

Mapping the Field of "AR": Adventure Racing and Bourdieu's Concept of Field

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Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of field, this paper explores the particular stakes and struggles that animate both the relationships among adventure racing (AR) participants and the competition among race organizers in order to highlight the social dynamic and power structure of this new "lifestyle" sport. Our investigation relies on a diversity of qualitative data, namely semi-structured interviews with 37 AR participants, Adventure Racing Association Listserve discussion, and participant observation of *Eco-Challenge Argentina* 1999. Our analysis demonstrates that what is at stake in the AR field is both the definition of the sport practice's legitimate form as well as its orientation with respect to two dominant delineating forces: "authenticity" and "spectacularization" of the adventure. These two forces currently constitute the specific forms of capital (sources of prestige) that define the AR field.

À partir du concept de champ de Pierre Bourdieu, cet article explore les luttes et enjeux particuliers qui animent d'une part les relations entre les participants ou participantes à la course d'aventure (CA) et, d'autre part, la compétition entre les organisateurs ou organisatrices de courses; une telle exploration met en lumière la dynamique sociale et la structure de pouvoir de ce nouveau sport. Notre étude est fondée sur une diversité de données qualitatives, notamment, des entrevues semi-structurées avec 37 participants et participantes à la CA, des discussions recueillies sur un tableau d'affichage électronique géré par l'Adventure Racing Association et une observation participante de l'Eco-Challenge Argentina 1999. Notre analyse démontre que les enjeux du champ de la CA sont la définition de la forme légitime de cette pratique sportive ainsi que son orientation en regard de deux forces directrices: «l'authenticité» et la «spectacularisation» de la CA. Ces deux forces constituent présentement les formes spécifiques de capital (sources de prestige) qui définissent le champ de la CA.

The sport of adventure racing (henceforth in the text and commonly referred to in the sport as "AR") by its very character resists strict definition, but can nonetheless be loosely described—in its most undisputed formulation—as a non-stop, self-sufficient, multi-day, multi-discipline, mixed-gender team endurance competition that takes place in the wilderness over a designated but unmarked course. In the larger field of sport practice, *Adventure* has now become a distinguishing brand and a marketing strategy, co-opted and commodified to suggest and/or validate producers' and products' active membership in the endurance race arena. AR, like many new sport practices, has become—for high performance athletes and weekend warriors alike—a "lifestyle" sport, an integral and invested part of participants' lives.

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The purpose of this paper is to position AR in relation to other social fields, to ultimately highlight its specific social dynamic and power structure. Our analysis, which relies on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of field, explains the constitution and direction of AR as the outcome of struggles, among social agents and institutions, over the definition of the sport practice's "legitimate" form. By highlighting the stakes and struggles specific to the AR field, we aim at making an analytical contribution to the study of lifestyle sport as well as to a larger project of exploration into the field of sport supply.

The first two sections of the paper present, respectively, Bourdieu's concepts of field and symbolic capital, and the methodological devices exploited to investigate the field of AR. The third section of the paper is devoted to our investigation of the AR field. For Bourdieu (1988), a comprehensive investigation of a field must consider four intimately connected aspects of analysis: (a) the social history of the constitution of the field in question, (b) the relationship of the field to other fields, (c) the specific stakes and struggles that fuel the field's dynamic, and (d) the power relations that transform the structure of the field, eventually transforming the practice itself. Accordingly, our analysis of the AR field consists of four main subsections: first, we briefly trace the constitution of the AR field; second, we position the AR field within the larger universe of sport practice, considering its relationship to other social fields; third, we explore the specific stakes and struggles that fuel the field's dynamic; and finally, we present the recent transformations in the AR field.

Theoretical Framework

"Field," as a key concept at the center of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, calls attention to the power relations, which are embodied in cultural practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 94-114). The concept of field is presented by Bourdieu more as a "way of thinking," a tool for the empirical study of various social arenas, than as a conceptual entity. By speaking of fields, rather than institutions, groups, or organizations, Bourdieu's intention is to draw attention to the latent patterns of struggles and interests that shape the existence and dynamic of these empirical realities (Swartz, 1997, p. 119). Our investigation attempts to exploit the heuristical power of the concept of field in the understanding of AR—a new sport in the universe of sport supply—and its particular dynamic.

Loosely defined, a field, in Bourdieu's work, is a social arena, simultaneously a space of conflict and competition, within which struggles take place for the accumulation of the resources valued in it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 7). Bourdieu conceptualizes resources as forms of capital when they become the object of struggle and function as a "social relation of power" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 375). Like other Bourdieusian concepts, the notion of field is *relational* in that, rather than referring to a delimited population of producers, it points to the relationships (e.g., opposition or alliances, domination or resistance) between various social agents occupying different positions in a structured network (Laberge & Kay, in press).

A critical characteristic of field is the existence of stakes for which agents vie: "A field defines itself by (among other things) defining specific stakes and interests, which are irreducible to the stake and interests specific to other fields" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72). One of our research tasks is indeed to identify the stakes and struggles specific to the world of AR.

Field struggles center on specific forms of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is what is efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a stake (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). In empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is and to determine what are the specific forms of symbolic capital active within the limits of that field (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73). Moreover, actors' struggles take place not only over particular forms of capital effective in the field, but also over the very definition of which capital is most valued (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 84). Therefore, one of the main objectives of our investigation is to identify the existence of symbolic capitals specific to AR.

Another property of fields is that they are structured spaces of positions based on the types and amounts of capitals. Bourdieu stresses that positions in a field are determined by the unequal distribution of relevant capitals rather than by the personal attributes of their occupants (Bourdieu, 1993). It is important to mention that the structure of a field is a *state* of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle; it is the result of previous struggles and is itself always at stake and likely to be transformed. According to Bourdieu, depending on agents' trajectories and positions in the field, agents will orient themselves differently toward the distribution of the field's specific capitals (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 109). Bourdieu speaks of three different types of field strategies: conservation, succession, and subversion (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 73-74). Conservation strategies tend to be pursued by those who hold dominant positions and enjoy seniority in the field. Strategies of succession are attempts to gain access to dominant positions in a field and are generally pursued by new entrants. Subversion strategies tend to be pursued by those who expect to gain little from the dominant groups. These strategies take the form of a more or less radical rupture with the dominant group by challenging its legitimacy to define the standards of the field. Hence, the structure of the field is likely to be transformed according to the relative "success" of the different strategies at work at a given time in a given field. Our investigation of AR, then, also attempts to identify the strategies at work among the AR race organizers to maintain or transform the structure of the AR field.

