

# ADVENTURE AND SOCIETY



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# Adventure and Society

"The interdisciplinary and interconnected nature of how adventure and society interact has been expertly crystallized within the pages of *Adventure and Society*. Examining adventure practices from multiple perspectives and standpoints is undoubtedly the most challenging and enlightening aspect of this book. Explorations of the multifaceted and ubiquitous interplay of social media, risk, identity, justice, and equalities within a societal context are undertaken with finesse and academic rigour. Discussion questions contained in each chapter assist the reader to personally contextualize the material, while the case studies provide an enriching illustration of the topical issues and provocations. This is a 'must read' for anyone delving into the sociological aspects of adventure and contemporary society."

—**Tonia Gray**, *Associate Professor, Western Sydney University, Australia*

"Activities such as mountaineering, skiing, and climbing are now popular across the globe. Traditionally referred to as adventurous, Western pastimes only open for a select few; their popularity suggests that they are now emerging as everyday activities available for a wide section of the global population. So how should we understand this phenomenon? *Adventure and Society* opens up much-needed discussions on the nature and value of adventure in today's global village. The reader is led on a journey of discovery and challenged to reflect on previous assumptions and presuppositions. This book is a 'must read' for anyone remotely interested in what it means to be human, and it will prove especially valuable for those studying adventure at any level."

—**Eric Brymer**, *Reader, Leeds Beckett University, UK*

"*Adventure and Society* is a must read for anyone interested in developing a deeper understanding of adventure sports and their place in contemporary society. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the authors carefully track the growth, development, and latest trends in adventure sports, such as climbing, skiing, hiking, and skateboarding. In so doing, they highlight the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political significance of such activities in the lives of individuals, communities, and societies around the world. Written in a highly engaging style, this book supports readers in accessing key theoretical concepts and developing critical thinking skills with rich, powerful, and relevant analyses throughout. For lecturers and students, the discussion questions and case studies offered in each chapter will also be very useful. A highly recommended read for anyone interested in understanding the rise of adventure sports and their complex relationships within society today."

—**Holly Thorpe**, *Associate Professor, University of Waikato, New Zealand*

"While adventure experience today is often considered an opportunity for personal growth and development, the practice of adventure experience is based on a legacy that is somewhat dark and clouded. It is based on a legacy of exploration, conquest, and exploitation—a legacy that has led to environmental degradation and cultural annihilation on a global scale. In its consideration of the nature of adventure in our contemporary world, *Adventure and Society* challenges readers to examine this legacy and its meaning for the practice of adventure experience today. The text offers a wide-ranging analysis of adventure and its function in the lives of people who engage in it. In doing so, the authors challenge readers to critically examine underlying assumptions on which adventure experience is based—assumptions that often go unexamined by adventure enthusiasts today. Such an analysis is valuable because it can help to promote a more conscientious approach to adventure pursuits, one that serves to redress old wrongs with respect to issues of social and environmental justice."

—**Bruce Martin**, *Professor, Ohio University, USA*

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## Foreword

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Many readers of this book will, like me, have spent much of their lives engaged in adventurous activities. For me, these activities began when I was in Girlguiding and then Sea Rangers (a senior section of Girlguiding), and later included climbing, kayaking, skiing, and various forms of sailing. I have taught these traditional adventure activities both practically and theoretically. Currently my activities include windsurfing, SUPing (stand-up paddleboarding), and hiking. Many, unlike me, will have been introduced to these activities by family, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award or other national organizations, school, and/or be(coming) enthusiastic skateboarders, surfers, or sport climbers. There may well be some of you who have not experienced these forms of adventure but practice a wide range of other, perhaps less conventional, ones. You may be a social science student, sports studies student, or any other critical thinker. This book is for you, as well as for those of you taking outdoor adventure education or outdoor studies programmes.

When I was asked to write an 800-word foreword for *Adventure and Society* I agreed and avidly read the chapters in the book. The irony of this is that I was engrossed in a little-known TV comedy drama titled *800 Words*. The main character, a newly bereaved father and columnist, moves his reluctant teenage son and daughter from a large city to a small surf town. Although he wants to improve his surfing, he is trying to cope with the sudden death of his wife. He and his teenagers encounter a wide range of situations with the diverse members of the community, which take them on countless unexpected twists. There is pathos and comedy in the crises they encounter in the unexpected twists that are part of the day-to-day routine in this small surf town community. *Adventure and Society* draws attention to Becker's explanations that at the structural core of adventure is the 'interplay between crisis and routine' (p. 26). Adventure and society are inexorably intertwined, as represented in the *800 Words* drama, and, as we are shown in this book, adventure is complex, multifaceted, and deeply embedded in and shaped by society.

Although we might consider that many adventurers operate in isolation and find freedom through participating in risky pursuits, this simplistic notion, like many other popular (mis)conceptions, is explored and critiqued here. *Adventure and Society* provides readers with critical, scholarly understandings of what society is and considers how individuals and groups are both constrained and empowered in relationships within communities. The popular image of who can initiate and experience adventure is for the most part that of the White, middle-class, young, able-bodied male. Not only does this book help us to perceive things like this differently, but also it offers readers theoretical and narrative skills to see through stereotyping, resist taken-for-granted assumptions, and challenge inequalities in society and so in adventure.

