

THE GENDERING OF OUTDOOR RECREATION:  
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES ON THEIR  
PATH TO LEADERSHIP

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

While growth has occurred in the numbers of women entering outdoor recreation vocations, white men are still the dominant face in outdoor recreation and wilderness adventure pursuits. One explanation is the effect of gender socialization. Socializing forces such as media, family, youth organizations, and school potentially contribute to the gender discrepancy in outdoor recreation.

Researchers have found that participation in outdoor recreation provides physical, emotional, mental and spiritual benefits (Hanlon et al., 2013). With fewer women involved in outdoor recreation, everyone is not accessing these benefits equally. The current study examines how female outdoor leaders experience gender as an outdoor leader and during their path to leadership.

This study employs in-depth narrative inquiry, an approach useful for rich investigation of personal experience (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative research is, in essence, an exploration of the ways people experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Further, scholars have suggested that it can be useful for sociological investigation, because of what it uncovers about social life: individual stories reveal insights about culture (Riessman, 1993).

The current study investigates the experiences of four female outdoor leaders. By using a four phase modified categorical content analysis eight metathemes emerged. Three of the identified metathemes present as motivation for the study participants:



mentorship, personal qualities and the development of idealism. Three of the identified metathemes present as constraints for the study participants: role expectations, nature of the industry, and media. Two of the identified metathemes serve as both motivations and constraints: family support and self-perception. Additionally, it is clear from the data that in terms of the phenomenon of “women becoming outdoor leaders,” gender socialization is often seen to play a more negative (constraint) than positive (motivational) role.

In response to the constraints faced by participants, a variety of negotiation strategies were developed and employed. These encompassed both long-range strategies, as well as strategies producing more immediate personal results. Acquiescence and avoidance were situational strategies that produced immediate results. Conversely, the negotiation strategies of support, contesting, and education resulted in varying degrees of both immediate and long-range impacts.

An unanticipated, but striking, indication that emerged in the current study was an episodically-evolved desire among all participants for social justice in outdoor recreation. The women in the current study all developed a desire to be agents of social change and demonstrated actions toward these ends.

This study holds implications for multiple groups and audiences. Implications of this study include contribution to the body of literature on gendered experiences in outdoor recreation leadership, as well as an expansion of awareness about the gendered experiences female outdoor leaders continue to face. This study also has the potential to enable future female outdoor recreation leaders to recognize barriers to participation,

develop effective strategies to diffuse or counter those barriers and, as an extended counter-strategy, optimize recognized motivations for participation.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

White men are the dominant face in outdoor recreation and wilderness adventure pursuits. This gender dominance has triggered researchers to investigate why white middle class men continue to be the majority (Johnson, Bowker & Cordell, 2001). Research has found that women's involvement has grown, yet unequal participation of women in outdoor recreation still persists (McNeil, Harris & Fondren, 2012; Siikamäki, 2009). Not only do men participate more often in outdoor recreation, but also men spend more time doing the activity when participating (Siikamäki, 2009). While growth has been noted in the number of women entering outdoor recreation vocations, these positions are still dominated by men (Wright & Gray, 2013). This participation gap persists, even as researchers find many positive benefits for both men and women that can result from participation in outdoor recreation (Korpela, Borodulin, Neuvonen, Paronen & Tyväinen, 2014; McNeil et al., 2012; Whittington, 2006). Participation in outdoor recreation can lead to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual benefits (Korpela et al., 2014; McNeil, et al., 2012). With white men making up the majority in outdoor recreation, these benefits are not being accessed equally by everyone.

One explanation for the difference in participation levels between men and women is the effect of gender socialization (McNeil et al., 2012). Gender socialization originates from a diverse range of sources. Institutions such as family and school, as well as cultural artifacts like television and books, are all socializing forces (Denny, 2011). Gender socialization's role in outdoor recreation has been found to affect not only

who participates, but also what type of outdoor recreation activity is engaged in by participants (Warren & Loeffler, 2006).

Even though outdoor recreation is a male dominated field, there are women who participate and become leaders in the outdoor recreation field. Little (2002a) argued that scholars and outdoor professionals can better serve female participants by examining the involvement of these women and trying to understand the processes and beliefs that contribute to their experiences.

This paper begins with a literature review that investigates the history and benefits of outdoor recreation and the inequity in outdoor recreation participation between men and women. The review then explores the role of gender socialization in maintaining the difference in participation levels between men and women. The literature review goes on to examine leisure socialization and the role it plays in the activities in which people engage and explores constraints to participation in outdoor recreation. This paper then examines the methods and results of the current study, which contributes to the current understanding of the gender disproportion found in outdoor recreation participation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to better understand how women experience gender while becoming outdoor leaders.

### **Goals of the Study**

It was hoped that multiple significant and distinctive goals would be attained in the process of completing this study. These ends would hold implications for theoretical or practical discourse surrounding gender and the field of outdoor recreation. A few of these goals were as follows:

1. Explorations and documentation of the lived experiences of women who have worked as leaders in the field of outdoor recreation.
2. Cultivation of an understanding of gender socialization's role in becoming a female leader in outdoor recreation.
3. Discovery of the personal qualities and motivations that contributed to the path to leadership in outdoor recreation.
4. Identification of barriers or obstacles experienced by female leaders in outdoor recreation.

### **Primary Research and Secondary Research Questions**

The intent of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how women experience gender while becoming outdoor leaders. With this in mind, one primary and three secondary research questions emerged that supported the purpose of this study.