Research Methods

For our study we chose to rely on multiple modes of qualitative data generation to help assess the "validity of inferences between indicators and concepts" (Hammerseley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 231), a type of methodology used extensively by Bourdieu that he describes as "discursive montage" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 66). We became equally attached to a process of "analytical induction," the inter-play between the data collection and revision of the research project (Brymon & Burgess, 1994, p. 4). Our intention was to build an iterative and self-corrective design to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 92), and to ultimately provide a description of the norms and values that underlie cultural behavior (pp. 229-251), interpreted in terms of the literature and theories in sport sociology. This meant that, as per Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 226), data analysis began with data collection still underway. After finishing each interview and again after finishing a large group of interviews, we examined the data in light of Bourdieu's conceptualization of *field* and *capital*, pulled out the themes that described the world of AR participants, and decided which areas to examine in more detail. We redesigned our questions

according to this preliminary analysis to focus on central themes (i.e., the values and norms at stake in AR) as we continued collecting data. After the collection was complete, we began a more fine-grained analysis of the data, paying particular attention to current debates, building toward an overall understanding of the field. In order to put into light the dynamic and the structure of the power relations of the field of AR, we categorized all the material by key themes and compared the material within categories for variations and nuances in meanings. We then compared across categories to discover connections between themes, the goal being to provide an accurate, detailed analysis.

Our qualitative analysis of the AR field is based on 37 interviews with AR participants conducted by Joanne Kay, 30 of which took place on site in Patagonia, Argentina in December of 1999 over 3 weeks of an *Eco-Challenge* competition. Seven of the interviews were done off-site previous to the competition. After the initial analysis, 10 of the respondents were contacted for follow-up interviews. All the interviews were semi-structured and tape-recorded, lasting an average of 90 minutes.

Specific themes were broached in each interview: perceptions and judgments regarding various AR practices, prestige as it is linked to specific events, the impact of media on personal AR experience, the impact of corporate sponsorship on personal AR experience, the impact of the "gender" rule on personal AR experience, the importance of AR as a "training ground for real life," and AR as a lifestyle activity.

Though respondents were deliberately guided toward the predetermined themes, spontaneous detours were encouraged with the aim of eliciting agents' particular knowledge of the field. As Bourdieu explains:

The notion of field reminds us that the true object of social science is not the individual. It is the field, which is primary and must be the focus of the research operations. Individuals exist as agents who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field. And it is knowledge of the field itself in which they evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their point of view or position (in a field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 107)

We also rely heavily on a series of Kay's e-mail correspondences that took place in January 2000 after a two-page feature she wrote on the *Eco-Challenge* was published in the *National Post* (Kay, 2000). The article, titled "Lights, Cameras, Eco-Action," criticized the media's (intrusive) role at the race, and the feedback Kay received from participants on this piece proved to be exceptionally useful in understanding the struggles taking place in the AR field.

We also draw on the Adventure Racing Association Listserve's (ARA-L) ongoing debate over the direction of AR. All comments and dialogue with "Direction of AR" in the subject line's header were collected for the duration of the debate, which took place over a 12-month period from September 1999 to August 2000. As this was the most popular on-line forum for AR participants and enthusiasts, the discussion was invaluable to determining and outlining the specific stakes and struggles in the field. Our online data collection was grounded in the ethnomethodological approach broadly concerned with how people construct their

own definition of a social situation: "These methods focus on ordinary, mundane, naturally occurring talk to reveal the way meaning is accomplished by everyone involved" (Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 86). As Denzin (1999) and Rodino (1997) have shown, "lurking" unseen on-line is an effective way to watch interaction without intervening in any way, an invaluable complement, we discovered, to more traditional qualitative research methods. Further, we found that computer-mediated communication, coined "CMC" by Mann and Stewart (2000, p. 2), has proven a mode capable not only of eliminating transcription bias (p. 22), but of generating data which are "more open, reactive and spontaneous than many traditional written accounts and more detailed, edited and reflective than many spoken conversations" (p. 194).

While we consider this study to be predominantly of a qualitative design, the *Eco-Challenge* Communications Department supplied us with some quantitative data, statistics, and competitor information that rounded out our knowledge of participants in AR. After a first analysis of the data, we also sent out a short questionnaire in order to help evaluate the relative positions of participants in the AR field.

Finally, much of the research took place through participant observation. Kay trained for and competed in the 36-hour *Raid the North* adventure race in Quebec, Canada in September of 1999—an experience that not only helped her relate better to athletes' perceptions and judgments, but permitted a privileged and welcomed entry into the AR community. Kay was able to go beyond conducting formal interviews and chat freely with racers in a more relaxed, unstructured exchange. Kay also conducted a 3-week field observation in Patagonia as a journalist/feature writer for the *National Post*. In this role she was given complete access to competitors, the course and race organization, including media production facilities and crew—access that would have been denied her had she gone in any other capacity such as racer, volunteer, or spectator. Data collection consisted of diligent note taking, photos and informal discussions with organizers, producers, participants, and volunteers.

The interviews did, however, present some ethical concerns. At times interviews were covert, conducted in informal non-regulated environments, as Kay was an active member in the group. As was Belinda Wheaton's participation in her analysis of windsurfers (Wheaton, 1998), Kay's participation was complicated by her additional role as sports journalist. She similarly found herself privy to invaluable information, sometimes deceptively uncovered, about media operations and influences. As an ethical minimum, Kay likewise informed her subjects of the broad area of research. She chose to conduct all interviews as a "researcher," offering confidentiality unless she made a specific journalistic request, since it was felt participants were more open and comfortable with her in this role. If specifically "journalistic" questions were necessary, she would turn off the tape recorder, rely on her note pad and state the change in purpose.

Our goal was to maintain an integrated approach that follows in the ethnographic tradition, which rejects positivist views of scientific research. Our intention was not to mirror social reality or social facts by representing empirical research. Rather, we tried to emphasize methodological reflexivity and, as researchers, to recognize our part in the social world being studied (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 217-253). Accordingly, while efforts were made not to overstep ethical boundaries, our participant-observation data was not only justified in this research; it was central to its validity.

Field Analysis

A Brief History of Adventure Racing: Genesis of the Field

Although the focus of this article is on the dynamic and the structure of the AR field, this analysis relies on the assumption that AR is, indeed, a field. It is therefore important to briefly trace AR's progressive constitution into an "area of production, endowed with its own logic and its own history," an area of production that refers to a specific reality and culture irreducible to any other, and that functions as a system endowed with its own specific rules and rewards (Bourdieu, 1978, pp. 820-821).

