

YOUNG, WILD, AND FEMALE: GENDERED EXPERIENCES AT AN OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CAMP

Jessica Dooley

Abstract

The outdoors and activities associated with them have historically been the domain of men, and studies have shown women to face unique challenges both to entering and continuing their participation in the outdoors. This is unfortunate given the fact that such a novel environment provides numerous benefits for both people in general and women specifically. This study examines the experiences of women as outdoor leaders in a conceptually and physically male dominated environment. Using a method of covert participation at a large outdoor adventure camp, this research demonstrates the special challenges that female staff members face, how they tackle these challenges, and the ways in which they navigate this gendered setting. These challenges include the experience of being a woman in a highly masculine environment, sexist remarks, and campers' expectations of gender roles to be carried out. Both gender conforming and nonconforming techniques were displayed by individual female staff members to navigate these obstacles. This work adds a unique perspective to the current body of research in the field of gender and the outdoors, and it increases our understanding of what exactly individuals must deal with as women in this particular environment and how their challenges can be confronted and overcome.

INTRODUCTION

Outdoor activities such as hiking, skiing, kayaking, and rock climbing provide many benefits to those who take part in them. Not only are they great forms of exercise capable of improving physical and psychological health (Kaplan 1995; Ulrich et al. 1991), but participating in outdoor activities offers participants numerous personal and social educational opportunities as well. Organizations like Outward Bound, the National Outdoor Leadership School, and the Boy Scouts of America have a long history of teaching young people practical outdoor skills, challenging them, and helping them discover their potential all by expanding the learning environment to a more open, natural setting. Adventure programs that groups like these provide can improve certain behaviors, teamwork skills, and both peer and adult interaction abilities (Garst, Sheider, and Baker 2001).

Unfortunately, these benefits are often only directed toward a select portion of the population, namely (white) men. In this way, the outdoor environment is gendered terrain that is welcoming towards some but not others. Along with simply being conceptualized as a male-dominated space (Martin 2004), women often face real constraints because of their gender identity. Additionally, for those women who wish to make a career through various outdoor outlets, they must navigate this gendered environment carefully to be taken seriously and prove that they can be just as successful as men in the same field. When they are able to venture out into the wilderness, they experience numerous benefits, some of which are fundamentally different than those of men. While their participation has been increasing, the underrepresentation of females in the outdoor industry means that they are being deprived of the large number of benefits that the outdoors can provide, and this represents a form of inequality.

This study seeks to examine how gender shapes the experiences of female staff members at a male-dominated outdoor adventure camp through a method of covert participation. More specifically, this research explores how gender impacts the daily lives of female staff members, what obstacles they face that males do not, and how they are able to be taken seriously in their work. This is a particularly personal research project as I have been employed at this camp for the past three summers, and it is difficult for other female staff and me to ignore our membership in the gender minority. Therefore, this camp is the perfect environment to understand the daily lives of women in both a conceptually and physically gendered outdoor space. This research will provide more understanding and insight into the gender gap that exists in the outdoors and women's direct experiences in this environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Outdoors as a Masculine Space

Historically, the outdoors has been the domain of men and consequent male hegemonic thinking, often excluding women because of their inherent inferiority (Humberstone 2000). In fact, the classic outdoorsman is often pictured as tough and rugged—a real man's man. Martin (2004) refers to this as the "outdoor leisure identity," and despite the fact that it is an outdated stereotype, it continues to portray the ideal outdoor enthusiast as a larger than life, white male worthy of the respect and adoration of those beneath him. Not only that, but this identity specifies who goes outdoors and who belongs there. Thus, the outdoors themselves, not just the idea of them, become subject to social construction as a white, masculine space, and anyone who does not fit the description is unwelcome (Humberstone 2000). If one looks at popular outdoor magazines for instance, he or she will find women present in less than half of the advertisements, and if there are women depicted, they are likely to be minimally engaged in the wilderness setting, as

novices in need of help from men or from being alone, targeted toward a whole family and vacation experience, or requiring highly feminized equipment if they are more engaged with the environment (McNiel, Harris, and Fondren 2012). Popular media sources such as these do serve to a specific clientele, but these depictions speak to the concerns of ability and participation of companies and female readers alike.