They are as follows:

#### **Primary research question.**

How do female leaders experience gender as an outdoor leader and during their path to leadership?

#### **Secondary research questions.**

1. What role has gender socialization played in the experience of becoming a female leader in outdoor recreation?
2. What motivations do women have for participating in outdoor recreation and becoming leaders in outdoor recreation?
3. What perceived constraints do women experience while participating in outdoor recreation and in becoming leaders in outdoor recreation?

## **Significance of the Study**

It was anticipated that this study may hold significance for multiple groups and audiences. The following are a few of the potential impacts that were hoped to come about through the study.

1. Contribution to the existing body of literature that describes or provides insight into gendered experiences in outdoor recreation leadership.
2. Supplementation of discourses which challenge gender discrepancy in outdoor recreation.
3. Education of potential women outdoor recreation leaders to recognize barriers to participation, with the end goal of increasing participation by constructing resistance strategies against those barriers.
4. Potential for increased diversity within the outdoor recreation industry.
5. Improvement in self-image and self-efficacy among potential women participants.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Gender socialization:* Gender socialization is the socialization process in which people learn the societal expectations associated with their sex. It is an influential force with the potential to direct the behavior of people in gender-typical ways (Andersen & Taylor, 2007).

*Outdoor recreation:* Outdoor recreation may be described simply as engagement in different types of activities performed in the outdoors. Many people participate in such outdoor activities. According to Cordell and colleagues (Cordell et al., 1990) outdoor activities range from driving through a park to high adrenaline activities like windsurfing and locations for activities range from urban backyards to a high mountain peaks.

*Outdoor adventure recreation:* Outdoor adventure recreation is a specific form of outdoor recreation which involves a substantial amount of engagement of the natural environment. Little (2002a) employed the following definition for *adventure recreation*: a specific form of leisure that often includes both physically and intellectually challenging components and is accessed, principally, in natural environments.

*Constraints:* I adopt Jackson and Scott's (1999) definition of constraints in leisure as “factors that limit people’s participation in leisure activities, people’s use of leisure services, or people’s enjoyment of current activities” (p. 301). The concept can, however, readily be applied beyond merely leisure activities.

*Hegemonic masculinity:* Hegemonic masculinity places masculinity at an elevated position from which everything else is evaluated or to which everything else is compared (Connell, 1995). Masculine traits are seen as the most valuable and desired in hegemonic masculine societies (Connell, 1995; Kian 2007).

*Gender experience by women:* How societal and personal expectations held about the characteristics, abilities, and likely behaviors associated with a women’s biological sex have been encountered and experienced.

*Becoming an outdoor leader:* This term is used to encapsulate the personal life history that has led a person to the vocation of outdoor leadership. It represents an exploration of how personal experiences have shaped the leader's life choices up to the present moment (as an outdoor leader)--including examination of a range of things such as upbringing, exposure, activity participation, extra-familial social interactions and related forms of training, among others. It charts the path a person has followed to outdoor leadership.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations for this study include the following:

1. In order to fully explore their experiences, the sample was limited to four participants.
2. Due to delimiting time constraints of a thesis, it is not possible to engage a large number of participants, particularly since this is a narrative study designed to explore stories through multi-stage in-depth interviews per respondent. Nevertheless, I was able to collaborate with up to four participants. This has afforded some richness of data through providing some range, pattern reaffirmation or both.
3. Participation was limited to people who work in the field of outdoor recreation in an adventure capacity.
4. Only participants that could commit to the full time required to complete all three phases of the interview process were included.

## **Limitations**

Limitations that had implications for this study include the following:

1. Locating participants who were available to commit to the lengthy interview process and who would be available for follow up interactions as necessary.
2. Personal time constraints on data collection.
3. Because the interviews were designed to be face-to-face with participants, challenges were experienced in travelling to the participants' locations.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study employed a qualitative research approach involving narrative inquiry. Due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, the subsequent literature review explored subjects and research that I anticipated becoming relevant to my study.

The following section reviews existing literature relevant to gender discrepancy in outdoor recreation and to the experience of gender for women as they become outdoor leaders. It will begin by investigating the history of outdoor recreation and the benefits associated with participation in outdoor recreation. It will then explore the imbalance in outdoor recreation participation between men and women. The review then identifies the role of gender socialization in maintaining the difference in participation levels between men and women. It goes on to examine leisure socialization and the role it plays in the activities in which people engage and explores constraints to participation in outdoor recreation. Finally the literature review will look at past studies focusing on female outdoor leaders and discuss the use of narrative inquiry in leisure research.

#### **History of Outdoor Recreation**

The wilderness and recreation that takes place within it have always been part of the United States heritage (Cordell, Bergstrom, Hartmann, & English, 1990). Cordell et al. (1990) pointed out that the “out-of-doors” is a central part of American history, as well as an integral part of contemporary life. While the outdoors has always been central in American culture, it was not until the late 1800’s that the outdoors was seen as a recreational resource. They argued that preserving outdoor recreation areas has become

increasingly important. In 1964 the Wilderness Act defined wilderness as “an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions” (Dodd, 2013, p. 665).