The origins of AR lie in a multi-sport wilderness endurance race started in 1980 in New Zealand, known as the *Speight's Coast to Coast*, a 240km cycling, running, and paddling two-day stage race across the Southern Alps. The race later spilled over into *The Longest Day* that tackles the whole distance at once. Soon after its inception, in 1983, some American race organizers responded with a race across the Arctic called the *Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic*. While *Coast to Coast* has grown into one of the most heralded and commercial multi-sport races in the world, the *Classic* remained unchanged from its original grass roots, advertised only by word of mouth and returning profits to those who compete. At this point in AR's history, with the emergence of two distinct forms of race organization, we see the first indication of the two forces that will eventually constitute the specific forms of capital (sources of prestige) that define the AR field: "authenticity" and "spectacularization" of adventure.

Following in the more capitalistic tradition of the *Coast to Coast*, the *Raid Gauloises*—the first mixed-gender-team, multi-sport, multi-day wilderness endurance race—was introduced to New Zealand in 1989 by Gérard Fusil. Though the event was similar to its New Zealand predecessors, Fusil points to the around-the-world sailing race known as the *Whitbread* as his inspiration in designing a "modern equivalent of colonial adventures past," designed to "stir the imagination and bring a sense of romance to competitive sports" (Dugard, 1998, p. 2). The well-marketed expedition-length (i.e., 5-day plus) *Raid*, seen by many as the ultimate human test, quickly popularized the sport of adventure racing in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

After its first year, the *Raid* traveled to a different exotic location around the globe each year, leaving room in New Zealand for Geoff Hunt to establish the *Southern Traverse* in 1991. It modeled itself on the *Raid* but was raced over a shorter 3–5 day period and in the same geographic location every Fall. The *Southern Traverse*, like the *Raid*, has maintained its legendary status in the AR community, despite increasing competition on the race circuit.

AR, now firmly established in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, was finally brought to North America by *Raid* competitor and entrepreneur, Mark Burnett, the creator of the *Eco-Challenge* and later the executive producer of CBS's reality TV series phenomenon, *Survivor*. The first *Eco* took place in Utah in 1995 and, brandishing a new "American flavor" (Dugard, 1998, p. 96), grew quickly into one of the most popular expedition-length races in the world.

During this period in AR's historical genealogy, an AR field is recognizable, with a critical number of events (products), "functioning as a field of competition, the site of confrontation between agents with specific interests linked to their positions within the field . . . endowed with its own specific rewards and its own rules,

where a whole specific competence or culture is generated and invested" (Bourdieu, 1978, pp. 820-821).

A recent addition to the emergent expedition length race circuit is the *Elf Authentic Adventure*, initiated in 1999 by *Raid* founder Gérard Fusil. The *Elf* hosts three classes for various skill levels and was the first competitive adventure to require racers to compete in total autonomy. Currently, because of the media attention, sponsorship, and elite competition that they attract, the *Raid*, the *Elf*, the *Eco*, and the *Southern Traverse* make up what can be called the "big four" of the sport.

In the wake of the new mainstream focus, many new, more accessible styles of AR have emerged. AR, like any rare product, has predictably been democratized and massified, and countless new races are now being staged around the world, all offering unique formats, disciplines, and rules. Distances now vary from "expeditions" to several hour-long "sprints" (such as the *Subaru Hi-Tec Urban Adventure* series, the *Sea2Summit* races, or the *Xterra off-road triathlons*) to stage races (such as Morocco's *Marathon des Sables* or China's *Mild Seven Outdoor Quest*) to non-stop "weekenders" (such as Canada's *Raid the North* 36-hour series, the 24-hour *FogDog*, the *24-hours of Adrenaline* mountain bike series, or the three-day *West Isles Challenge*). As the prohibitively expensive and time-consuming weeklong expedition-length races are accessible to only a privileged few, the shorter, cheaper, easier races offering a chance for a "weekend warrior" clientele to compete have experienced a very profitable boom and are challenging the previously dominant format of AR.

Positioning AR in the Field of Sport Practice and in Relation to External Social Fields

Although the AR field has its own specific history and developed culture, it cannot be said to function in isolation. The AR field articulates with other sport practices as well as with external social fields. These articulations with other spheres are the result of strategies developed by social agents to accumulate symbolic capital (prestige). To highlight the significance of these articulations to the development of the AR field, the second part of our analysis positions AR both within the larger field of sport as well as in relation to specific external fields namely those of risk recreation, adventure tourism, corporate/human resources, and entertainment/media.

Positioning AR in the field of sport practice. AR's relationships to other sport practices can be understood in light of general trends in sport practice. Pociello (1994, pp. 167-170) has identified *deinstitutionalization*, *delocalization*, *ecologization*, *hybridization* and *adventurization* as particular characteristics of new sport culture. AR emerged from these specific trends at a time when "extreme" sports were gaining popularity. These sports, though in earlier manifestations fueled by larger political opposition,¹ have most recently been described as sports that either ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and their values (Beal, 1995; Rinehart, 1998).

According to a relational approach that posits AR as taking its signification from its relational position to—and in function with—other social practices, values, and discourses, we have cautiously (indeed, any schematic "fixes" a social space that, in reality, is dynamic and in constant transformation) positioned AR within the field of sport. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the inclusive and exclusive relations of AR with others sports and with external social fields; this

graphic representation is based on the dominant social representation of AR that emerges from participant opinion. Our content analysis leads us to consider AR as a field² within the sphere of extreme sport, touching the overlap of institutionalized sport practice (see Figure 1) and overlapped by significant external fields, "constituting a potentially open space of play whose boundaries are dynamic and are the stake of struggles within the field itself" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104).

Though we have positioned AR predominantly in the sphere of extreme/fringe sport, it necessarily overlaps the intersection of traditional/mainstream sport, as participants and organizers struggle over the practice's apparently ambiguous position. Most agents, for example, feel a sense of pride about the "open" nature of the sport and its fringe association:

AR is unique and exciting because of the unrestricted nature that it now enjoys. (ARA-L³)

Concern for the "fringe" status of the sport has grown even more recently as races become bigger and more accessible, striving to achieve prestigious rank and media attention. For many, the *raison-d'être* of the sport is associated with its distance from the mainstream:

I like the fact that no one knows what the hell AR is. If AR becomes more mainstream, the essence of the sport is subject to the influence of the masses. (ARA-L)

However, many participants see a benefit to driving the sport toward the mainstream, making it safe and accessible, hence creating tension with those who would cling to the sport's fringe status:

If we don't get this into the hands of kids, the average middle class person, it [AR] is dead. (ARA-L)

