists. Conflicts with other users were in part related to environmental attitudes, and issues with sharing space, yet only occurred when the longevity of these spaces was threatened by the behaviour of some, mainly younger mountain bikers and other young people who did not take part in mountain biking.

Much of these conflicts, particularly those with younger rider or ‘kiddies’, were associated with their attitudes towards the leisure space, based loosely around a lack of
trail etiquette. Similar to the findings of other lifestyle sport theorists (e.g. Rinehart and Grenfall, 2002), younger participants may have failed to understand the importance of some aspects of identity prized by those who were more entrenched within the lifestyle. Beal and Wilson (2004) have also argued that amongst skateboarders, proper attitudes are linked with age; that is, younger riders were observed to have the wrong attitude towards commercialisation, competition, and partly towards space, using adult run, low risk skate parks that challenged the forms and values of the culture. For youth mountain bikers, lacking an understanding of etiquette often prevented some young people and other youth groups from accessing the most legitimate ‘secret spots’.

A lack of trail etiquette at ‘secret spots’ often involved alienation from the community and resulted in limited access to leisure space and, therefore, attitudes towards trail etiquette were a hugely important element of mountain biking identities. Whilst Chavez et al., (1993), mentioned the role of ‘etiquette’ as part of conflicts between mountain bikers and other countryside users on multiple use trails, they did not refer to the lifestyle implications of attitudes towards etiquette, despite the evidential effects these have on the inclusion and exclusion that takes place in mountain biking space. For youth mountain bikers, etiquette, inclusion and exclusion were part of developing a lifestyle.

Wheaton (1997) has discussed a similar value system used by windsurfers where forms of insider knowledge were crucial to the process of identity construction and to achieving truly ‘authentic’ windsurfing identities. What Wheaton (1997) termed ‘insider status’ incorporated concepts such as conspicuous consumption, style, skill and attitudes to competition but it didn’t consider how insider status or ‘etiquette’, as mountain biking participants term it, is played out in space. Although she mentioned localism as a form of exclusionary process and rivalry between surfers from different geographical areas, this concept has remained absent from discussions of insider status and the construction of identity. Thus etiquette within youth mountain biking communities is of increased importance because the regulation of behaviour and the adherence to shared norms is crucial to accessing and maintaining those spaces which in turn affirm a legitimate mountain biking identity.
This section has shown, that similar to Kiewa’s (2002:157) observations of climbers, playing the role of mountain biker means ‘adopting a mode of being that subscribes to the values of the community’ even if that means working to exclude others. Trail etiquette was used to maintain the order of space, and within individual cycling spaces, ‘the locals’ were heavily involved in sanctioning particular types of behaviour and implementing their own policies for inclusion.

7.4 Conclusion

Mountain biking is one of the contemporary leisure activities that Crouch and Tomlinson (1994) identify as moving beyond ‘the gaze’ to include the making and remaking of space, affirming and reconstructing identity. Young people expressed a desire to be involved in establishing place either through improving the reputation and cycling opportunities at Bedgebury or through creating their own ‘new’ and often ‘secret’ cycling spaces, and in this sense the links between lifestyle and identity are inherently spatial.

DDF and cross country riders exhibited differences in their use of space related to their own lifestyle values and the availability of their own distinct cycle spaces. This chapter has shown a bias towards the lifestyles of DDF riders, this is not because cross country riders were less interesting, rather their relationships with public space were less fraught than those of DDF and they did not access as many forms of countryside spaces as DDF riders. Nevertheless, landscape values were important to the identities and social dynamics of both of these recreational groups (Brown et al., 2007) and the importance of ‘countryside’ space as the setting for youth mountain biking lifestyles and its role in identity has emerged as a key finding. Countryside or non built-up space was at the centre of the symbolic production of both of these mountain biking lifestyles. As Agnew (2003:263) has contended; ‘one place or ‘territory’ in its differentiation from other places can become an ‘object’ of identity for a ‘subject’’.

Young people made important connections with countryside space through their lifestyles as mountain bikers and this chapter has illustrated the distinct relationship youth mountain bikers formed with countryside space. Interestingly, some riders linked their participation in mountain biking with a wider environmentalism, echoing
Macnaghten’s (2003) claims that embodied leisure practices in countryside space allow people to connect with and value ‘the environment’. These connections influenced their opinions of urban leisure spaces, and their attitudes towards the countryside which became crucial elements of their identities, as Massey (2005) has argued; identities, the relations between them, and the spatiality which is part of them are all co-constituted. Yet whereas Macnaghten (2003), Becker (2003) and Eubanks Owens (1988) findings, for example, showed activities in the countryside were essentially ways of being in close proximity to nature. For youth mountain bikers these attitudes were not based on an explicit appreciation of nature but rather a preference for particular type of leisure space that afforded particular types of leisure opportunities. This isn’t to say that nature wasn’t important to them. Countryside spaces especially woodlands that afforded privacy and certain topography were invested with meaning and formed a significant part of mountain biking identity but similar to Matthews et al.’s (2000a) study of growing up in rural areas, youth leisure in rural spaces did not necessarily produce an affinity with nature.