The Boy Scouts of America is an organization that has come to be associated with the outdoors and technical prowess in this arena. It has been argued that the program grew to be structured to counter feminizing forces in American society around the turn of the 20th century, including the suffrage movement and women's increasing entrance into the work force. In addition, its rhetoric sought to quell men's anxieties of, somewhat ironically, becoming dominated by traits like passivity and dependence—traits commonly associated with femininity (Hantover 1978). Thus, the men and boys separated themselves to create the ideal man in an overall environment void of feminine influence. Certainly the Boy Scouts of America are not responsible for the conception of the outdoors as a masculine space, but the organization has both physically and conceptually connected the outdoors with masculinity. This association is far from obsolete according to research on the subject of gender and the outdoors (Culp 1998; Henderson et al. 1996). In these studies, respondents praise the outdoor learning and participation opportunities available for Boy Scouts, sometimes comparing them to those existing for Girl Scouts. In these cases, it seems the Girl Scouts tend to fall short.

Constraints to Outdoor Participation

In this context, a constraint can be considered anything that inhibits or restricts a female's ability to participate in the outdoor environment. Numerous authors have studied this phenomenon both in relation to outdoor activities and leisure in general (e.g. Culp 1998;

Henderson and Gibson 2013; Henderson, Winn, and Roberts 1996). A number of common constraints have emerged from this research, most notably including gender role expectations, a lack of knowledge or confidence in the outdoor environment, a lack of opportunity, and environmental and safety concerns.

Given the notion that the outdoors has historically been a masculine space, it should come as no surprise that it is often not considered a space for women and girls. Females are expected to be clean, gentle, and docile which are all attributes considered to be at odds with the typical activities associated with the outdoors. In addition, their expected and lived caretaking roles as wives and mothers may not necessarily be compatible with an outdoor identity, and they may feel guilty for pursuing outdoor recreation at the perceived expense of their family (Culp 1998; Little 2002). Thus, female outdoor adventurers and educators often face challenges associated with their gender. They often face a double-edged sword as conforming to gender norms can be just as harmful as gender nonconformity (e.g. Allin and Humberstone 2006; Wittmer 2001; Wright and Gray 2013). Whereas female leadership styles are associated with warmth, understanding, and displays of emotion, male leaders are typically autonomous, organized, and assertive. When women in outdoor professions display more masculine leadership traits, they are viewed and evaluated negatively by their participants. At the same time however, if they predominantly use a female leadership style, they may be seen as weak and will not be viewed as competent in the “hard skills,” referring to the physical activities at hand like rock-climbing or canoeing (Frauman and Washam 2013; Wittmer 2001).

Because activities that take place in the outdoors are perceived as masculine, those women who work and play in this environment are perceived equally so, often being penalized for not conforming to gender. Additionally, these same women are often unfairly stereotyped as

being masculine women, or “butch,” because of their nonconformity, but equally harmful is their perception as “superwomen,” able to do it all and then some (McClintock 1996; Warren 1996; Wright and Gray 2013). This image holds them to higher expectations that are unrealistic, introduce unnecessary stress into their lives, and ultimately set them up for failure. These expectations not only set them apart from their male counterparts, but also from other women who see them as some larger than life, unattainable standard. It seems more common than not for women to internalize this character as they often attempt to outperform their male colleagues (Warren and Loeffler 2006; Warren 1996). Ultimately, these women feel representative of their gender, setting out to prove that they too can thrive in the outdoors just as well, if not better, than men. This is not just a perception that only they possess because any indication of weakness or failure is interpreted as a sign that women are not cut out for the outdoors and its many challenges. Coupled with higher expectations women in this field are at an extreme disadvantage. Many often end up fatigued and burnt out in their work (Wright and Gray 2013).

Another major barrier that hinders females’ participation in the outdoors is their lack of confidence in technical outdoor knowledge and ability (e.g. Frauman and Washam 2013; Little 2002; Warren and Loeffler 2006). This generally includes skills such tying knots, repairing malfunctioning equipment, and maneuvering through difficult terrain. What is and is not proper for girls and boys to do or say reflects notions of femininity and masculinity in society, and children are taught this at a young age. For instance, the ways in which girls are raised and socialized, particularly in comparison to boys, has a great deal to do with both their competency and sense of competence in the outdoor environment. They do not receive the practical and mechanical conditioning and instruction offered to boys and young men, expressions of confidence in their skills are stifled, and they are taught that technical prowess is not something a

girl should possess (Whittington 2006; Warren and Loeffler 2006). However, being active in the natural environment requires a certain degree of understanding of specific technical skills as well as a certain level of physical ability. Thus, young girls and women simply believe they would be uncomfortable and out of place in a wilderness setting, not only internalizing notions that they should not possess or practice this technical knowledge but also because many do not have this knowledge in the first place.