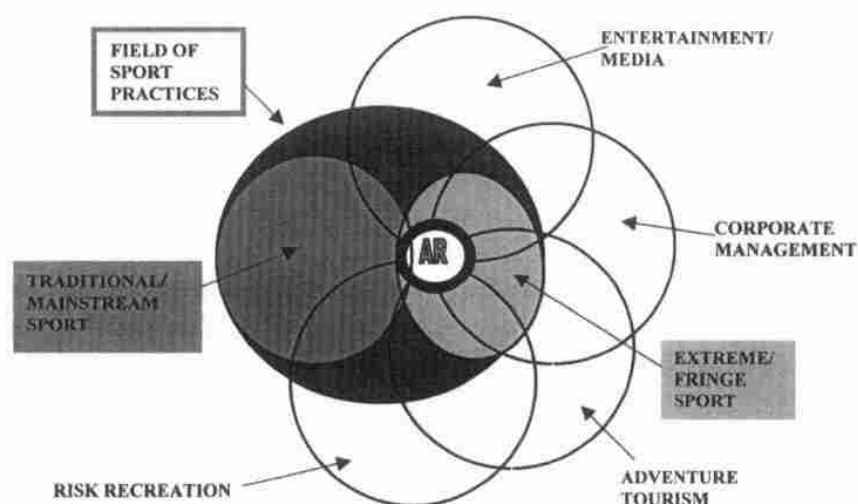


Figure 1 — Positioning AR in the field of sport practice and in relation to external social fields.

We need to make it more interesting and spectator-friendly. Don't let it go into rich elitist hands who want to keep it to themselves. Let's make it mainstream! One day, doable race, go to work on Monday. (ARA-L)

Let's make it mainstream. Not for more advertising but to make it more popular. We need exposure not to sell products but to feed the sport. (ARA-L)

It's tough to find something tougher than this [Eco] that someone like me can do. Circumnavigation of the globe, Everest or becoming an astronaut are totally unobtainable for the average person. So for a grunt like me, this is the top of the heap. (Male, 36)

Beyond the concern over AR's distance to the mainstream, the reference to AR as an extreme sport is problematic as well:

When someone says AR is extreme, I correct them and say "ultra-endurance." Because extreme has a connotation of young party animals, crazy stuff like double flips, backspins and stuff like that which is not us. Most competitors call it ultra-endurance or extreme endurance—not caring maybe, but sponsors don't want to associate with extreme sports so it matters. (Male, 26)

The discord reflects the constant struggle among the racing community over the sport's position within the larger field of sport. This tension reveals the boundaries of the sport—between fringe and mainstream, traditional and extreme—as important stakes in the struggle within the field of AR. Similarly, the boundaries between AR and external fields are equally important to the struggle.

Links to external fields. Beyond AR's ambiguous position within the field of sport, its articulations with external social fields exemplify a growing trend in new sport culture by emphasizing the elasticity of its boundaries. However, as the AR field shares many core values with other social fields, it is also by identifying its distinct and differentiating values that the important stakes in the struggle over its legitimate form emerge. Therefore, AR's articulations with the fields of risk recreation, adventure tourism, corporate/human resources and entertainment/media expose both AR's specific shared values as well as AR's specific position within the field of (competitive) sport as important stakes in the struggle over its legitimate form.

For example, AR could be confused for risk recreation—outdoor pursuits most often implying personal challenge and self-development, the main objective being to acquire competence and skill:

Rock climbing may be as necessary as ice climbing to reach a pass or a peak, abseiling is a means of retreat which often makes use of fixed ropes left by other climbers, local area knowledge helps on negotiating weather patterns, and experienced leadership unites an expedition in overcoming risks and unexpected obstacles. Individual outdoor pursuits are the means; the end is the whole journey. (Bell, in press, p. 3)

However, AR participants emphasize that competition distinguishes AR from risk recreation. Similarly, for the risk recreation participant, the competitive and commercial aspect of the sport is seen to challenge the "purity" of self-designed outdoor pursuit. While the AR field's distinct property of competition distinguishes

it from this external social field, both fields articulate with each other through shared activity and values. AR, for example, while treated as a distinct field, is often viewed as a phase or experiment in an otherwise uncompromised risk recreation lifestyle. As one top US competitor explained:

In a couple of years, I'll be forced to acknowledge my waning capacity to compete and I'll be out to pasture. But what a pasture! I'll rejoin the backcountry tourists, moving through the wilderness on foot, mountain bike, kayak, or fixed line at a more contemplative pace. I'll be able to take naps, carry extra food, and not worry about the fitness of my companions. If the weather goes to hell, I'll be able to short-circuit the trip or take refuge. But I will always be able to cling tight to that singularly unique sensation that comes from going out into the wilderness with less than you are supposed to, traversing a course designed by a sadist, enduring foul weather and bad navigation decisions, shedding a little blood, and coming home a winner. For that, the sky can be filled with the roar of hovering Wescams.⁴ (Male, 46)

A second important articulation is taking place between the AR and corporate human resources fields. As corporate culture is becoming, like adventure-sport, a space for "personal realization," it is not surprising that AR has been used as both metaphor and training ground for corporate values. Whereas sport has generally been used as a symbol for corporate competition, AR is being used as a management strategy.

Corporate culture insists on the paradoxical necessity of combining commitment to the collective with autonomous distinction (Alvesson, 1993; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1998; Dahler-Larsen, 1994; Deal & Kennedy, 1992, 1999; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Sackman, 1991; Sherriton & Stern, 1997). AR manifests this paradoxical combination. Examples of corporate appropriation of AR values can be seen in inter-business competition, in the invitation of high-level athletes to seminars and training sessions, and in the corporate retreat that relies on physical outdoor training incorporating specific AR skills. The lessons learned about teamwork and risk-taking are based on building an entrepreneurial employee mentality while fostering commitment to company values.

AR agents have likewise appropriated the values of corporate culture. Mark Burnett, founder of *Eco-Challenge*, has in fact incorporated corporate training into the *Eco-Challenge* mission, based on his belief in the transferability of "Eco-values" and on his vision of *Eco* as an experience guided by a practical philosophy for daily life:

I do management consulting speeches based on Eco lessons. Tolerance and realizing that the goal is more important than you alone is more important today in business. And we are in the process right now of going in that direction as a corporate retreat. Eco has my branding of what I think I am in terms of adventure and human dynamics. It follows one of my goals of Eco as a management training ground for team dynamics (Mark Burnett, personal communication, November 28, 1999).

Many AR participants own and operate adventure schools that, like Burnett's company *Eco-Challenge Lifestyles*, comprise a corporate training program as well as a race organization, offering corporate training based on the AR experience.

Participants and organizers share a belief in the ability of AR to teach life lessons that will transfer into daily life:

It's so hard and it's based around interpersonal team relationships. Arguments and conflicts lead to far more energy loss than just racing. And I think they all learn that. They all learn, as well, they never thought they could do something this hard and it kind of makes other problems in life seem not so bad (Mark Burnett, personal communication, November 28, 1999).