These relationships with space have highlighted the difficulties of understanding youth leisure space and collapse the urban / rural dichotomy as a tool for conceptualisation. Young people’s constructions of space differed from common understandings and whilst participants recognised rural and urban spaces were distinct, they distinguished between spaces because of the different opportunities and experiences these offered for mountain biking. Urban spaces such as skate parks, streets or car parks afforded a particular type of cycling experience, but as a built-up space, did not allow for trail digging and jump building. In addition these built-up spaces were often subject to more management or control by adults. Youth mountain bikers performed their identities more freely in countryside space. In addition countryside spaces and other non built-up spaces provided the resources for experimentation in building or digging trails, often away from the adult gaze, and, therefore, acquired additional symbolic meaning. Youth mountain bikers challenged the boundaries of space and repositioned notions of urban and rural as ‘built-up’ or non ‘built-up’ according to their own movements and lived experiences in these different spaces (Leyshon, 2008).
Countryside spaces became invested with meaning through the building of jumps and trails and these spaces such as Bedgebury freeride area and single-track or ‘secret spots’ acted as hubs for the local mountain biking community. These leisure performances and the cultural settings in which they occurred were symbolic of the position of the countryside and the significance of these activities in the lives of those who participate. Yet those spaces which were most meaningful were those where young people were able to exercise some element of power and control either free from adults and landowners influence or by excluding other young people. As Rinehart and Grenfall (2002) have argued, the practice of shovelling dirt and building mounds allowed participants to exert their own individuality, and insider status, whilst engaging with each other and with the course.

Individual and collective identity in youth is closely connected to space (Hil and Bessant, 1999) and Crouch (1992) has drawn upon Okeley (1989) to argue that the connectedness to landscape formed through particular cultural practices means that a change to the landscape is recognised as a threat to their own identity and culture. Participants colonised certain spaces, excluding others from ‘their territory’ (Valentine 2004:85) and employing rules and codes for behaviour and policies for inclusion and exclusion. Trashing of sites was a common occurrence but often riders were able to find new spaces to build with limited threat to identity.

In Chapter 6, mountain biking was positioned as less structured and constrained than mainstream sports yet young people’s entry to these mountain biking spaces was conditional and participants continued to exclude certain groups based upon gender, class and age. For mountain bikers the exclusion of other youth and younger riders in part was linked to their behaviour in space. These groups did not follow the informal codes and rules for behaviour and were perceived as threatening.

Building jumps and trails was an important part of the lifestyle of youth mountain bikers but participants often experienced conflicts with private landowners and other institutions such as the Forestry Commission because of this unauthorised activity. At Bedgebury youth mountain bikers were keen to take part in building and maintenance days but DDF riders in particular found this arrangement problematic. Matthews et al. (2000a:151) have contended, there is lack of consultation with young people, or
encouragement to ‘get involved in the politics of place’ in rural areas despite evidence
to suggest that ‘young people have the capability, competence and motivation to
become keenly involved in local decision-making, especially that which affects their
neighbourhoods and the provision of local services’ (also see Davis and Ridge, 1997).
In addition, Dougill and Stroh (2001) have claimed that users of countryside leisure
space feel disenfranchised and excluded from management of countryside space,
drawing upon Sibley (1995) to illustrate how the control of leisure space privileges
expert knowledge as opposed to the lay knowledge’s of user groups. This chapter has
demonstrated how young people acquire knowledge through their immersion in
countryside space and deliberate shaping of their leisure sites. The empowerment that
accompanies this involvement and these processes remains unexplored within wider
academic research.

This chapter has shown through the case of mountain biking how young people
produce and interpret leisure space as part of identity and lifestyle. Delaney (2005:11)
has argued ‘if it makes sense to say that cultures create to “produce” territories, they do
so through the process of reproducing and re-creating themselves’. This research has
contributed to and advanced current understandings of the interaction between leisure,
life-style and space through its emphasis on the shaping of space as part of the lifestyles
of youth mountain bikers.
Chapter 8    Conclusion

8.1    Leisure, lifestyle, identity and space
The thesis has examined the link between youth identities, lifestyles and space. This has involved exploring the interconnections between youth leisure and space through the case of mountain biking in line with the aims set out in Chapter 1, and the sections in this chapter address each aim individually. Contrary to other rural geographies of youth, the thesis has drawn upon the spaces of leisure rather than residential landscapes. Furthermore, in acknowledging the performance of identity and lifestyle through countryside leisure, the thesis also contrasts with other cultural studies of youth.

Lifestyles depend upon patterns of consumption, cultural codes, distinction and taste in the shaping of identity (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Youth cultural studies have drawn links between leisure and identity for expressing particular cultural tastes, belonging and group solidarity. Yet this thesis has argued, along with others (e.g. Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), that youth lifestyle and identities can only be fully understood by examining their interaction with space and the links between leisure cultures and their physical location (Crouch, 1992; Agnew, 2003).