People participate in many different activities in the outdoors. They range from driving through a park to high adrenaline activities like windsurfing, in locations ranging from an urban backyard to a high mountain peak (Cordell et al., 1990). For the purpose of this study, outdoor recreation has a narrower definition than merely activities that occur in the outdoors. Instead, outdoor recreation is concerned with activities taking place in a wilderness setting (Martin, 2004). Little (2002a) explained adventure recreation as a specific form of leisure that often includes both physically and intellectually challenging components and is accessed, principally, in natural environments. Activities defined as outdoor recreation commonly include, hiking, camping, rock climbing, river rafting, mountaineering, backcountry skiing, and many others.

### **Benefits of Outdoor Recreation**

The benefits of outdoor recreation occur on various levels. Not only are individual benefits reaped by participants, but also social, economic, and environmental benefits stem from outdoor recreation, according to Cordell et al. (1990). The authors argued that outdoor recreation creates jobs, can facilitate family cohesion, and enriches American culture. They went on to point out that participation in outdoor activity has the power to stimulate public interest in the environment and helps inspire public support for environmental protection.

On an individual level, scholars in outdoor recreation have found that

involvement in outdoor activity has been linked to many positive aspects of health, including mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits (Arnold, 1994; Henderson, 1996b; Korpela et al., 2014; McNeil et al., 2012; Whittington, 2006). Godbey (2009) observed that people have reported decreases in stress simply from spending time in natural spaces. He argued that spending even small amounts of time in the outdoors could decrease the symptoms of attention deficit hyperactive disorder. Furthermore, Godbey (2009) argued that outdoor recreation is most beneficial when it becomes a regular part of a person's life.

While positive mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits are available to all outdoor recreation participants, some researchers have found benefits of outdoor recreation that are specific to women (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1994; Lloyd & Little, 2005; Whittington, 2006;). Whittington (2006) argued that outdoor recreation programs focusing on girls' development could confer benefits such as challenging traditional notions of femininity, promoting positive gender identity development, and helping girls resist social stereotypes. She pointed out that because outdoor recreation requires skills that are both conventionally understood as masculine and those conventionally understood as feminine, participation in outdoor recreation allows girls to explore many attributes of masculinity and femininity. Whittington went on to argue that participating in outdoor recreation programs with other females "can encourage positive relationships between females and challenge girls to take themselves and other women more seriously" (p.218).

Lloyd and Little (2005) studied the effects of participation in a female outdoor recreation program on quality of life. They found that the women who participated in the

program experienced increased quality of life in four different ways. The women reported a sense of balance, access to new opportunities, a sense of belonging, and improved self-perception. They also found that participation in the organized outdoor recreation program inspired some women to continue participating in outdoor recreation.

### **Gender Discrepancy in Outdoor Recreation**

Even as researchers find many positive benefits that can result from participation in outdoor recreation, gender discrepancy in outdoor recreation persists (McNeil et al., 2012). Outdoor recreation continues to be dominated by white, college-educated, middle class men (Johnson et al., 2001). While female participation numbers have begun to increase, their number continues to lag behind male participation (Little, 2002a). In a study that measured outdoor recreation time use from 1965 – 2007, Siikamäki (2009) argued that gender differences in outdoor recreation time use have been prominent and persistent. He remarked that not only do men participate more often in outdoor recreation, but also men spend more time doing the activity when participating. He found that the participation gap has somewhat closed over the past twenty years, yet the participation rate of men is nearly one and a half times that of women. The most recent measure (2007) found the average time spent per person in outdoor recreation activities was 2.6 hours per week for men compared to 1.4 hours per week for women (Siikamäki, 2009).

Humberstone (2000) stated that “outdoor education and adventure recreation, like sport, are frequently manifestations of leisure cultural form” (p.24). Framing participation in outdoor recreation within the greater history of leisure participation can help explain the continued gap seen today. Humberstone (2000) pointed to the work of Deem (1986)

and Green, Hebron and Woodward (1990) as important in analyzing the different leisure experiences of men versus women by placing them within a Marxian Feminist perspective. From this perspective, gaining access to leisure is linked to the gender power structure in society. Humberstone (2000) argued, “Capitalist patriarchal structures, and the ‘ideologies of femininity,’ worked to exclude women from public places and maintain their servicing position within the home” (p.24). This need for women’s leisure to be subordinate to the female life of mother and wife has constrained women’s leisure.

While the role of mother and caretaker has impacted female leisure pursuits, the traditional definition of what is feminine has compounded the participation gap (Little, 2002a). The outdoors is traditionally seen as an arena for masculinity (Humberstone, 2000; Little, 2002a). While femininity has traditionally been defined as passive, nurturing and dependent, masculinity has been seen as independent, skilled, in control and decisive (Little, 2002a). Masculine traits traditionally have been defined as more conducive to outdoor adventure pursuits and to sports in general. It has been argued that sport helps uphold hegemonic masculinity in society and also has assisted in its creation (Huybers-Withers & Livingston 2010; Kian, 2007).

Other researchers posited that not only are feminine defined traits not seen as conducive to participation in outdoor recreation and sports, but also gender socialization affects women’s perception of the outdoors as unsafe for them (McNeil et al., 2012). Research has found that some women have a sense of fear attached to recreational activities that take place in the outdoors or the “wild” (McNeil et al., 2012; Wesely & Gaarder, 2004). This fear can manifest as fear of violence, fear of crime, and fear of general safety. These fears create perceived constraints to female participation,

constraints that are linked to bigger social power relations. As an end result, these gendered constraints cause the lives of women to be more restricted in comparison to the lives of men (Day 2001; McNeil et al., 2012).