One avenue that can be taken to learn these outdoor skills is through more formal organizations. Perhaps not surprisingly, many females express a lack of similar opportunities to get involved in the outdoors as a major constraint to their participation (Culp 1998; Henderson 1994; Henderson et al. 1996). While there are programs that cater distinctly to girls in addition to co-ed organizations, the number, quality, and recognition of these programs are not as established as those originally tailored towards boys (Culp 1998; Henderson et al. 1996). This constraint is very much related to the fact that, again, girls are not socialized in the same way that boys are. Programs and organizations that foster outdoor and technical knowledge are not as accessible to young girls. However, when girls are exposed to the outdoors at a young age and are given further opportunities as they grow up to engage in this setting, they are more likely to appreciate the outdoors more and build upon their interests and skills. If not through the family or school, more formal organizations and summer camps can provide this exposure, but if these opportunities do not exist, leisure in the outdoors is less likely to occur (Henderson 1994; Henderson et al. 1996).

Perhaps culminating in this differential socialization is the constraint that female feel due to their fears of the natural environment and being alone in this setting. In part because girls are not as familiar with the outdoor environment and the skills necessary to successfully participate

in various wilderness activities, they express fear and self-doubt in this type of setting (e.g. Johnson, Bowker, and Cordell 2001; Little 2002; Warren and Loeffler 2006). In addition, it has been suggested that females are more aware of their vulnerability and taught from a young age to always be alert for sexual predators, thus they tend to express greater fear in going to remote wilderness locations on their own (Johnson et al. 2001). In fact, difficulty finding other female partners to engage with in the wilderness and a heightened awareness of male-dominance in outdoor recreation are subsequent barriers that women face (Culp 1998; Henderson et al. 1996). This level of fear is not often cited by males, and even women established in the outdoor industry express greater fear of the physical risk associated with these activities (Boniface 2006). Women may actually be more fearful than men in dangerous situations, or they may more readily admit their fears.

Benefits to Outdoor Participation

Despite the numerous constraints that women encounter, the outdoors is no longer the strict domain of men as more women than ever before are participating in various forms of outdoor education, recreation, and adventure (e.g. Boniface 2006; Henderson 2002; Henderson and Hickerson 2007). For those females who do decide to involve themselves in the outdoor environment in some form or another, the benefits they receive are nothing short of significant. There is no reason why women wouldn't experience the same benefits from the outdoors as everyone else. In fact, because of their gender and the constraints it imposes in many aspects of life, the benefits of going outdoors are greater in number and sometimes fundamentally different for girls and women than they are for males.

Outdoor settings and activities provide many benefits for the human body, self, and psyche. Even simply placing oneself in a natural environment and experiencing its sights and

sounds can relieve stress, rejuvenate the mind, and promote good psychological health overall (Kaplan 1995; Ulrich et al 1991). These benefits are extraordinary given the relatively low costs of accessing some form of green space whether it be a city park or a heavily wooded environment. So long as the environment is sufficiently its own unique space and one is willing to engage in the surroundings, the outdoors provides the rare ability to “get away” from the stresses of everyday life (Kaplan 1995). To add to these advantages, the outdoors are an ideal place for exercising, the benefits of which, such as lowering the risks of weight related health problems and promoting mental health, are widely understood. They provide numerous forms of exercise across several intensity levels that can appeal to all people too such as walking, hiking, skiing, climbing, and much more. The novel surroundings of an outdoor environment also make it a great place for education and learning as opposed to the typical indoor classroom setting (Garst et al. 2001). Finally, one cannot ignore the positive individual and interpersonal effects that certain outdoor recreation can provide. Groups like Outward Bound, the National Outdoor Leadership School, and the Boy Scouts of America to name a few have made it their missions to mold future leaders and create valuable members of a team through the collective participation in outdoor adventure and education programs. Given its novel characteristics, the natural environment can be a trying place especially in the presence of other individuals and can thus provide opportunities to improve behavioral and interpersonal skills such as peer interaction, teamwork, and interaction with authority (Garst et al. 2001).

For women in particular, the advantages of participating in the outdoors have been studied by many (e.g. Allen-Craig and Hartley 2012; Overholt and Ewert 2015; Pohl, Borrie, and Patterson 2000). These are not necessarily benefits that only females derive from this setting, but they are benefits that are especially crucial for females given their unequal status in society and

the subsequent challenges they face. There are two primary contexts under which these benefits have been examined—all-female outdoor programs and general outdoor participation. In both situations, positive outcomes include increased self-sufficiency, a greater connection with others (especially other females), enhanced technical ability, and clarity of mind (e.g. Allen-Craig and Hartley 2012; Pohl et al. 2000; Whittington 2006). The challenging situations produce self-doubt and anxiety in some, but many girls and women express a desire to increase their opportunities for leadership in the future, and they feel liberated from the constricting gender expectations they otherwise experience in an environment that is profoundly different from that of their day-to-day lives.