Young people consume objects, spaces and experiences so they can differentiate their lifestyles from others (Thornton, 1995). This research has shown how use of space is centrally implicated in the constitution of difference, as youth mountain bikers distinguished themselves from other youth - and from adults - through the activities they pursued in space. Strong group identities emerged, particularly in relation to dirt jumping, downhill and freeride (DDF) styles of youth mountain biking. Both DDF and cross country mountain biking identities were perceived by participants to have different ‘scenes’ associated with the types of participants (e.g. adults or young people), the approach to leisure (e.g. serious or casual), and also the different ways in which they moved through space. At the case study site of Bedgebury Forest, cross
country riders explored large areas, finding new ways to move through space via routes that were generally more spatially structured than those of the DDF riders. DDF riders performed mountain biking in a designated space, however, this was more disordered than that of cross country, and involved the performance of tricks and laps of jumps interspersed with periods of inactivity or ‘hanging around’ collectively referred to as ‘sessioning’. Periods of inactivity were an integral part of the experience of ‘sessioning’ and involved watching others, discussing skills or adjusting equipment. Therefore, this inactivity was differentiated from the deviant or sedentary ‘hanging around’ participants associated with other youth leisure lifestyles in other types of spaces (also see Beal and Weidman, 2003). Youth mountain bikers as a whole distinguished themselves from sedentary or urban based youth leisure lifestyles by emphasising an ‘outdoorsy’ and active identity.

Youth mountain bikers also distanced themselves from adults who took part in mountain biking, in part through their involvement in the building and shaping of leisure space. Gaining invitations to particular types of mountain biking space (especially ‘secret spots’) or displaying some knowledge about creating or maintaining cycle space, were important signifiers of a legitimate mountain biking identity for young people. Cycle spaces were connected to their lifestyles and identities; for example as ‘locals’ at Bedgebury or nearby Penshurst Off Road Cycling (PORC), or as ‘owners’ or builders of ‘secret spots’. ‘Secret spots’ were, however, constructed as ‘youth’ spaces and participants described how adults showed little interest in becoming involved in building or maintenance. Therefore, youth mountain bikers considered these connections to space were less important as part of adult mountain biking lifestyles. Youth mountain bikers, however, formed an important connection to cycle spaces through their involvement in scoping, shaping and cycling different spaces. Their participation in creating these landscapes through digging and trail construction reinforced their own sense of identity (also see Crouch, 1992 who confirms the importance of such agency).

Space was also implicated in the power relations between young people and other stakeholders in cycle space. At Bedgebury, youth mountain bikers experienced a sense of ownership over space they felt had been ascribed to them. This was facilitated by
the lack of surveillance. The freeride area was positioned away from other trails and therefore other users, whilst the single-track was long enough to absorb groups of mountain bikers allowing participants to explore with little interruption (see Appendix 1).

Similar to the findings of Hil and Bessant (1999), Matthews et al. (2000b) and Valentine (2004), marginal spaces were also important to the performance of lifestyles and participants described using a range of ‘hidden’ spaces such as derelict land, street spaces, private woodlands or disused quarries to perform mountain biking away from the adult gaze. These were significant because in addition to offering space for mountain biking they often provided space for building jumps and trails.

This thesis has also picked up on themes emerging from rural and urban youth geographies which emphasised the need to consider control, conflict and exclusion as part of the youth leisure experience. It has been claimed that young people are frequently expected to adhere to adult definitions of appropriate behaviour and are demonised in their use of public spaces (e.g. Valentine, 2004; Macdonald and Shildrick, 2004; Travlou, 2004). Participants discussed experiences of exclusion from certain cycle spaces or ‘the locals’ or by landowners or authorities because of trespassing. Yet youth mountain bikers were able to assert ownership and control in public cycle space and felt empowered to create ‘secret’ cycle space in unauthorised spots or negotiate permission from landowners to access private land. Space also emerged as a crucial factor as part of conflicts in youth leisure. Youth mountain bikers described a specific atmosphere, spatial organisation or spatial location which reduced or increased the conflicts between leisure users and with other youth not involved in mountain biking. Participants considered urban spaces, such as skate parks, where several different groups of young people would ‘hang around’, were different to non built-up mountain biking spaces.

8.2 Youth leisure in the countryside
The thesis also aimed to address the neglect of countryside leisure space within theorisations of youth identity and lifestyle. Previous youth cultural studies have concentrated largely on urban leisure activities. The literature on youth and
countryside space focussed too often on young people for whom the countryside played no part in their leisure lifestyle, such as urban youth who visited the countryside on rare occasions (e.g. Kong et al., 1999; Kong, 2000; Countryside Agency, 2005). Instead this thesis addressed the need to investigate the spatial relationships of people who do visit the countryside as part of their leisure lifestyles (Ravenscroft and Curry, 2004).

A body of research has suggested that young people are marginalised from the countryside (Tucker and Matthews 2000; Bell et al., 2003; Ward Thompson et al., 2004). But, by focussing on the experiences of those whose leisure lifestyles are dependent on the countryside, this thesis contributes to understanding the experience of inclusion and of marginalisation rather than providing a critique of the barriers to leisure participation in the countryside. Crucially, it shows how young people’s leisure experiences are dependent upon the spaces available to them for leisure and the opportunity to access and shape this space to create a sense of ownership and belonging.