### **Gender Socialization**

Gender socialization is defined as the socialization process in which people learn the societal expectations associated with their sex. It is an influential force with the potential to direct the behavior of people in gender-typical ways (Andersen & Taylor, 2007). Denny (2011) noted that children are exposed to gender socialization from a diverse range of sources, including institutions such as family and school, as well as cultural artifacts like television and books.

Gender scholars have argued that one explanation for the difference in outdoor recreation participation levels between men and women is the effect of gender socialization (McNeil et al., 2012). Gender socialization's role in outdoor recreation not only affects who participates, but also affects what type of outdoor recreation activity is engaged in by participants (Warren & Loeffler, 2006). Scott and Derry (2005) argued that the dominant messages of traditional gender socialization include valuing female bodies for their form and not their ability. They went on to point out that children continue to be taught that there is an "essential contradiction" between physicality and femininity.

**Media.** One instrument of gender socialization, which may contribute to the difference in outdoor recreation participation levels between men and women, is media. It is considered a social institution with the power to maintain hegemonic ideals (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000; Hardin, Lynn & Walsdorf, 2005). Media has the capacity to create and

reinforce or change attitudes and values held by both individuals and society (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000; Kian, 2007). Bandura (1986) argued that society shapes media and media also shapes society. Goffman (1979) is regarded as a prominent name in the study of media and gender relations (Chhabra, Andereck, Yamanoi & Plunkett, 2011). Goffman (1979) argued that gender roles are reflected in advertisements. While these portrayals are often subtle, nonetheless they serve as a gender socialization tool (Goffman, 1979). Because these media portrayals have such wide exposure in the public domain, they are often perceived as reality and thus they support and maintain the roles of men and women (Goffman, 1979; Chhabra et al., 2011).

The persistence of *hegemonic masculinity* exists within the realm of outdoor recreation and adventure sports media. McNeil et al. (2012) investigated wilderness recreation advertising and its potential role in the under-participation of women in wilderness recreation. The purpose of their study was to further insight into why women were underrepresented in the wilderness. The study focused on the portrayal of women in two popular outdoor sports magazines. The authors found, when looking at advertisements that portrayed women, that the women were shown in limited roles and often shown with a male companion or leader. They argued that while having women portrayed at all in the advertisements was positive, the messages portrayed in some of the images were not. The advertisements represented messages of women as outsiders in the environment, or women in need of guidance by a male counterpart. The authors also pointed out that in the few ads in which women were portrayed with high levels of ability or very active in the wilderness, the advertisements made efforts to portray them as extraordinary. These ads would also add feminization to the women pictured by sharing

backstories, or commenting on feminine traits (McNeil et al., 2012).

Print media is not the only source of media gender socialization. Television and film also play a role in gender socialization (Denny, 2011). One growing avenue of media for outdoor and adventure recreation is the film festival. Frohlick (2005) found that film festivals that presented outdoor adventure recreation films portrayed outdoor sportsmanship as a male-dominated arena. She studied women's reactions to the gendered images portrayed at one such mountain film festival. She explored women viewers' perceptions and reactions to the predominantly male-centric films that were screened at the festivals. Frohlick found that women's reactions to the films and their representation of masculinity varied. While most participants found the festival films enjoyable, some were more aware of and bothered by the dominance of hyper-masculinity in the films. Some women felt excluded by the films. Frohlick argued that this illustrated the continued exclusion and "otherness" women feel in adventure narratives in general. One theme she singled out was the idea of a 'playful, white masculinity' being overwhelmingly represented in the films. Frohlick argued that this imbalanced picture forced women and non-white men to the sidelines of adventure recreation media.

Researchers have contemplated what would happen if portrayals of women were changed by the media (Hardin et al., 2005; Williams, 2001). Williams (2001) argued that "emergent" discourse has the potential to incorporate into contemporary practice. Furthermore, Hardin et al. (2005) suggested that the challenging of gender categorization in cultural imagery may be an emergent discourse and that sport imagery may be a site for this challenge (Hardin et al., 2005). However, if change in media portrayals of women



were to occur, the effects of that change would be slow. Gauntlett (2002) argued that consumer ideas change at a slower rate than media content, she went on to argue that this is likely due to consumers being previously influenced by dominant ideals. Hardin et al. (2005) cited Fiske in explaining that audiences may select some texts and reject others. They argued that the changes of media representations of women must be made gradually, if they are to be widely accepted.

**Youth organizations.** Another gender socializing agent, with the power to affect outdoor recreation participation, is the youth organization. Denny (2011) pointed out that youth organizations, specifically gender segregated youth organizations, are a source of gendered messages and gender socialization for children and adolescents. She focused on the gendered messages found in the handbooks of the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts organizations. Denny acknowledged that these two organizations are prominent single sex youth organizations with clearly gendered pasts. She found that the handbooks communicated gender messages in context, content and approach. The Boy Scout handbook consistently sanctioned “traditional heteronormative masculinity” (p.41). While the Girl Scout handbook conveyed messages that were more progressive, it also contained traditional feminine messages. Denny went on to point out that the Girl Scout handbook provided more group-oriented and other-oriented activities than self-oriented ones. Furthermore, it offered more artistic activities than science based ones. She argued that other-oriented activities and artistic activities were examples of messages that communicated traditional femininity.