While most research under this domain tends to use a methodology that relies on interviews, this study is one of the only ones to use a method of covert participation. In doing so, it directly explores how women experience gender in a highly masculinized outdoor space, some of the barriers that women face in their work as outdoor educators, and how these women negotiate these constraints in order to be successful in their work. This is important, not only because it provides a different perspective on the subject of gender and the outdoors, but also because this perspective gives experienced firsthand and secondhand accounts of what females actually go through in an outdoor environment that is physically and conceptually dominated by males. Because of this fact, this research also offers a glance into both the overt and subtle sexism directed toward women in this setting, particularly in the form of language. This has not been studied by many (Jordan 1996; Loeffler 1996), but it has real and important consequences.

RESEARCH SETTING

In order to better understand the nature of this environment, it is helpful to provide some contextual information. The ranch at which I worked is located on over 130,000 acres in the

southern Rocky Mountain region of the United States and allows thousands of Boy Scouts and Venturers the opportunity for personal growth via seven- and twelve-day group excursions, or “treks,” through the wilderness. These groups are known as “crews,” and they consist of youth participants and a few adult advisors. Given the physical size of the ranch, there are 35 backcountry camps that provide various programs for the crews during the length of their treks. From homesteading to riding ATVs, the Scouts have a great time and are enthusiastically welcomed by staff at these camps. This is where my job comes in, for it is at one of these camps that I worked and primarily did my research.

The particular camp that I worked at offered a C.O.P.E. program (Challenging Outdoor Personal Experience) for the Scouts in which staff members facilitated the growth of whole crews by providing mental and physical challenges. By growth, I am referring to the fact that crew members learned and improved in areas such as teamwork, communication, leadership, decision-making, and the like. Aside from this main program, the rest of the staff and I formally welcomed and oriented crews to the camp, provided an interactive evening program for those crews staying the night, and provided overall hospitable service. The staff consisted of one camp director, one assistant camp director, and five program counselors. While most camps have staffs that are primarily male-dominant (a few do not even allow female staff members), our situation was unique in that only two of our staff members were males—the camp director and a program counselor. Overall, the gender makeup of the ranch staff is about 75% male and 25% female. Thus, on the one hand, the atypical gender makeup at our camp was great for my study because it allowed for a number of opportunities to understand the female-specific experience in both a figurative and literal male outdoor space. On the other hand however, this circumstance might

have been so unique that it was far from representative of a typical female's experience here. I will expand upon these ideas later.

It should be noted that since the gender makeup of our camp was very noticeable because it was drastically different than that of most others, a number of advisors would ask if there was a reason why there were so many females. This was a typical question and the response from the staff was to explain that we all had the right personalities and skills to work together, it just so happened that most of us were female. In this way, it was almost a deliberate attempt to subvert common notions of gender by emphasizing the importance of individual characteristics and not gender.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

In order to collect my data, I used a method of covert participation. I kept a small notebook which held notes of what people said or did that related to the research. These included individual actions, participant-staff interactions, and staff-staff interactions. When I realized that a comment, action, display, or situation was related to gender, I kept a mental note. At the end of the day, or after several days passed, I wrote down those notes that stood out in my mind the most. The capability of memory should not be underestimated, as the personal nature of the study created highly salient data, proving difficult to forget. I did this from mid-May to mid-August—the length of my job contract. After collecting all of the data, I went through and manually coded it to find overarching themes and particular instances that fit into these themes.

I took the role of a covert participant for several reasons. First and foremost, my being employed at the ranch made it so that I had no other option but to be personally involved in the research itself. Not only was I able to observe the role that gender played in the lives of my fellow coworkers, but I also experienced the effects of my own gender during my time at camp.

The personal nature of this project therefore provides a greater depth that cannot be achieved with simple observation. I could better understand how gender creates difference in the experiences of staff members because I both saw the effects on my coworkers and experienced them firsthand. I made the decision not to reveal my role as a researcher primarily in order to study my subjects as their genuine selves, without any intervention. If I had told them I was studying them, they might have been more careful with their words and actions or otherwise acted as they normally would not under similar circumstances. Additionally, it would have been unfeasible to get consent from each and every adult that came through camp. Oftentimes, an advisor would say or do something related to the research that was small and fleeting, but significant. Instances like these provided great opportunities for study, but it was not necessary to reveal my role or get consent due to the sheer number of instances and my not collecting any identifiers of these individuals.