Respondents participated in various forms of mountain biking which afforded different types of social relationships and level of participant control. Cross country mountain bikers were more likely to take part in more structured leisure through organised club rides or races to improve their opportunities for socialising and meeting others. DDF riders adopted a more casual approach to leisure and refuted adult supervision or participation in organised rides, demonstrating how social relationships within these disciplines were achieved more organically. Therefore this thesis responds to Ward Thompson et al.’s (2006) calls for further research into unstructured forms of youth leisure in countryside space.

Whilst some have claimed that the countryside may not be to the tastes of young people (Henley Centre, 2005), the participants within this research, including many urban dwellers who perform their lifestyles in largely countryside spaces, were demonstrably positive about the opportunities offered by the countryside as a leisure space. Some participants, for example, appreciated the robustness of the countryside to absorb different user groups and experienced a less pressurised environment than other mountain biking spaces on streets or in skate parks. Crucially, countryside spaces
offered vastly different opportunities for leisure than other less malleable spaces such as skate parks or urban streets and youth mountain biking lifestyles included activities beyond the practice of mountain biking such as digging, jump building and trail maintenance. The marginal position of the countryside, in contrast to what were considered more popular youth spaces such as skate parks, did in fact contribute to its appeal as young people could share their lifestyles with others who were ‘outdoorsy’. The countryside also provided a space they could ‘carve out for themselves’, perform various forms of ‘risky’ behaviour and challenge the adult hegemony of public space (Bell et al., 2003:97).

Whilst some have argued that indoor activities (Henley Centre, 2005) or commercialised leisure (Roberts, 2006) have drawn youth in from outdoor activities, and that organised sports have replaced spontaneous play in local neighbourhood spaces (Lieberg, 1995; Valentine, 2004), this thesis has shown that young people are still participating in such activities yet often in spaces that are ‘hidden away’. Youth mountain bikers avoided areas where they would encounter other adult or youth users, preferring to shelter their activities from those who may challenge or obstruct their activities. Nevertheless, youth mountain bikers, particularly cross country riders, often joined adult run clubs to access established social networks and membership of a club was also an important part of demonstrating commitment to the lifestyle. For DDF riders, youth run clubs were set up to improve access to ‘secret spots’ for those within the lifestyle and to police access of other non mountain biking youth or younger youth mountain bikers (defined in relation to the participants own age).

Youth mountain bikers created a lifestyle that was orientated around particular a set of attitudes towards the countryside. Ward Thompson et al. (2006) have identified unstructured activities in the countryside as the principle means for young people to experience nature, Bridger (2003) claimed nature is the single most important draw of mountain biking and Midol and Bryor (1995) have argued that young people’s participation in adventurous activities was driven by a desire to connect with nature. In addition writers have claimed that adventurous lifestyle sports in the countryside facilitate a unity between body and nature (Cater, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Franklin, 2002; Macnaghten 2003) and research into countryside leisure, and mountain biking
specifically, has often highlighted connections with nature as a key dimension in the experience of countryside leisure (e.g. Pigram, 1993; Franklin, 2003; Hollenhorst et al., 1995; Goeft and Alder, 2001). This thesis builds upon these studies, recognising how the relationship between participant and space was partly embodied and relating to performance and flow yet the role of nature as part of this experience was less succinct. This thesis argues that attitudes to nature were not the most significant element of mountain biking for young people, but were part of the process of building identity and lifestyle because youth mountain bikers considered their attitudes towards nature to be different from those of adults who also use countryside space.

The countryside was symbolic in mountain biking identities; youth mountain bikers showed an awareness of the environmental implications of their activities, employed distinct forms of nature knowledge as part of their lifestyles and an appreciation of ‘natural’ spaces, yet these elements were managed by participants as a subtle part of identity, rather than as a defining factor. For example, appreciation of nature was not part of a youth mountain biking identity, but understanding how ‘natural’ elements contributed to cycle space was. Youth mountain bikers displayed an intimate knowledge of the ‘nature’ of cycle spaces based on the way in which topography, soils or vegetation produced particular mountain biking experiences. This knowledge was often acquired through digging and jump building but also through riding in different types of non-built-up space. Other research (e.g. Heer et al., 2003) may consider this less significant than formal or adult forms of nature knowledge yet this thesis has shown how these distinct relationships with ‘nature’ informed the identities and lifestyles of participants and distinguished them from other youth lifestyle sports performed in built-up spaces, and is, therefore, contributing to academic debate.

Importantly, however, mountain biking lifestyles were not just lived in countryside space as lifestyles allow for the movement of individuals through different spaces and locales (Chaney, 1996). This thesis highlights the significance of a multitude of spatialities of youth leisure; street space, private space, public space, urban space, virtual space, neighbourhoods, gardens, shops and clubhouses have all emerged as important for the performance of mountain biking. It has shown the continued importance of space in the formation of youth lifestyles and identity and presents a
challenge to the binary division of leisure space into rural or urban domains. As Leyshon (2008) has argued, young people have complex and widely varying views of rurality and how young people construct territory and experience place can critique, breakdown or reposition the conventional markers of urban or rural space. Youth mountain bikers employed a simplistic division of space that was less concerned with urban or rural connotations but rather they encountered built-up or non built-up spaces. They classified these according to the capacity for becoming involved in the making of space, the level of conflict with other youth leisure groups and the perceived atmosphere in these spaces. Because of these types of connections with space, youth mountain bikers digress from other readings of lifestyle sports which may overlook the relationship between participant and space.