**Technical skill development.** Warren and Loeffler (2006) examined the role of technical skill development on female participation in outdoor recreation. “Technical

outdoor skill development refers to situations that involve the process of manipulating equipment to accomplish a physical task in the outdoors” (p.107). Often referred to as “hard skills,” technical skills include processes such as setting up a rock climbing anchor, rolling a white water kayak, placing an ice screw, rigging a haul system, and navigating with a map and compass. Warren and Loeffler argued that social factors, such as gender role socialization, influence the development of technical skills. Technical skill development is influenced by gender role socialization, because of the perception that certain outdoor activities are considered more appropriate for men than women.

Gender role socialization can result in gender stereotypes that are both descriptive and prescriptive (Benard & Correll, 2010; Heilman, 2001; Rudman, 1998; Warren & Loeffler, 2006). It is a descriptive and prescriptive stereotype that women have better interpersonal skills than technical skills. Warren and Loeffler pointed out that if women display competence in technical skills instead of interpersonal ones, they are challenging a descriptive stereotype. They argued that because they are competent in an area traditionally reserved for men, they violate gender prescriptions. This is a violation of prescriptive stereotypes and can result in poor evaluations, being disliked, and other social penalties. These stereotypes not only designate differences between men and women, but also dictate how men and women should and should not act. Warren and Loeffler argued that descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes not only limit female technical skill development, but also impact how women in the outdoor field are perceived.

### **Leisure Socialization**

Similar to the research examining the impact of gender socialization, leisure

scholars have examined the role of social forces on leisure behavior. Leisure scholars have long been interested in what determines a person's leisure behavior. Because the path to outdoor leadership usually stems from initial participation, understanding the influences on leisure behavior is important. An early perspective argued by Lewin (1935) is that behavior is a function of person and environment. This social psychological perspective focuses on the interaction between a person and the situation in which they exist and the perspective has been adopted by some leisure scholars examining leisure participation (Kleiber, Walker & Mannell, 2011).

The perspective involving essential roles by both person and environment is referred to as an interactionist perspective. It incorporates some self-determination in leisure choices by considering people as agents able to choose their own leisure experiences (Wearing, 1998).

While the wider societal power structures are not perceived as deterministic in the interactionist framework, leisure is positioned as a learned behavior affected by social forces (Wearing, 1998). Kleiber and Kelly (1980) argued that leisure participation and activity choice are principally learned behaviors. They argued that groups, family, and communities significantly influence people's leisure behavior. Kleiber et al. (2011) pointed out that the roles people take in school, at home, and at work play a part in determination of their leisure choices.

With multiple scholars agreeing that social processes such as modeling, social learning, persuasion and conformity influence leisure behavior, Kleiber et al. (2011) observed that research has begun to focus on the ways in which people resist social forces and are able to have some self-determination in their leisure outcomes. He argued that a

person's ability to resist outside influences might also be a product of social forces. Indeed, some scholars have argued that leisure participation can be an indication of resistance to social forces in its own right (Kleiber et al., 2001; Wearing, 1998). When women or men participate in leisure activities that are incongruent with their social roles, dominant views in society about what women or men can do, or should do, are challenged (Kleiber et al., 2011).

### **Constraints**

Another area of research focusing on the factors that contribute to leisure participation is the investigation of constraints or barriers. Constraints to leisure have been defined as “factors that limit people’s participation in leisure activities, people’s use of leisure services, or people’s enjoyment of current activities” (Jackson & Scott, 1999, p. 301). A large body of work investigates the constraints to leisure participation that people experience (Godbey, Crawford & Shen, 2010; Jackson, 2005; Little, 2002b; Shores, Scott & Floyd, 2007).

One prominent theory that has emerged and adapted over time is the hierarchical leisure constraint model presented in this paragraph (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Godbey et al., 2010). The model suggests that constraints are encountered at three sequential levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural, with intrapersonal constraints being the most powerful. The original model posits that these constraints must be negotiated in sequence for participation in a leisure activity to transpire (Godbey et al., 2010). After further analysis of this model, Godbey et al. (2010) argued that the model can be viewed as circular, with the starting level not restricted to the intrapersonal level, but instead adapted to where the person is within their leisure experiences.

While leisure constraints affect all people, research focusing on the particular constraints faced by women has been insightful (Little, 2002b; Shores et al., 2007). It has revealed that women's constraints differ from those of men in terms of quantity and nature (Shores et al., 2007). Little (2002b) conducted a study examining constraints experienced by women in adventure recreation, as well as their ability to negotiate those constraints. She found that women were able to exercise some control over their lives and their leisure choices, even though they experienced constraints caused by the social structures surrounding gender. Expanding on the hierarchical leisure constraint model introduced by Crawford and Godbey (1987), Little (2002b) divided the constraints experienced by the women in her study into four categories: socio-cultural, the family and other commitments, self, and technical. Socio-cultural represented an overarching, "umbrella" category under which the other constraints are confronted. She expressed this category as influencing participation due to the "social and cultural context of adventure activities and individuals' life situations" (p.163). The family and other commitments category represented the responsibilities women experience and the roles women take on throughout a lifetime. Responsibilities to partners, children, parents, and the role of caretaker influenced their ability to participate in outdoor recreation. Little's self category encompassed personal constraints noted by the women due to the cultural notions they were exposed to about gender and adventure. The traditional adventure narrative of male domination, requiring "masculine" traits such as strength and risk taking, was problematic for some women and they needed to adjust their concept of outdoor recreation to participate. The last category she defined was technical. This constraint category encompassed monetary commitment of purchasing gear, technical skill set

development, and the physical ability needed to carry the gear and perform the skills needed for participation. While the women in the study engaged in various methods of negotiating constraints, Little (2002b) warned against disconnecting constraints and negotiations from a person's holistic experience.