Collecting the data proved to be more difficult than I had originally thought. I had planned to carry around my notebook throughout the day, jot down notes as events played out, and transcribe and elaborate on them further at the end of the same day. However, this was challenging for a number of reasons. First and foremost, my job ultimately came before my role as a researcher—it had to. The particular camp I worked at was busy, and there was little time in the day to write notes, let alone transcribe them, without being obvious or affecting my job performance. Work along with fatigue, exceptional circumstances, and the like thus prevented me from conducting my research as I had hoped. Secondly, the lack of technology was limiting. Living at a backcountry camp for nine days at a time means living with no electricity, no internet, and no cell phone reception. The situation on days off was not much better. Pen and paper was essentially the only viable option, making my research collection limited and

somewhat inefficient. Finally, I had originally wanted to understand the dynamics of gender in the instruction of male and female staff during the C.O.P.E. program itself, but again the business of camp prevented this. Additionally, the course was an exceptionally long walk from the main cabin. Therefore, the only understanding I could grasp of this dynamic was from what my coworkers told me and anything I might have heard or seen while they were on the course at the same time that I was. Despite these limitations, the data collected is abundant, fascinating, and greatly informs the research on gender and the outdoors.

MAIN FINDINGS

This is a Man's World

Several patterns for men emerged through the research. A number of men shared a traditional view of gender where men are respectful, chivalrous, and strong. As one advisor I spoke with said, “[This ranch] is a piece of Americana,” and the Boy Scouts hold and practice values that others no longer share. These values include hard work, responsibility, and faith. This sentiment was shared by many men, both staff and participants. Their belief was that scouting, and this place in particular, provides experiences and challenges to turn boys into men. This ranch is truly special, and many do express a change for the better after coming out on trek. So many tell stories of how they came out on trek, and had such a difficult and miserable time, but over time, they came to understand and learn from these challenges and decided to come back. Others loved their time spent as a youth and kept coming back again and again. Still others came out as youth and were finally able to return when their sons were of age. In this case, fathers were cherishing a special bond that they shared with their sons. While these are heartwarming stories, they sometimes ignore the harsh realities below the surface. Understandably so, the Boy Scouts are dominated by male voices and experiences, leaving women's perceptions almost

completely absent from the narrative. While conditions have certainly changed for women's (and men's) benefit, several aspects of the ranch are driven by a "boy's club" mentality. In such an environment, women are constantly reminded of their gender and status as minorities. They encounter challenges not faced by males that are often obvious, but a lot of the time too, they are disguised in subtler forms.

Jokes and comments by staff, advisors, and young Scouts alike seemed to be the most common type of barrier experienced by women on the ranch. Some were playful, some were genuine, and some were unintentional. One of the sources of these remarks indeed came from the high proportion of females at our camp. Throughout the summer, the female staff members were jokingly referred to as the daughters of our camp director. Often he would pretend to actually act as a father, saying (in an Italian mobster accent, à la *The Godfather*), "no boys allowed at camp" and setting limits on what was proper for us to do and not do. In addition to this, our situation came to be commonly referred to as a harem, the camp director acting as the husband while all the female staff members were his wives or concubines. Make no mistake, we were all in on these jokes and laughed a great deal because they were impossible to actually believe and take seriously. However, they did make reference to the unique gender makeup of our camp as well as a possible perceived power dynamic. This perception might not have necessarily been the true case, but to those outsiders looking in, it might as well have been.

Other jokes were more offensive and not taken as lightly however. One day, most of the females at our camp (and only the females) were sweeping and cleaning the kitchen areas of the cabin when our camp director came in and said, "It's good seeing you women where you belong!" This was not the last time something to this effect was said either. Needless to say, none of us were too pleased with his joke. Another common joke made reference to our

menstrual periods, and the ever-feared “full moon” which refers to the possibility of all of the female staff members’ periods syncing. This would be disastrous according to them which plays off of the stereotype that all women become extremely irritable and moody on their periods. They supposedly become “bitches,” and any display of emotion or masculinity (sternness, aggressiveness, etc.) is unfairly associated with a woman’s menstruation.