8.3 The ‘youth’ mountain biking experience

The final aim of the thesis was to recognise the diversity of experiences of the countryside and of mountain biking and understand the ‘youth’ element of this activity. The methodological approach adopted within this thesis privileged the youth voice, employing a combination of ethnographic techniques to capture a variety of narratives and achieve thick description. Interestingly whilst mountain biking is a mobile activity, mobile research methods, whilst useful, did not make a distinctive contribution to the primary data which was also collated through interviews and an assemblage of various participant observations supported by discussions on a local forum. Nevertheless, through sustained presence and involvement at the research site and through conducting ‘conversations in place’ (Anderson, 2004:254) the researcher was able to form a trusted relationship with participants and other stakeholders at Bedgebury and integrate into the community as another mountain biker.

In chapter two, the theoretical position of the thesis argued for the privileging of the concepts of lifestyle and identity as tools for understanding the experiences of youth based on discussions over subcultural and post-subcultural approaches to the theorisation of youth. The empirical findings of the thesis resonated with notions of subcultures and post-subcultures especially the way young mountain bikers distinguished themselves from adults and each other. These conclusions share similarities with the emphasis on youth deviance and adult surveillance as part of the
consumption of leisure in street corner society (e.g. Macdonald and Shildrick, 2007). The empirical findings also show how lifestyles are built in complex ways: through choice of clothing, attitudes towards competition and willingness to take risks, but also through spatial preferences, participation on forums and through controlling or creating cycle space.

The thesis has not built upon these by adding a new perspective or by enforcing a particular theoretical framework as an approach to research. Rather, by exploring the lives of youth mountain bikers, the thesis has shown both the value and limitations of these different theorisations of youth and demonstrated how, in many ways, these perspectives are linked. Crucially though the thesis informs conceptual debates over lifestyle by showing the importance of a spatial perspective as part of the approach.

Mountain biking and other countryside recreation literature does not tend to take a cultural approach to understanding why young people do or do not take part in particular activities in particular spaces. Yet research involved with youth in general (e.g. Miles, 2000; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007) showed the relevance of understanding patterns of leisure and acknowledged the importance of understanding leisure choices and the cultural meanings of leisure. This thesis, therefore, addresses Smith et al.’s (2004) concerns over the failure to capture participation of young people in ‘lifestyle activities’.

Youth mountain bikers perceived the way in which they performed leisure and created identity was fundamentally different from adults. Young people produce their identities in ‘a more anarchic way than adults’ and it is claimed the meaning inscribed on leisure space is different for young people they have little ownership over space, often relying on public spaces to express themselves and their lifestyles (Valentine, 1996b:214). Therefore, young people involved in particular leisure pursuits affirm their identity through their differentiation from the leisure lifestyles of other adults or from those youths who do not take part in the same leisure activities (McRae, 2004). Youth mountain bikers distinguished themselves from adults through distinct practices and cultural meanings developed around the performance of mountain biking.
Mountain biking literature has made some limited attempts to understand the social, personal or health benefits of participating, and has, in part, recognised some distinctive elements of mountain biking such as the association with ‘outdoor types’ (Dougill and Stroh, 2001), yet these have been broad in their perspective and approach. This thesis advances these understandings by focussing on the youth element of participation exploring in depth, the different forms, different spaces and the different personal and social meanings attached to mountain biking. It offers a contemporary perspective on the lifestyles involved in youth mountain biking.

Previous research has focussed on the deviancies of mountain biking (e.g. Dougill and Stroh, 2001; Hollenhorst et al., 1995; White et al., 2006) and concurrently on the deviancies of ‘youth’ (e.g. Bell et al., 2003; Ward Thompson et al., 2004) in the use of countryside space. It is claimed, for example, mountain bikers cause significant ecological damage (see Chavez, 1997; Ruff and Mellors, 1993; Goeft and Alder, 2001). Youth mountain bikers became involved in sometimes extensive building projects in countryside space which participants claimed inevitably caused some local damage to flora and fauna. Participants did, however, describe efforts to minimise damage and respect for the environment was a part of youth mountain biking etiquette. In addition to environmental damage, previous research has discussed how mountain bikers (Dougill and Stroh, 2001; Cessford, 2002) and young people (e.g. Bell et al., 2003; Ward Thompson et al., 2004) were implicated in debates over social conflict with other countryside users. This thesis has shown, however, that youth mountain bikers accessed countryside spaces to avoid the conflicts they experienced with others in built-up spaces. Youth mountain bikers chose spaces away from other users and trusted other participants to protect the identity of some cycle spaces and keep their activity ‘secret’ from others.