What we need to understand is the holistic expression of participant's [sic] leisure behaviours so that a decompartmentalized picture of leisure behavior can be developed. Only then will strategies of access be able to be clearly defined and opportunities focused on the whole individual be devised. (p.173)

### **Women as Leaders**

While there have been many research contributions focusing on outdoor recreation participation, the perspectives of leaders have received little attention, and even less research has been focused on female leaders. One such study, conducted by Allin and Humberstone (2006), investigated the concept of "careership" in the outdoor education profession. They explored the experiences of two female outdoor educators in the United Kingdom. They found that because outdoor education is a traditionally male field, for both of their participants "career decision-making was always shaped to a greater or lesser extent by gender" (p.150). "Turning points" in the careers of these women were often factors of gender, coupled with burnout. The study revealed that gender socialization continually shaped their career decisions.

Similarly, Wright and Gray (2013) examined the life histories of three experienced women outdoor leaders. Their life histories revealed how they were able to accomplish career longevity in the outdoor recreation field. The authors pointed out that

management of fatigue and burnout were important factors in achieving career longevity. Wright and Gray went on to argue that the burnout and fatigue experienced by women could be misinterpreted, because of gender stereotypes. Instead of fatigue and burnout being understood as normal and manageable aspects of careers in outdoor recreation, they may be interpreted as confirmation that women are unsuitable for these careers.

Compounding the problems of fatigue and burnout is the pressure women may feel to prove themselves in a male dominated field (Teal, 1994; Warren, 1996; Wright & Gray, 2013). Teal (1994) studied female raft guides and argued that women experienced gender based expectations. Women guides are often expected to underperform, when compared to male colleagues. Teal argued that this can result in women feeling pressure to perform, not only on par with male peers, but better than men in order to be respected. Wright and Gray (2013) pointed out that this added pressure to perform might contribute to women experiencing increased burnout and fatigue.

Wittmer (2001) also explored the impact of social expectations on female outdoor leaders. She explained the effect of gender role expectations on the leadership styles of women. She pointed out that an effective outdoor leader needs to utilize a variety of leadership styles, both masculine and feminine. She went on to explain, however, that if women use a leadership style that is traditionally considered masculine, for example being directive or assertive, they may receive negative evaluation from participants. Because societal expectations of women include a feminine leadership style, exercising a style that is gender role incongruent, even when it is necessary to the situation, can be received negatively.

Similar to the life history studies of Allin and Humberstone (2006) and Wright

and Gray (2013), I conducted a narrative study focusing on the experiences of women during their path to leadership in outdoor recreation. While Allin and Humberstone focused on careership and experiences during employment, and Wright and Gray focused on factors contributing to longevity in the profession, I explored in-depth, the stories and meanings of women's experiences leading up to and pursuing careers in outdoor recreation.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Narrative Research**

The purpose of this study was to better understand how women experience gender while becoming outdoor leaders. Narrative research offers a qualitative approach for investigating a person's experience (Polkinghorne, 1995). While there is an unavoidable difference between what a person has experienced and what they are able to communicate to others about that experience, storytelling is a way for people to make meaning out of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995). Moen (2006) suggested that narrative research should focus on the meanings individuals attach to their experiences. The intention of this study is to have participants share their experiences in a narrative form, and also create space for the meanings attached to those experiences to be realized.

While Glover (2003) acknowledged that narrative inquiry has been used inconsistently in qualitative research, he suggested narrative “describes a particular type of discourse, that is to say, a story” (p.147). Glover went on to state that a narrative stands on two essential footings. First, narratives have an internal structure; they follow a progressive order, a sequence of events. The internal structure of a narrative refers to a set of sequential qualities including an abstract, an orientation to person and place, a complication or event that occurred, an evaluation of the event, and a result (Glover, 2003; Labov, 1982). The stages of an internal structure have also been described as a transformation, moving from a preliminary condition to a conclusive one (Polkinghorne, 1995; Glover, 2003). Second, Glover (2003) stated that a narrative has

thematic organization. A narrative includes the evaluation of events by the storytellers, the meaning connected to them.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) pointed out that narrative inquiry is complex because it involves the retelling of stories. Storytellers are engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories simultaneously. Then as the researcher engages with the storyteller, the researcher becomes part of the story. Thus, Connelly and Clandinin observed, narrative inquiry turns collaborative, including mutual storytelling and restorying. Similarly, Bishop (1996) suggested that by hearing others stories, one's own story is impacted. Acknowledging the participatory role a researcher takes on is important. According to Bishop, "[W]e need to acknowledge our participatory connectedness with the other research participants and promote a means of knowing in a way that denies distance and separation and promotes commitment and engagement" (p.23). Josselson and Lieblich (2003) pointed out that in narrative research the researcher becomes the research instrument, immersed in the process. This immersion encourages a relationship between researcher and participant, collaboration during the process, and ongoing reflection (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003).

Narrative research has emerged in many disciplines including, sociology, history, education, anthropology, literary criticism, psychology, and recently in leisure studies (Glover, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that narrative research is useful for investigating a process, because it creates space for stories of lived experiences to be told. Narrative research is, in essence, an exploration of the ways people experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Riessman (1993) suggested narratives could be useful for sociological investigation because of what they

uncover about social life; individual stories reveal insights about culture. Glover (2003) argued, “narrative inquiry offers a great deal of promise and potential to leisure scholarship aimed at exploring the leisure experiences in the lives of individuals” (p. 160). He went on to state that using narrative inquiry could offer insight into the role of social forces on people’s leisure experiences. It is my hope that narrative inquiry will be an insightful way to explore women’s experiences in becoming outdoor recreation leaders.