We live in a world where consumption is overwhelming. In order for the few to profit many must labour and more must buy. This book prompts us to question how we engage in and consume adventures. What, and whose interests, are maintained by rampant production and consumption? Where once, years ago, we bought our walking, camping, and climbing gear cheaply and often recycled from ex-army shops, now vast numbers of different brands operate in the marketplace to gain our loyalty and get our money.

As Denzin (2010) opines, '[c]omplex discourses and ideological processes shape the rituals of cultural production and consumption. Each historical period has its racially preferred gendered self. These selves are announced and validated through these circuits of representation, identification and consumption' (p. xv). *Adventure and Society* offers readers the opportunity and knowledge needed 'to interrogate these formations and the circuits they forge'.

Social justice and environmental justice are inexorably interconnected. Challenging the abuse of people and the natural environment in meeting the wants of wealthy corporations and adventure seekers is crucial if future adventurers are to continue to live in a biodiverse world. Humans and the more than human are on the cusp of global disaster largely because of mindless consumption informed by neo-liberal ideologies or, more generously, by the unintended consequences of capitalism. We know that the oceans are becoming plastic; many beautiful coral reefs are now grey and lifeless. *Adventure and Society* brings these issues to our attention, but gives us hope by pointing to the many activist adventurers and others doing what they can at the local as well as global level for sustainable futures.

The authors of this book are offering you a wealth of knowledge to enable you to make sense of our complex fluid society, to challenge dominant ideologies, and to act sustainably and equitably in your adventures. Make it happen.

**Barbara Humberstone**

New Forest, UK

## References

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## Preface

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Before we get started, let us pause for a moment to make sense of what this book is going to be about; we aim to provide an accessible overview of the ways in which ‘adventurous practices’ influence, and are influenced, by the world around them. Compelling examples of this that are worth unpacking can be found in many places. For instance, please close the book and have another look at the cover. What do you see? Apart from a fantastic photograph of two skiers dropping into Number 3 Gully on Ben Nevis in Scotland, taken by Hamish Frost, what pieces of information can you glean?

First, specialist clothing and equipment is being used and it is probably quite expensive. Second, this activity—for most of the world’s population—would seem pretty risky. Third, the top skier is wearing a GoPro camera on their helmet, in order to capture video of their descent which will likely be posted and shared online.

If those are the initial observations and assumptions that we can make, what might be some of the others? If you were a betting person, what social class, ethnicity, and gender would you guess these two skiers to be? They obviously have enough free time to travel to the mountains and spend the day climbing and skiing, and they are using and wearing costly pieces of technology—all of which come with a price; so, our skiers come from relative socio-economic and cultural privilege. It would, we think, be safe to assume that the two skiers take their pastime very seriously—so seriously that they watch lots of ski videos on YouTube, follow other extreme skiers on Instagram, and, as mentioned, contribute their own images to these and other social media sites. Being extreme skiers who participate in a community of like-minded others is part of who these two are.

Let us take our evolving, informal analysis a step further. From where do you think the raw materials for the ski equipment and clothing were extracted? Although purchased and used by individuals in a northern, developed nation, where do you think this gear was manufactured? By whom was it manufactured and under what conditions do these labourers work and live? Finally, it is worth considering the long term and what might happen to this equipment and clothing once they gather enough nicks, tears, and breaks, and need to be disposed of.

As they stand, the above questions and assumptions stemming from the vignette on the cover are no more than the kinds of topics we might discuss in a coffee shop or pub. This book aims to tackle these same issues, but with more precision and depth, through the use of recent scholarship and insightful theoretical frameworks. Our primary aim is thus to examine adventure practices from perspectives that we otherwise might not.

One of the most challenging aspects of writing this book was illustrating the interdisciplinary nature of how adventure and society interact; because each topic is connected to the others, it is hard to contain, for example, discrete discussions of social media, risk, identity, and equalities within the constraints of one standard chapter length. We have done our best to package the chapters into logical and relevant themes and have made plenty of links between the chapters in the text. Each chapter has discussion questions to

personally contextualize the material and a case study to provide a rich illustration of the topic. We have also highlighted key readings at the ends of chapters, which you can pursue in order to gain further insight on certain topics.

We have left aside the conventional chapter-by-chapter summary and instead encourage you to take a look at the table of contents to get an overview of the topics that we will cover and then jump in wherever it works best for you. Although we recommend starting at the beginning, the chapters can be read in any order, and this may be useful for educators using this text in a variety of courses.

Finally, if we have a central wish for readers, it is that you come away from your time with this book motivated to undertake adventures that are more deeply considered. Whether your adventure involves meeting friends at the local climbing gym every Thursday night or training for a once-in-a-lifetime ascent of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, it is our belief that having a richer scholarly, theoretical understanding of adventure practices will make these pursuits even more personally meaningful, less harmful to others, and perhaps even a force for positive social change.

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Professor Barbara Humberstone's outstanding research in the field of outdoor leisure and recreation has greatly influenced the ideas featuring within this book's chapters, and we are so pleased that she agreed to write the Foreword. Barbara, however, did more than write the Foreword: she also provided a chapter-by-chapter critique of the entire book, suggested literature to ensure that our discussions were up-to-date, and was hugely helpful in exposing weak arguments and assumptions unwittingly made by our gendered perspectives.

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