Previous studies of youth discussed the role of risk as part of young people’s leisure (Foreman, 2004), and also as part of activities in the countryside (Stranger, 1999; Becker, 2003; Krein, 2007), and this thesis has highlighted risk as a defining feature of young people’s mountain biking lifestyles. DDF styles of mountain biking were considered more in line with the ideals and cultural values of youth culture because of their attitudes to risk and adventure whereas cross country mountain biking was
associated with a more adult approach to leisure. Consequently this affected the way in which young people constructed their own identities and youth mountain bikers from both cross country and DDF disciplines drew upon notions of risk to separate themselves from adult mountain biking identities. In addition, whilst many participants were serious about their commitment to mountain biking, and commitment signified an insider identity, this was nuanced from a serious approach to leisure they associated with adults. Youth mountain bikers were less competitive in a conventional sense, more willing to take risks and placed an emphasis on having fun.

This research has shown the difference in the experience of leisure associated with mountain biking. Young people’s experiences of countryside space were differentiated according to age where younger mountain bikers often lived different lifestyles to those who were more experienced, yet mountain biking remained an important activity for them. This thesis has contributed to understandings of leisure and lifestyle for younger youth where other youth cultural research on clubbing (e.g. Thornton, 1995; Malbon, 1998, 1999) or other older youth activities has not examined how leisure lifestyles develop for them. In addition participation in youth mountain biking lifestyles is in part affected by social divisions as young people distinguished themselves from other youth groups through notions of class, often by stigmatising youths as ‘pikeys’ or ‘chavs’.

Most notably this thesis has differentiated between the experiences of cross country and DDF riders, where the mountain biking literature (e.g. Bowker and English, 2001; Carothers et al., 2001; Ruff and Mellors, 1993) has not distinguished between these types of riding, usually appearing to refer to cross country forms of mountain biking. The DDF element of mountain biking which includes more risky downhill, dirt jump and freeride forms of mountain biking and represented the majority of youth mountain bikers has been overlooked. In addition, the mountain biking research (e.g. Carothers et al., 2001; Chavez et al., 1993) only explored the use of formally managed spaces and public trails and, therefore, the issues surrounding young people’s use of marginal or liminal spaces such as ‘secret spots’ has not been considered as part of these understandings. Some writing on BMX which can be part of the mountain biking experience has recognised the importance of space, and in particular spaces
participants have designed and built for themselves and the role these play in building identity (Rinehart and Grenfall, 2002), yet these processes remain attached to the lifestyles of BMX riders in USA and so far have not been linked with those of mountain bikers in England.

This thesis has extended some of the debates which emerged as part of discussions of lifestyle sports. In line with Waitt (2008), Wheaton (2002) and Borden (2001), sexism and gender stereotypes emerged as key themes in young women’s experience of mountain biking yet they were not excluded from accessing ‘secret spots’ or from developing their own mountain biking lifestyles because of their gender, instead male mountain bikers assumed this was not something they would choose to do. The thesis also discussed the construction of alternative identities (Tomlinson et al., 2005; Wheaton, 2004a; Kiewa, 2002; Beal and Weidman, 2003; Humphreys, 2003) in relation to mainstream sports, and the importance of consumption as part of lifestyle and identity (Wheaton, 1997; Thorpe, 2004; Beal and Weidman, 2003; Tomlinson et al., 2005) part of youth mountain biking lifestyles. Youth mountain bikers considered their identities were alternative when compared to other youth leisure cultures, particularly those associated with mainstream sports and also when compared to adult mountain biking identities. Similar to Beal and Weidman (2003) and Wheaton (2004a), subtlety in the negotiation of this alternative identity was privileged. Part of being alternative was adopting a casual approach to leisure, whilst also being a ‘proper’ rider and showing commitment to the sport.

In addition, the findings demonstrate the ways in which consumption was used, negotiated and expressed in very different ways than suggested in these readings because of a lack of economic capital. Wheaton (1997, 2000) discussed the implications ‘all the gear and no idea’ through the case of windsurfing. This thesis has shown however, how these processes may be more significant for youth participants as a tool for differentiation from adult participants, who it is believed do not share the etiquette and ethos surrounding clothing and equipment and who do not become involved in the shaping of space. Participants described an etiquette to obtaining, using and displaying equipment, refuting the need for expensive equipment which they associated with adult outsiders where they instead often relied upon modification or
customisation. Yet youth mountain bikers contradicted this etiquette by displaying their ‘set ups’ on websites and forums and by distancing themselves from those young people who could not afford to mountain bike. Youth mountain biking etiquette involved displaying knowledge about equipment and expensive equipment was only acceptable in relation to a participant’s skill and commitment to the sport.

The youth experience of consumption and alternative identities has emerged as far more complex than has been discussed within the body of literature on lifestyle sports. Nevertheless, there are clear overlaps with debates raised by studies of other lifestyle sports such as skateboarding or snowboarding which have acknowledged a youth dimension to participation (e.g. Thorpe, 2004; Humphreys, 1997, 2003; Henio, 2000; Borden, 2001; Beal and Weidman, 2003; Beal and Wilson, 2004; Eubanks Owens, 2001). This research has highlighted that participation in lifestyle sports is not homogenous; each sport has its own ethos and philosophy, codes and rules that participants may utilise or manifest in different ways.