It became apparent that some cultural scripts were so ingrained in men’s minds that the presence of so many women changed nothing. Obviously if one lives his whole life believing that it is okay to disrespect or objectify women, little is going to change on a twelve-day trek, especially when other camps on the ranch encouraged this “boy’s club” mentality. Sometimes gender was used as an insult. When the crew was slow to move and do what was needed to be done, an advisor exclaimed (in an aggravated tone), “Let’s go ladies!” Similarly, as I was doing program with one group, the boys were goofing around and struggling to solve the task at hand. An advisor who came along to watch thought it was taking too long, and he yelled at them saying, “Hurry up! You’re acting like a bunch of girls!” He looked at me, embarrassed and realizing his mistake. Not really being phased but knowing that he considered it insulting to me, I said, “It’s fine.” But to correct himself, he said “I mean, you’re acting like a bunch of four year-olds!” It almost would have been better if he had not tried to correct himself because instead of simply associating women with a stereotype that they talk a lot and take a long time to do anything, he then seemed to insult women’s intelligence by basically equating these same actions with young children. That might not have been his intention, but that is how it came across nonetheless.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there were many who made reference to the female staffers’ appearances. Most, if not all, comments made to us were kind and playful rather than offensively

vulgar. Of course, I have to wonder what was said behind our backs given the typical thoughts and behaviors of teenage boys and some of the offensive things they said in front of us. There were signs of what might have been said in private however. For instance, after coming back from a program, one female staff member, complained that the crew she took out was goofing off and blatantly hitting on her the whole time. While their advisors made them apologize later on, it seemed the damage had already been done. Another crew that this same staffer took out towards the end of the summer clearly found her attractive and tried to impress her by talking themselves up. A number of advisors made comments like “I’m sure the boys don’t mind having all these girls in camp,” apparently referring to our looks more than anything. Many of these comments were harmless and intended as compliments, using words like “pretty” and “beautiful.” Nonetheless, the implication was that looks were still very relevant, even in the remote wilderness.

With such a high concentration of testosterone, there is definitely a boy’s club mentality on the ranch, and this is both reflected and perpetuated by the all-male staff camps. There are a few interpretive camps at which women are specifically not allowed to work because it would be historically inaccurate otherwise. The staff members are depicted as fur trappers and loggers, and they provide programs such as rifle shooting, spar pole climbing, tomahawk throwing, and “loggerball.” Along with these activities are certain traditions like sexualizing inanimate objects by giving each spar-pole a female name and yelling something “manly” after climbing one of these spar poles or before shooting the rifle. Often these phrases sexualize and make a mockery of women. Before meals, the staff at each camp usually says grace, but those at the all-male camps might put their own spin on the typical prayer. For instance, at the “mountain man” (i.e. fur trapper) camp nearest our camp, the staff members banged on the tables while essentially

shouting the grace and speeding it up. At the nearby logging camp, the guys centered their grace on women and their sexualization. When I visited with a female backcountry manager, they got a few words of the prayer out before she said, “Hey, what did I say about that grace? You can’t say it when other female staff are around.” This is an interesting sentiment as it expresses that *she* is apparently not offended by the grace, but other females should and will be. It also assumes that all males are okay with this attitude towards women, which might not necessarily be the case. Habit and tradition might be more to blame, but nonetheless, it does not portray women in the most positive light.

While there were instances of sexism from men, still others response to women in the outdoors was not only accepting but often welcoming. In fact, many were genuinely interested in increasing girls’ participation in the outdoors. A number of fathers expressed a desire for their daughters to get involved in scouting and the outdoors. In one instance, a male advisor took a picture of a few of us and followed by saying, “I want to prove to my daughter that there are women out here.” Other fathers expressed this same sentiment, claiming that their daughters were skeptical of an outdoor program such as the one we provided, but if they knew there were other women with whom they could relate, they might be more inclined to give it a try. In fact, a lack of female role models is a concern of many girls when it comes to getting involved in outdoor recreation (Culp 1998; McNeil 2012). While many dads wanted their daughters to have the same experiences as their sons, they had a difficult time figuring out how to go about it. This was mainly due to the fact that girls do not have the same program opportunities as boys. Both staff and advisors tended to agree that the Girls Scouts struggled to retain participants and did not offer nearly the same experiences found in the Boy Scouts. As young girls, my female colleagues and I were often disappointed not to be learning the same practical skills that boys were, which

confounds previous research (Culp 1998; Henderson et al. 1996). In addition, some of these troops disbanded, leaving it difficult to continue on as a Girl Scout. The Venturing program offers females the chance to get involved in scouting, but this too was found limiting due to the age requirements. One has to be fourteen years old to join, and the program essentially stops at age twenty-one. By this time, a girl has likely not had the training and experience to want to participate or feel confident enough to participate (e.g. Frauman and Washam 2013; Little 2002; Warren and Loeffler 2006). It then becomes difficult to find enough people to join a Venturing troop. Those advisors with whom we spoke were actually in favor of simply letting girls join the Boy Scouts to offer those interested the same opportunities.