The way you deal with a situation in Eco – you get lost as a team, you start fighting—is the way you deal with life. (Male, 42)

Eco is life crammed into 10 days. (Female, 35)

The articulation between the fields is further evidenced in competitor's own attitudes toward the racing experience, where the blurred distinction between work and leisure that marks new corporate culture is apparent. At the finish of *Eco-Challenge* 1999, one North American racer commented on his AR experience:

These guys [his teammates] are the kind of people you would want working for your company. I have to force people to listen to me at work. This was worth five years of management training. The ultimate corporate retreat. It will teach me to be a better boss. Stress management, time management. Everything. I even got time off work by telling my boss I was going on a self-development program, not a sport event! (Male, 37)

The shared values between the AR and corporate fields blur the boundary between *Eco* the race and *Eco* the corporate retreat. Here it is AR's position within the larger sport field—its status as a "sport event"—that distinguishes AR as a separate field.

A third significant field in articulation with AR is that of adventure tourism. Adventure tourism is part of a broad category known as "eco-," "green," "alternative," or "hard" tourism and is often defined in opposition to "mass" tourism. Alternative tourists seek participatory experiences of local cultures and places, often involving risky outdoor activities in remote locations. Adventure tourists aim to "get in touch" with their own selves by actively and physically enduring some element of controlled danger in order to overcome the challenge of nature. Adventure tourism, like AR, places value on the "authentic," making the activity somewhat of a "sacred journey" (Clope & Perkins, 1997, p. 186) while simultaneously existing as a staged consumer product. Here we see the shared importance of authenticity of the adventure in the two fields:

I would have felt terrible going through these places like that (tourists) but because we were covered in mud and hadn't showered, we stunk, we were right with the people. It was almost like you would imagine in the old days when you were an explorer hiking and you came to a village and someone invites you to sleep in their barn. And that's because you didn't drive up in a big Mercedes with all your stuff and you're staying in a big hotel. ... Like, I don't know why anyone would go to Club Med in Marrakech. Like, in the market, at 7 o'clock, all the people come off the tour busses—in white hats, with cameras, walking two by two so they don't get robbed, looking around suspiciously. Tourists thought they were seeing a Berber village and it wasn't.

It's like if I said I was going to show you a traditional Canadian farm and I took you up to my house in North Vancouver. That was the great thing about Eco. The only way you could see the real thing was by hiking for days. It allowed you to get so close to the people. That to me is like being a real explorer. I'm not just hopping off a bus and seeing restaurants and clubs. It's being in the wilderness and getting a better sense of a place. (Male, 28)

This quote by an AR participant demonstrates little distinction between the adventure race and the adventure tour except the notion that AR is a sport event. Competition, then, as one of AR's constitutive properties, takes on greater significance according to a relational approach.

Lastly, the field of AR is consistently strengthening its links to the field of entertainment/media. AR, as made-for-TV sport, marries nostalgic adventure narrative—the stories of heroic pioneers and explorers who trekked over risky terrain for social advancement—to popular “reality TV.” The bigger AR races are choosing media partners that can capitalize on this trend, who specialize in family entertainment, attracting not sport spectators but adventure voyeurs, to maximize sponsorship and profit. The result is that adventure races are simultaneous sport and entertainment/media products with blurred boundaries between the two. As we will see in the next section, AR participants, though tolerant of the concurrent media production, tend to prioritize their commitment to *Eco* the race versus *Eco* the show, stressing the significance of competition as a defining AR property.

Though its distinct history and properties constitute AR as an autonomous field, its articulations with external fields create boundaries that are dynamic. Its links to external fields highlight values such as outdoor skill competence, self-development, authenticity, and media partnership as significant values—and therefore stakes—in the AR field. Its simultaneous position within the larger field of sport practice, however, is highlighted as a significant differentiating and defining characteristic thus equally important stake in the struggle for the legitimate form of AR.

We have highlighted the significance of AR's position and boundaries within the field of sport as significant stakes. In the third stage of the analysis, we will demonstrate how these stakes affect struggles over the symbolic capital most valued in the AR field.

Stakes and Struggles in the Field of AR

Two major debates appear to animate the relationships among AR participants and the competition among race organizers: that over authenticity of the adventure offered by the race organizers, and that over the spectacularization of the adventure product. Both issues are intimately linked to two crucial stakes in the field: the definition of the legitimate form of AR (what *is* AR?), and its legitimate direction. There is currently an abundant supply of races listed on AR calendars whose forms of practice range widely, from the authentic (*Raid Gauloises*) to the staged (*X-Terra Offroad*) to the spectacularized (*Hi-Tec Adventure*) to the covert (*Alaska Wilderness Classic*). Race organizers and participants are in constant competition, striving to make their particular form of practice valuable in the field. Here we present the relations of oppositions in the debate over the definition of the legitimate form of AR.

Authenticity of the adventure. One of the significant indicators of the conflict concerning authenticity of the adventure is the debate over the inclusion of (solo) stage and sprint races in the AR arena. Adventure purists argue that these practices resemble the triathlon too closely:

Sprints are not what the sport's really about. When you you've got 100 odd teams in a 3-4 hour race, it's essentially a team triathlon with slightly different events thrown in. (ARA-L)

The *Hi-Tec* and *Mild Seven* are off-road triathlons, not an AR. They have no navigation. It's staged or only three hours long. You don't have to deal with packing your gear or setting gear strategy. You don't have to worry about managing food and water. You don't have to worry about sleep-deprivation or having to survive in the wilderness – all of the things that make AR a challenge. It has to at least go through the night and be a team race. (Male, 29)

Predictably, those who participate in races that don't meet the strict criteria hold AR to a looser or more inclusive standard:

The very essence of the sport is getting out into the wilds—hence adventure. If it does that, it's an AR. (ARA-L)

The ultimate AR could even be solo because it's a scary concept. (Male, 28)

It is important to note that, although the definition of "off-roads" and stage races is under dispute, they are regularly listed on AR web calendars and referred to in AR literature, while sports such as orienteering and motorized expeditions are not. The fact that these formulas are self-defined in the field, and that their inclusion is a hotly debated issue, demonstrates their active membership in the field.