Youth mountain bikers employed etiquette and ethos to exclude or manage other youth such as women or younger mountain bikers and in doing so reinforced other social differences. Localism and the creation of territories was an important part of mountain biking lifestyles and gaining access or ‘invitations’ to ‘secret spots’ by adopting the appropriate etiquette signified a legitimate insider identity. Echoing the findings of Waitt (2008) in surfing, and the conflicts between mountain bikers over turf discussed by Chavez et al., (1993), defending these spaces from invasion by other youth who do not mountain bike, or from adults or younger riders who did not understand the ethos, was also a part of these territorial claims.

Mountain biking offered young people a liberating context for identity formation away from institutional social or family expectations and importantly, was considered an activity that could be free from adult control. But mountain biking was often constructed as deviant by adults, particularly when using what adults considered to be non mountain biking spaces. As other research has claimed (e.g. Davis and Ridge, 1997), young people felt excluded from many countryside spaces they deemed appropriate for leisure and were restricted by landowners and institutions such as the
local council from accessing these spaces. Yet youth mountain bikers often found ways to continue to perform their lifestyles in these spaces.

The thesis is based upon a case study as part of the Active Woods projects which sought to encourage physical activity in countryside locations in particular target groups and the findings have raised interesting issues surrounding the management of countryside mountain biking destinations and for Active Woods project which seek to encourage the participation of young people.

First, the thesis has uncovered important dynamics surrounding the empowerment of young people to feel ownership or involvement in mountain biking space. For many youth participants mountain biking is a way of exerting their own control over physical spaces and participants described the importance of being involved in decisions about space at Bedgebury through involvement with the cycle club, or in other areas, through the creation of ‘secret spots’. For some, however, this control over space is also manifested as a form of resistance to mainstream, adult society. Many described designing and building their own jumps and accessing private land that they know is ‘off limits’ as a way of reinforcing these associations. For forest managers there may be issues in attempting to contain mountain biking to a particular area, where there is a tendency for some participants to scope the locality for additional mountain biking opportunities and for sites to migrate.

Mountain biking represents an important tool for engaging young people in outdoor recreation in forest spaces, yet as is shown above, participation is not gender neutral and women experience mountain biking in different ways to young men. Therefore initiatives which are seeking to encouraging young women to participate in mountain biking may require different strategies and techniques, and specific modes of intervention.

The final management implication of the thesis concerns the relationship between youth mountain biking and the environment which is broadly differentiated into three types of functional environment in relation to the values of different users. First, ‘nature’ in terms of biodiversity is implicated in this thesis because whilst participants were conscious of causing local damage, these activities may impact negatively on the
conservation of flora and fauna. Second, there are issues surrounding ‘spaces’ which are understood by participants as territories, or places to be owned. Whilst some youth mountain bikers were happy to share the space with other countryside user groups, it was important, particularly for DDF riders that some space was solely for mountain bikers or that mountain bikers had the principle claim over certain spaces. Third, participants created important connections to the terrain in mountain biking spaces and formed their own knowledge of how this contributed to different mountain biking experiences. For forest managers, this local knowledge may be usefully considered in the maintenance and improvement of sites. Crucially, however, the need to balance the many and sometimes conflicting needs of different human and non-human constituents of countryside use will provide the most important challenges for forest managers.

This thesis has sought to put young people at the centre of the research and allowed participants to define their own interpretations of their leisure, identities and lifestyles and tell their own stories. In doing so, this thesis has revealed how youth mountain biking is contoured by a multitude of different lifestyle divisions, explored a range of spaces outside those conventionally accessed and discussed and contributed new understandings to the theorisation of youth leisure in the countryside with relevance in both academic and political domains.
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Appendix 1: Map of Bedgebury mountain biking trails
Appendix 2: Flyer for recruitment of participants

Mountain bike research project..... ...tell us what **you** think of Bedgebury and what mountain biking means to **you**

If you’re aged between 13 and 25 years, are passionate about any kind of mountain biking, and have ever visited Bedgebury then I’d like to hear from you!

For more information or to take part contact: myspace.com/bedgeburywoodlandriders

Katherine King: k.h.king@brighton.ac.uk
A University of Brighton and Forest Research Project
Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet: Young People and Woodland Recreation

About the Project

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Brighton and have been appointed to work with the Forestry Commission to evaluate the success of the new cycling facilities at Bedgebury. The Forestry Commission have been issuing questionnaires to visitors to find out their opinions, and now they are looking for more in depth research to understand why certain groups of people visit Bedgebury. This research will be finding out how young people use Bedgebury and is hoping to understand the importance of mountain biking in general.

What will volunteering involve?

A one hour interview

This will be an informal chat about your experiences at Bedgebury either on your own or with your friends. We'll discuss your opinions of the site, which parts of the site you like best, and what improvements you think should be made. I'm also interested in understanding what appeals to you about woodlands and your opinions on nature and the environment, as well as finding out about other leisure interests you may have. Every person who takes part in an interview will receive a £10 bonus bond shopping voucher for giving up their time and to cover their travel expenses. The voucher can be spent in many shops e.g. HMV, Halfords and TopShop.

Guided Ride

As the project is focussing on mountain biking and I am a keen (Beginner!) mountain biker, there will be an option, for those who are interested to take me on a ride through Bedgebury to show how you use the forest and which places you ride. Interviewees will have a voice recorder attached to record any thoughts or opinions you have about different parts of the forest as you ride through. This can be conducted with the interviewer or with friends you would normally ride with.