### **Sample Description**

Reflecting the purpose of this study, the criteria for participation included only women who have worked in outdoor recreation. Because my interest in this study was focused on exploring the path to leadership, no minimum amount of time spent working in the outdoor field was required for participation. To provide, at least a range of experiences and in order to allow time to richly explore experiences of each respondent, the sample size included four participants. Finally, to create a more cohesive study, participation was limited to people who work in the field of outdoor recreation in an adventure capacity.

I used a purposive snowball sampling method to recruit participants. Atkinson and Flint (2004) defined snowball sampling as a research participant assembling technique that finds an initial participant and uses that participant to help locate and contact other participants. The participants then facilitated contact with more participants, ever expanding the network of contacts. Whenever possible, I requested more than one named contact from each interviewee. Utilizing the preexisting social network of female outdoor leaders helped me identify participants who fit the criteria for

participation and who were willing to devote the time needed for participation. Only participants who could commit to the full time required to complete all three phases of the interview process were included.

Access to the sample population, as well as honest sharing of experiences by participants, can present challenges to research (Brown-Saracino, 2014). Insight can be gained from previous research on ethnographers' ability to gain access to research participants. Much of this literature examines the influence an ethnographer's identity or role has on his or her access to a research population. Access is often shaped by the cultural and perceived similarities or differences between the researcher and the population (Brown-Saracino, 2014; Burgess, 1991; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991). This is evident in Blee's (2002) study where limited connection and similarity existed between her and the sample population, thus access was limited. In the current study, I shared gender, as well as profession, with the research population. It can be reasoned that this affinity influenced accessibility and created a comfortable space for the deep exploration of participants' experiences.

### **Preparation for Data Collection**

When preparing for data collection I took into consideration several factors. This study was an in-depth narrative inquiry, involving the establishing of relationships with participants and including broad, in-depth, collaborative conversations of mutual storytelling and restorying. Because of this, when selecting participants I sought a substantial time commitment from them due to the time needed for interviews, as well as the potential need to revisit and/or come back to them for multiple interviews. As participants emerged, I contacted them personally and explained the three-step interview process that was used for this study and asked them to commitment to the full process

(Seidman, 1998). I provided each participant with a journal to use during the research process for reflection, and I attained verbal and written consent from each participant.

### **Data Collection Process**

Data collection included semi-structured, in-depth personal interviews, using broad open-ended questions in an attempt to create a space for participant stories to unfold, while also keeping the direction of the interview focused. I used a three-step interview process, modeled after the series designed by Schuman (1982) (as cited in Seidman, 1998). Seidman (1998) observed that a narrative interview might, at first, be met with some hesitancy from participants to reveal their full stories. He went on to argue that interviewing participants multiple times would enable them to gain confidence and trust in the interviewer.

The first interview attempted to get a holistic account of the participant's story in order to establish a framework for their experiences. The second interview focused on the specific details of the participant's pertinent past experiences, as well as the details of their present experience. The third interview focused on the meaning of their experiences. In the third interview participants reflected on their story. Seidman (1998) pointed out that this step in the series is a chance for participants to examine how past experiences contributed and interacted to create current experience. Following the structure presented by Seidman (1998), each interview lasted about 90 minutes. If the schedules of the participants allowed, each phase of the interview was spaced three to seven days apart in an effort to give the participant time to reflect on the last interview, while not letting too much time pass. The three-step interview model was used as a guide and was adapted as needed.

Interviews were video and voice recorded. The videos were generally used as a secondary voice-recording tool and in one instance became very important when the voice recorder proved unreliable. In this study, I did not do a content analysis of images. The videos, however, certainly hold additional information which could be useful for carrying out future analyses.

Interviews were collaborative, with mutual storytelling. A conscious effort was made not to allow the voice of the interviewer to overshadow the participant's story. During the interview process, collaborative storytelling occurred and shared stories emerged. In some cases I shared a story that I was reminded of in response to a story a participant shared with me. In other instances, participants would ask me if I had experienced something similar to them or if I could relate to their story. This collaboration is reflected in the footnotes included in each participant's *phase one* analysis.

I used a reflexive journal during the research process to take additional notes during and at the end of each interview, based on my observations. I included quick notes about my perceptions, feelings, and interpretations of what was happening during the interview, including the emotional expressions, actions and body language of the subjects (Syrjälä & Estola, 2013). I also noted key ideas that were expressed. I provided each participant with a reflexive journal to use throughout the process. Two participants employed the journal for reflection between interviews, while the other two participants reflected internally. Between interviews the participants noted any thoughts or reflections that emerged from the interview process. The reflections in participant journals were used to guide their second and third interview.

The nature of this study involved multiple interviews and continued collaboration during the entire research process. Commitment to this process from participants was addressed before collaboration began and discussed again upon exit from the initial interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The approach I used for data analysis was a multiphase process. I began by transcribing the interviews in their entirety. The data analysis process was a modified categorical content analysis. The analysis model I used was adapted from a model used in a narrative study by George and O'Neil (2011). The data analysis included four phases.