Another aspect relating to the issue of the authenticity of the adventure concerns the competitive character of AR. While some feel AR can provide authentic adventure, others feel that AR, by its very competitive character, cannot provide it. Those who believe that competition is not a compromise to authenticity see the criteria for authentic adventure linked to specific race characteristics:

Authenticity of the event is important to me. I would like no trails, no roads in a course, no deliberate misinformation, no teams allowed to train on the course prior to the event and no artificial games but real problem-solving difficulties. (Female, 44)

The purest version would be to tell teams: here's point A, here's point B—see you when you get there. No aid stations. A straight expedition working against the clock. (Male, 30)

Those who believe authenticity is solely attached to adventure understand AR as too competitive to provide "true" authenticity in the adventure experience:

What's most pure is someone who crosses Greenland and doesn't tell anyone. (Male, 27)

You cannot have the purest version (of adventure) in AR because it is not commercially possible. (Male, 29)

Accordingly, the most authentic and thus prestigious adventure races are deemed to be those that most closely mimic authentic adventure with minimal compromise within the scope of an organized race.

AR as media spectacle. The second major debate taking place in the AR field, which is inextricably linked to the struggle over the definition of the legitimate form of AR, is the role of media at races. Indeed, organizers and participants have been engaging in a heated debate over the commercialization of the sport and the growth of media-driven AR spectacles. There is a difference, for agents, between media partnering ("show") and media coverage ("news"), the latter allowing for a more authentic race experience. Most participants, for example, saw the increased presence of *Discovery Channel* film crews at the 1999 *Eco* as too conspicuous and disruptive, defeating their own personal reasons for being there:

AR is about working through difficult problems as you move through unknown physical territory. You should have opportunities to see the country as it really is, to deal with the inhabitants (people, fauna and flora). Schlepping between film sites is NOT adventure racing. TV coverage is very important to the sport, there's no doubt, but it is possible to have events that look and feel like serious expeditions and still produce magnificent and appealing television. (Male, 38)

It's really orchestrated according to a script, which makes better TV. The elite athletes are already turned off. So many of the teams aren't going to Borneo. (Male, 32)

Eco in 99 suffered a huge degree of lack of authenticity compared to previous *Ecos*. If the event continues as it did in 99, I would be disinclined to take part. (Female, 45)

It took away from my experience—the wild experience—because it's a show. The objective now with *Eco* is not the athletes—it's the media. (Female, 34)

To rationalize their participation in the *Eco-Challenge*, racers who chose to compete all described the *Eco* as two separate events, the race and the show:

I had the impression that certain teams had been invited to make money for Discovery. They had teams from foreign countries that have never kayaked but they were accepted so (Burnett) could sell the Discovery package to their country. When I understood that, I said: "I'll do it for fun, for myself and enjoy it, and they can do their show." (Male, 38)

Although there was a constant awareness of media, then, some racers were able to ignore their intrusions and focus on the race. Some even saw the media as a positive addition:

There are fun elements in the media coverage. Being on television and being part of that. We were filmed so much that we would be disappointed if we weren't in the film. (Female, 31)

They've invited these cheap actors to come on board, thrash the shit out of their bodies for ten days and make this movie or docu-drama on it. But the commercialization doesn't bother me a bit. Having done other races that aren't commercial, it's scary sometimes how badly organized they are. (Male, 40)

If there wasn't Discovery Channel, we couldn't have done it – it would be too expensive. There is no way we could afford to enter the Raid, for example. (Male, 52)

Participants' judgments and perceptions of the media's role in AR seem to be closely linked to their own judgments and perceptions of authenticity. It appears that there is constant negotiation between commercial and authentic elements precisely because the notion of 'authenticity' is so entrenched in AR discourse. One comment demonstrates the significance of the AR discourse to the struggle:

AR allows you to stretch your capabilities, go beyond what you thought you were able to do. It is the only sport I know of that gives you a new outlook on who you are. *I speak as someone who has yet to take part in an AR* (emphasis added). (ARA-L)

The direction of AR. The struggle over the definition of AR is inextricably linked to the struggle over the direction of the sport. Most of the race community is concerned—even opinionated—about the direction of the sport's future growth:

The heart of the sport will maybe become the weekend type events, which are both accessible, but still hard. The top of the sport should always be the expedition races. (ARA-L)

More organization is needed and the USARA is the best way to go right now. (ARA-L)

Those who oppose this sort of discussion take the position that even having opinions on the sport's direction is already too restricting to AR:

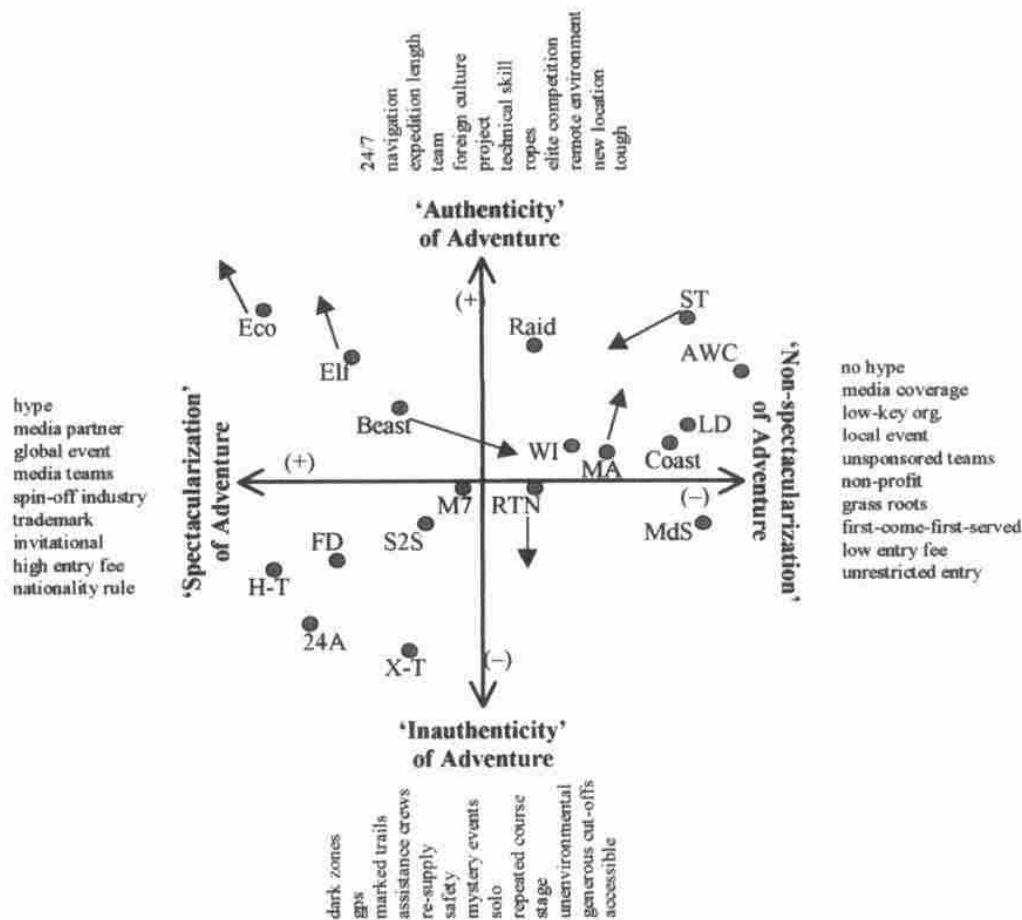
Why can't we just let AR evolve without people deciding the direction it should take? (ARA-L)

Directing anything kills the free spirit. Good events will thrive and poorly run events will die off. It's evolution. (ARA-L)

Participants and organizers are in constant struggle, therefore, not only over what AR *is* and where it is heading, but also over whether or not the debates are even worthwhile.