Participation is voluntary!

Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, no reason is necessary.
Confidentiality

All the information collected will be treated in strict confidence and will only be seen by the researcher and the project supervisor. All data will be kept in a secure place. Participants’ personal details will be confidential and anonymous and tape recordings of interviews and any notes taken will be locked in a secure cabinet. Information that is then put onto a computer will be coded so that it is not traceable to you and kept in a secure place, with password only access. On completion of the project all participant information will be destroyed (July 2009).

PLEASE NOTE: ALTHOUGH INTERVIEWS ARE CONFIDENTIAL I HAVE TO WORK WITHIN LEGAL GUIDELINES. THEREFORE ANY CONCERNS IN REGARD TO ADULT OR CHILD PROTECTION LAWS MAY BE FORWARDED TO OTHER AGENCIES

Contact Details

Researcher: Katherine King, School of Environment, University of Brighton, Lewes Road, Brighton, BN2 4GJ
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Project Supervisor: Prof Andrew Church, School of Environment, University of Brighton, Lewes Road, Brighton, BN2 4GJ
Tel: 01273 642374 Email: a.church@brighton.ac.uk
Appendix 4: Participant consent form

Consent Form for Participants: Young People and Woodland Recreation

Please tick all boxes and sign below.

I agree to take part in a recorded interview with Katherine King as part of this research looking at young people and mountain biking at Bedgebury

Katherine has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the research and the possible risks involved. I have also read the information sheet and I understand everything fully.

I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else and that any contributions will remain anonymous.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving a reason.

I agree to take part in an informal recorded cycle ride through the forest with the researcher, Katherine King after the initial interview. Katherine has discussed where will go and both have the cycling abilities to follow the route. I understand that I can end the cycle at any time without giving a reason.

I agree that any posts I have written on the forum Jabonline.myfastforum.org can be used as part of the research.

I have received a £10 bonus bond voucher

Medical Information

Do you have any medical condition or recurring complaint of which a first aider should be aware (e.g. allergies, diabetes, asthma, epilepsy)? Please specify below.

The research will form the basis of a PhD thesis and articles/books for academic publication. The results will be available to you and all other participants in the research. Contributions will be anonymous they will not be named in any of the research publications

Name (please print) .......................................................... Signed ......................................................... Date............
Appendix 5: Interview guide

**Being a biker**
How did you first get involved in mountain biking? why did you initially start mountain biking
What kind of mountain biker would you classify yourself as? Why do you prefer this type?
Can you tell me something about experience of this compared to other types.....when did you decide this?
Tell me about the other types of mountain biking and the people who take part in it.
(what is involved in making this kind of decision, is it important to distinguish?)
Do you consider yourself to be skilled?
Why do you ride? What’s your motivation?
Tell me about your bike
Tell me about how you got involved in mountain biking at Bedgebury?

**Bedgebury**
Tell me about the first time you came to Bedgebury, can you describe the experience?
How often do you come to Bedgebury? How do you get here? Do you consider yourself local to Bedgebury?
Are you a member of the cycle club?
What do you think of the site? Do you visit other woodlands for MB, how do these compare?
Tell me about other places you ride, which are your favourites? Why? How do you get there?

**Space and the countryside**
What kinds of places do you mountain bike other than Bedgebury?
Do you come to the countryside when you’re not mountain biking?
Would you say you were someone who enjoyed nature or getting out into the countryside?
Do you feel confident in the countryside?

**Social networks**
Tell me about the types of people who you’ve met through riding here. Cycling around do you recognise people you know? Have you met any friends though mb here?
Is it important to talk to other mountain bikers?
What do your other friends think about mountain biking?
Who do you ride with?
What type of person enjoys mountain biking? Do you have a lot in common with other mountain bikers besides the sport?

**Forums**
Tell me about the kinds of discussions you have on forums.
How often do you write on forums, do you use other websites?
Appendix 6: Parental consent form

Parental Consent Form for Participants: Young People and Woodland Recreation

Please tick all boxes and sign below.

I agree that.................................may take part in a recorded interview with Katherine King as part of this research looking at young people and woodland recreation at Bedgebury. □

Katherine has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the research and the possible risks involved. I have also read the information sheet and I understand everything fully. □

I understand that any confidential information will be seen only by the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else and that any contributions will remain anonymous. □

I understand that he/she is free to withdraw from the project at any time without giving a reason. □

I agree that he/she may take part in an informal recorded cycle ride through Bedgebury forest with the researcher, Katherine King after the initial interview. Katherine has discussed with both myself and him/her where they will go and I am satisfied that he/she has the cycling abilities to follow the route. □

Please indicate any medical condition or recurring complaint of which we should be aware (e.g. allergies, diabetes, asthma, epilepsy)? Are they receiving any medication for the condition and will they require any medication for the condition and will they require any medication during the event? ...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

The research will form the basis of a PhD thesis and articles / books for academic publication. The results will be available to all participants in the research. Contributions will be anonymous they will not be named in any of the research publications.

Name (please print) ........................................................................................................................................................................

Signed .................................................. Date........................................