Finally, self-doubt and confidence issues were faced by the female staff members. These concerns were mainly brought up in regards to participants messing around and not listening during a talk or during program. We wondered if they were misbehaving because they were simply teenage boys or if it was because of the fact that we were women, and they thought we could be more easily disrespected. While the male staff at our camp had to deal with unruly Scouts, they never attributed it to their gender. Therefore, this was a barrier that only females had to deal with. Even if our gender was not the reason for their misbehavior, it was still perceived as one which does not make it any less real.

Navigating the Masculine Environment

In such a testosterone-driven environment, how do women navigate this environment? Additionally, because our camp had a female majority, how might our dynamic have differed from that of other camps? It seems that surviving in a male-dominated environment often means simply putting up with disrespectful language and actions here and there. Some comments were clearly not intended to be disrespectful, but nonetheless, they came off as insulting. Instead of

disciplining men on the spot, women often ignored off-putting comments. Ignoring however, should not be mistaken for forgetting, as female staff members would sometimes recite multiple personal instances of sexism. Having these conversations seemed to be more of a way for female staff to bond with one another rather than purposefully shame men, although shaming is perhaps somewhat of a natural reaction given the content of some of the men's words and actions.

Another way women succeeded in this macho environment was by both conforming to and defying gender stereotypes, either deliberately or unconsciously. Femininity is often linked to emotional displays, interpersonal finesse, physical beauty, and so on. These are obviously not qualities typically associated with the machismo of the outdoor environment, but that didn't seem to affect the women at our camp. Three female staff members at our camp (including myself) wore makeup practically every day. It is definitely a bit taboo to do this, and I got questioned a few times and felt judging glances from others for wearing it. People tend to assume that cosmetics are worn to impress other people, so if there is virtually no one to impress in a backcountry setting, there is no point to bother with the hassle of putting it on and taking it off every day. However, women kept up their appearances in other ways as well. For instance, one female often tied bandanas in her hair so that they looked like bows. She often encouraged us to try new things with our hair as well. Two other females and I would often roll the legs of our work pants up to look more like capris. Rolling the sleeves of the polo work shirt was very common among women (and sometimes men) across the ranch. While all of these habits may signal the overbearing importance that society places on women's appearances and its reach into the outdoors, they might just as well be forms of resistance to the macho environment otherwise surrounding female staff members. In this way, these women are highlighting the fact that working in the outdoors does not make them masculine or "butch." In such a testosterone-filled

environment, it seems that each female tries in some way to distance and differentiate herself from the men. Or, they might be simple ways to differentiate oneself from everyone else wearing the same uniform, mainly given the fact that male staff members did some of the same things, though smaller in proportion.

Gender nonconformity acted as a strategy to both be regarded favorably amongst participants and resist the stereotypical characteristics associated with females. Displays of physical strength were one such way this was achieved. One of the females often challenged the Scouts to do more dead-hang pullups than her on the pullup bar we had at camp (her record was twenty-three pullups). She would also typically show off her “guns” (muscular arms) and talk about her motorcycle, so much so that we began to tease her for her talk and displays. We would refer to her as a “YAM,” or young aggressive male. She was certainly not the most feminine woman at camp, but she was also one who wore makeup almost daily, and the participants loved hanging out with her. Thus, displays of gender were not necessarily predictable, and female staff could not be confined to a single label. Another female staff member was into road-biking and had particularly muscular calves and would challenge campers if they believed they had stronger calves than she. More subtly, carrying the trash and other heavy objects by ourselves was done out of necessity, but in some instances, it was deliberately meant to show the men that we were strong and were perfectly capable of doing things on our own. Vulgarity was also not off-limits to female staff. We cussed like sailors which is not a trait typically associated with being “lady-like.” Talk and demonstrations of bodily functions was fairly common too. From belching, to bowel movements, to periods—all of it was fair game. The males at camp seemed to be okay with this, but they got squeamish when discussing menstruation. As I said before, they could

obviously joke about it, but they got uncomfortable when we discussed the reality of it. Nevertheless, we women did not much care.

Finally, embracing female gender stereotypes and poking fun at them was another way female staff resisted being confined to certain gendered expectations. For instance, when there was a brief span of time in which both males from our camp were gone, we celebrated by doing stereotypically feminine activities and letting all the campers know that only females were running the camp. We made pinwheels and cucumber finger sandwiches (typically associated with tea parties) and made facemasks that night. Throughout the entire summer, we were in on the sexist jokes, laughed at them, and embraced them to. In doing these, we were able to subvert typical notions of gender and gain control of our overall minority positions as females.