Mapping the field of AR. In order to depict the relations of opposition among the various forms of races presented as AR and the defining forces that delineate the field, we have drafted a graphic representation of the field structure (see Figure 2). Here we position the major races along two axes: authenticity of adventure, and spectacularization of adventure. According to Bourdieu, fields are viewed as structures in which each particular element (institution, organization, group, or individual) derives its distinctive properties from its relationship to all other elements (Swartz, 1997, p. 123).

The figure presents the various positions assumed by players⁵ in the field of AR according to the two major forces, which, as objects of struggle, also represent the field's defining capitals. It is important to note that this diagram is not the result of a quantitative analysis; we positioned the races according to their objective characteristics as well as according to participants' judgments relating to them. The two axes should also be considered as continua between the opposite poles.



Legend

24A = 24 Hours of Adrenaline
 AWC = Alaska Wilderness Classic
 Beast = Beast of the East (Alaska)
 Coast = Coast to Coast
 Eco = Eco-Challenge Expedition Race
 Elf = Elf Authentic Adventure
 FD = FogDog 24 hours
 H-T = Hi-Tec Adventure Series
 LD = Longest Day

M7 = Mild Seven Outdoor Quest
 MA = Expedition Mata Atlantica
 MdS = Marathon des Sables
 Raid = Raid Gauloises
 RTN = Raid the North (Canada)
 S2S = Sea 2 Summit
 ST = Southern Traverse
 WI = West Isles Challenge
 X-T = X-Terra Offroad

Figure 2 — The field of AR.

The characteristics listed at the upper end of the vertical axis refer to those that were deemed most significant in creating an authentic race experience. The most significant criteria included non-stop travel (the term “24/7” implies continuous racing through the night for as long as the race takes, not necessarily 7 days); the required use of navigation skills with only a compass and rudimentary map for guidance; a course that takes 5 days or longer to complete; a rule that requires team endeavor; a race taking place in a foreign culture; an humanitarian, environmental, or cultural sensitivity project; a course requiring high-level technical skill; several creative and/or difficult rope sections; elite-level competition; a

remote geographic location; a new location each year; and a race considered to be among the "toughest" races on the calendar.

Among the characteristics deemed to make an AR "inauthentic" adventure experience and are listed at the lower end of the vertical axis are the presence of "dark zones" that, for safety reasons, disallow competitors from moving forward on specific sections of a course except in daylight conditions; the allowed use of a GPS, or global positioning unit, for navigation; the planned use of marked trails or automotive roads on a race course; the use of assistance crews at designated transitions; re-supply points on the course where competitors can change equipment and clothing and refill water and food stores from a prepared supply box; the too obvious and overprotective use of safety equipment on course (requiring guides to lead competitors through dangerous sections, for example); the inclusion of contrived problem-solving "mystery events" (requiring competitors to solve riddles, for example); a "solo" race; a course repeated from year to year; a "stage" race that is divided into daily sections with overnight rest, allowing competitors to "start fresh" each day; races that are not environment-friendly; cut-offs that allow even the slowest of competitors to finish officially; and races accessible to all levels including beginners.

A race is deemed to be spectacularized, as the left side of the figure shows, when it is surrounded by promotional "hype"; when the race has a large corporate media partner creating its own product; when teams are required to meet eligibility rules based on common nationality; when teams are chosen for their telegenic strengths rather than AR ability; when organizers use the race for "spin-off" profit, such as combining corporate retreats and tourism packages; when organizers trademark names and/or concepts associated with a race; when teams are invited instead of going through a common application process; and when there is a high entry fee.

Finally, the right side of the figure lists the criteria for a non-spectacularized event: there is little or no promotional hype surrounding the event; there is media coverage of the event "as it happens" but is non-intrusive and a non-priority; the organization appears low-key and uninterested in its promotion; the event is primarily run for local participants; teams are unsponsored; organizers appear to be concerned more with producing a great event than with taking home a profit; the event maintains "grass-roots" values privileging the adventure over the competition; entry is based on a first-come-first-served application process; the entry fee is low; and team entry is unrestricted.

The (+) and (−) symbols refer to the accumulation of capital. Accumulation of capital along the authenticity axis is uncomplicated: the more authentic a race appears to be, the more prestigious it is for participants. Accumulation of capital along the spectacularization axis, however, is dependent upon negotiation of the characteristics. A spectacularized race is considered prestigious and thus "rich" in symbolic capital. But race organizers must negotiate the level of spectacularization because over-spectacularization of an event, as our account of the current dynamic in the field of AR will show, can actually lead to a loss of prestige, and thus a demotion (see arrows, Figure 2) in the field.

The arrows in the diagram, leading away from specific players' positions, refer to the current trajectories of agents in the field. These will be explained in the following discussion.

Current Dynamic in the Field of AR

The structure of a field is never static; "it is a *state* of the distribution of the specific symbolic capitals which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73) and likely to be transformed according to the outcome of struggles among agents/institutions. A field structure is itself always at stake and governs the strategies of the agents/institutions (differently situated in the field) aimed at transforming it. The last section of our analysis of the AR field focuses on various strategies deployed by the race organizers in order to improve their position in the AR field, and ultimately to modify the current state of the field. Here we briefly present some examples of subversion, succession, and conservation strategies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 109).

Eco-Challenge, our first case example, was perceived to be too commercial in 1999, and its trajectory changed. *Eco* became too much of a spectacle by creating too much hype: Burnett opted for a multi-million dollar docu-drama instead of having regular event coverage; he branded and trademarked all aspects of the event—a move considered by most AR participants to be "commercial overkill"; he invited athletically unqualified but media-friendly teams; and it was thought that he took too much profit. In the same year, *Elf Authentic Adventure* was attracting an elite group of competitors and promised far less hype. The *Beast* announced it would become the AR World Championships and had also confirmed elite participation for the following year. Both these races took advantage of *Eco*'s reversed trajectory, using strategies of subversion and succession to distinguish them from *Eco*'s overcommercialized reputation. Burnett then needed a conservation strategy to recover the capital that he lost. To do so, he would have to reacquire an authentic image.