DISCUSSION

There is no question that gender played a significant role in how women at this camp experienced various situations and surroundings. This is not surprising given that the overall gender makeup on the ranch is about 75% male and 25% female. The highly masculine environment coupled with the overwhelming male majority placed their gender identity at the forefront of females' consciousness, making them very aware of their minority status. More importantly, there existed numerous occasions in which they were treated differently or they perceived themselves as being treated differently because of the fact that they were women. The perception of being discriminated against makes it especially clear that gender was constantly on the mind of these female staffers, which does not appear to be something their male counterparts had to deal with.

No two women were exactly alike in how they navigated this gendered environment. Whether or not an individual conformed to gender norms seemed to be an effect of personality

and previous experience in dealing with similar matters rather than the situation or context at hand. This seems to suggest that there is no specific “type” of woman who is involved in outdoor recreation, contrary to existing stereotypes. There were no purely feminine women at camp, true, but this type represents an extreme “ideal” on the sex-gender spectrum; “real” men and women according to the popular perception do not exist in the real world. Feminine women and masculine men are out there, but can hardly be considered to fall to one end of this spectrum or the other. Researchers in this arena have pointed to this dualism, noting that when the culturally constructed characteristics of gender are applied to binary sex categories based in biology, there is the tendency to simply equate the two so that, in common thinking, gender and sex are more or less the same concept (Humberstone 2000; Pinch et al. 2008). In addition, some have suggested that a more androgynous identity might be more able to succeed in an outdoor environment because they have a larger collection of behaviors to choose from in determining how to act and respond to situations (Overholt and Ewert 2015). Along these lines, this study generally finds that masculine traits displayed by women are more respected by men, as opposed to feminine traits. In addition, feminine characteristics displayed by male staff members were frowned upon much more than when those same traits were displayed by female staff members. More research is needed to determine the relative significance of sex and gender norms and their interaction in gaining respect in an outdoor recreation environment.

Finally, I have stated that the situation at the camp I worked at was unique in terms of gender makeup, and this created some dynamics not found anywhere else on the ranch. Most significant of these dynamics was the female comradery. With there being so many other women around to work with and confide in, the female staff members were more able to speak up and have the confidence to fight for their positions. It is as if they fed off of each other and knew they

could count on one another to back them up if need be. At other camps, there may only be one other female on staff, and that bond is not as strong to really speak out around a majority male staff. It could be argued that our age and experience was more at work in this sense than our gender, but I do not think this is entirely the case. The number of years each of us served on the ranch did have some effect on our confidence, no doubt, but this variable should not be overstated. What is likely is the existence of an interaction effect of both experience and gender. While knowing the work environment is helpful, even still, female staff run into special challenges despite how many years they have worked. Having more experience simply gives one a better set of tools and a better ability to handle these challenges.

Our camp dynamic was also unique in that we were able to capitalize on the gender makeup. Having a majority female staff seemed to put the scouts off guard, and we were able to use this to our advantage. Because there were so many of us, we were able to avoid some of the problems other female staff might run into at other areas of the ranch like even more overt sexism. It sent an unspoken message to campers that we were a tight-knit group and were not to be treated with disrespect. In other words, our female comradery was not only apparent to us, but it was clear to outsiders looking in as well.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, gender is highly salient when discussing outdoor recreation. Even when more women are there to “balance out” the number of males, there still exists a boy’s club mentality that is difficult to ignore, and women still face challenges in their experiences because of their gender. This is not just an outdoor issue; gender inequality exists in almost all areas of life for women—the workplace, the home, leisure in general, and more. In fact, this study invites both an outdoor and workplace perspective to the discussion of gender inequality. It is not right that

women and girls should be deprived of the wonderful experiences and benefits that the outdoors and working in the outdoors provide simply because they are female. In a similar vein, their capabilities should not be devalued on this very same basis.

The findings from this research will contribute valuable information to the existing body of knowledge on the subject of gender and overall diversity in the outdoors. While there are limitations of this study relating to generalizability, the data and methods are appropriate for exploratory nature of this study. Furthermore, this study strays from the interview and survey methodologies that are more often used by instead using a method of covert participation. Future research should look into the sexism and discrimination that women directly face from men in the outdoor setting in their language and actions. The issues that this study addresses can be used so that changes can be made to more easily facilitate the inclusion of women and girls in the outdoor community. Their unique experiences and perspectives must be taken into account in order for this to happen.

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