The first thing Burnett did was set the 2000 race date to conflict with the *Beast*, declaring the *Eco* as the new World Championship instead. He reacted to the criticism of overhype with more authentic rule changes; The race became "first come first served" rather than invitational, he removed dark zones and re-supply points, and he paid elite competitors registered in the *Beast* to come to his race instead. He also partnered with *USA Network*—a network that frequently provides sport coverage—rather than *Discovery*, the family channel that specializes in entertaining documentaries. *Eco* regained its dominant status (see Figure 2), shifting the positions of other races in the field.

The *Beast*'s succession strategy had failed, and as it was still subordinate to *Eco*, it lost most of its competitors to Burnett. Without the elite teams necessary to attract media, the capital it had accrued disappeared (see Figure 2). The *Beast* has now returned to its more grass-roots origins ("the racer's race") and no longer competes with the *Raid*, *Eco*, and *Elf* for the dominant position in the field. The *Southern Traverse*, which had always distinguished itself as "Eco without the hype" announced a new partnership with *Discovery Channel* for 2000, thus trading some authenticity capital for that of spectacularity (see Figure 2). *Expedition Mata Atlantica* prides itself on copying the *Elf* format, which is high in authenticity capital but institutes socially responsible sponsorship rules, hoping to take it one step above (see Figure 2). The *Raid* promotes itself as "the legend," unchanged from its original concept. Its strategy to conserve a constant position (see Figure 2) is ironically a strategy to gain authenticity and thus accumulate symbolic capital in the field. The above examples highlight the strategies deployed by race organizers

to negotiate the fragile balance between spectacularity and authenticity in an attempt to accumulate prestige and improve their positions in the AR field.

The smaller races that are in more direct competition with each other also shift positions for similar reasons. For example, *Raid the North* markets itself as the most accessible of the authentic races. Serious organizational problems resulted in a damaged reputation and a loss of credibility. However, in Canada, there are few 36-hour races and *RTN* was able to maintain a relatively powerful position in the field due to its strategic location.

Racers also feel that they can influence race organizers' strategies. A series of comments appeared on the ARA-L on the subject of the battle between *Eco* and the *Beast* similar to this one:

Race directors drop the glove. Let stand that in life's retrospect, a man and a woman will be ultimately judged not on their intentions but by their actions. Pick a race, die by the sword, and if you can't take the politics, sit one out. Boycott. Regardless, act with integrity. (ARA-L)

One racer described the AR field as she saw it. This rather exhaustive description is especially significant as, while not drawing on Bourdieu's social theory in her analysis, she demonstrates a "feel for the game" and actively participates in the field struggle:

While I am new as a racer, I have watched this sport grow for many years. There seems to be a rush of new adventure races sprouting up all over the country, which on the surface would indicate that the sport is growing by leaps and bounds. . . . It's like the early gold rush, every one is trying to get into the act and stake their claim. You have the old guard/racers out there that were not necessarily elite athletes but simply first in with little true U.S. competition who by their early successes in one race or another have their place in the growing but brief AR U.S. history. You have the growing web presence with new companies sprouting up trying to be the sports mouthpiece. You have the usurious races like *Cal Eco* that steals its name from a much bigger and better race. You have the USARA that is ahead of its time and is still trying to come up with true benefits to its members. You have races like the ill fated *Desert Quest* or *Great Nor Easter* that somehow sealed their own fates. You have the self-proclaimed world championships by a company that had its last *Beast* finish in 3 days, has never put on a major race over 5 days, has only one race in one small region of the country and by its proclamations has offended every major race out there that has done it bigger, better and longer. You have the *Hi-Tec* series that, while spreading the word of AR across the country with its sponsor-driven 4+ hour format, has less to do with true adventure racing than mystery events but has probably done more to grow the sport in the U.S. outside of *Eco Challenge* than anyone. The power of sponsorship! So what is the state of adventure racing and where is it headed. It is going through all the growing pains that us diverse humans bring to the table. Yes the sport is definitely growing and with the good invariably comes the controversial. The sport will no doubt continue to grow faster than just about any sport has. We as racers will continue to have the ultimate choice of where and when we race and whether to buy into the hype or not. (ARA-L)

Concluding Thoughts

The field of AR, like any other field of social practice, defines itself through its particular forms of capital. It hovers at the intersection of fringe and mainstream sport, impacting and impacted by the fields of risk recreation, corporate/human resources, adventure tourism and entertainment media among others. It is a site of struggle over its very definition and direction—a struggle that underscores its social dynamic and power structure. The “players” are the driving force of the field’s development, forming the corps of specialists who try to develop, transmit and control their own particular status culture, forming organizational and professional interests that constantly restructure and redefine the field. One cannot seek to understand a field by simply studying its production and consumption trends. One must understand its stakes and its struggles, its history and its players, its internal and external articulations. In so doing, one can begin to understand the dynamic that propels its evolution.

Our analysis has shown that new forms of sport practice are the result of power relations between agents vying for the domination of their definition of sport. It has highlighted the fact that the symbolic value of any sport is determined by the particular structure of the field at any given time. We have also begun to demonstrate the significance of participants’ involvement in field struggle through the practice of, preferences for and rejection of various forms of sport. This analysis is a part of a larger project that aims at a more comprehensive understanding of the social signification of AR. While we have expressly used Bourdieu’s theory of practice as a tool and not for the purpose of testing its validity, our study has demonstrated the usefulness of the framework to similar projects that explore the relatively untapped areas of lifestyle activities and new sport culture. A next step would be to question the existence of a specific habitus, characterizing participants in AR.

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Notes

¹Extreme sports are said to have emerged out of the cultural revolution that took place in the 50s and 60s in the United States after the Second World War when the economy grew dependent on mass production and mass consumption. Although the "anti-mainstream" image of extreme sports is still apparent, its interdependent relationship with media and corporate agents has de-emphasized—or even reversed—the oppositional ideology that marked its earlier motivation.

²In order to stress that a field does not have parts or components, Bourdieu sometimes uses the term "subfield." A subfield shares many properties with a larger field but "has its own logic, rules and regularities" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104).

³Adventure Racing Association listserve.

⁴Wescams are giro helicopter-mounted cameras used in the filming of Eco-Challenge for the Discovery Channel miniseries produced simultaneously about the event.

⁵The events selected for the analysis were chosen according to their level of "official recognition" in the AR community as adventure races. The above races have all appeared frequently on AR schedules and have been the subjects of discussions on the ARA LISTSERVE.