The first phase was used to gain a holistic account of the individual stories. It include the following elements: gaining a holistic account of the narrative, identifying key elements of the narrative, organizing and sequencing the key elements, and identifying and including settings, characters, problems, actions, and resolutions.

The second phase examined patterns across individual stories and included a categorical content analysis where parts of the story from the phase one narratives were selected and examined for themes or patterns across stories. The themes represented the integration of the participants' words and my interpretation.

The third phase involved a meta-analysis of all the participant stories and presents broader issues that emerged during the study. It included the following elements: the identification of themes, patterns or connections across all of the participants' stories to find metathemes, the identification of meaningful differences across all stories, and analysis of the narratives in terms of my research questions.

The last phase contained theoretical analysis and included an analysis within the larger theoretical literature. It examined the questions of where the current research fits in the body of literature, and whether analyses of the narratives from my study corresponded with existing theories, or whether original themes emerged.

During all the phases of analysis I continually involved and collaborate with participants, inviting them to offer feedback about the presentation of their stories to ensure their experiences were actively portrayed.

### **Data Validation**

Polkinghorne (2007) pointed out that for narrative research, validity is concerned with how well the storied text expresses the actual meaning experienced by the participants. Polkinghorne (2007) went on to identify four sources that contribute to the disconnection of storied text and a person's experienced meaning: the limits of language to convey meaning, experienced meanings that are out of one's awareness, resistance of participants to reveal the full meanings of their experiences, and complexity caused by the co-production of texts between the participant and researcher. In an attempt to gain as much insight into the experienced meanings of the research participants as possible, I attempted to address each of these sources of disconnect throughout the interview process.

Being conscious of the *limits of language to convey meaning* I, as Polkinghorne suggested, encouraged the use of abstract expression by participants. In an attempt to let more of the participants' *experienced meaning that are out of one's awareness* be realized, the three-interview process was used. This encouraged and provide time for deep reflection by participants. The three-step interview process was also used to *help*



*minimize resistance of participants to reveal the full meaning of their experiences.*

Throughout the interview process it was my hope to build a relationship and trust between the participants and myself, aiming to produce more open responses during each subsequent phase of interviewing. Polkinghorne explained *complexity caused by the co-production of texts between the participant and researcher* as participants not solely generating the resulting text of a narrative inquiry. The text is influenced by the interaction between the interviewer and the participant. Polkinghorne (2007) warned that participants might equate body movements as well as voice inflections of the interviewer as signs of the suitability of their responses. To try to mitigate this I was an open listener and maintained awareness of my body language and voice during the interviews.

To further improve the validity of my narrative text, I continually sought clarification from participants during the analysis process of the research, as well as asking participants to read the narrative texts to make sure they accurately represented their experienced meaning (Polkinghorne, 2007). In addition, Lincoln (1995) suggested honesty, fairness, and justice be used as criteria to guide the validity of qualitative work. I reflected on these three criteria throughout the process to make sure I was meeting each to the best of my ability.

Ultimately, the evaluation criteria for this study included authenticity, reflexivity, and reciprocity. Authenticity was attended through providing time and space for a participant's honest understanding of their own experiences to be narrated and by checking back with participants to make sure the text of the narrative matches their meaning. Reflexivity was attended through awareness and the use of a reflexive journal. Finally, reciprocity was attended through the research method of in-depth, face-to-face

interviews in a hope of facilitating a mutualistic dynamic between the participant and myself.

## CHAPTER IV

### NARRATIVES AND ANALYSES

#### Data Collection Story

**Initial candidate selection.** Before beginning my data collection I took some time to think about the female leaders I knew in the outdoor adventure field that would be willing to participate in my interview process. I also considered who I knew that might be able to recommend female outdoor leaders willing to participate. Two people came to mind, Sarah and Nicole. Sarah is the division manager of an outdoor program and Nicole works on inclusion and diversity for the same program. I have worked with this organization; that is how my original connection with both women formed.

Sarah, the division manager, was unable to participate due to her time commitments. She also stated that she didn't think her story was unique. I replied that made her a great candidate, but she still did not participate. However, Sarah provided a list of female contacts who might be available and excited to participate. Nicole was able to participate and became my first interview participant. Nicole connected me with Meredith, who became my second participant. Allison, a contact from Sarah, became my third. The first three participants all work in differing capacities for the same organization. All three sets of interviews with these participants were conducted during the same three week time period.

**Interview process development.** Nicole is someone I have interacted with professionally, although I have never worked with her in the field. Nicole and I have built a friendship over the years. She was happy to participate as my first

interviewee. I stayed at her house for some of the time during my initial three weeks of data collection; I conducted all three interviews with her there.

During our initial interviews I did experience some awkwardness with Nicole. This could have been because she was my first interviewee, or because the interview process was different from our prior friendship, or because of something unrealized. The awkwardness eased throughout the interview process. My comfort with interviewing, as well as our interactions and story sharing, felt natural and relaxed by the end.

After our first interview I prepared for our second interview by listening to the first interview again and making notes about questions to ask, referencing notes I had made during the first interview. I used this same “listen and reference” method in preparation for Nicole’s third interview, as well as subsequent participant interviews following Nicole. I utilized my interview guide throughout all the interviews and found it helpful. However, I did not restrict interviews to things pre-determined by the guide. Often in my interviews with Nicole she would take us on a digression, which in most cases was relevant to the topic, and I would ask follow-up questions in order to explore those digressions and stories. This same pattern of interview guide use, while creating space for digression, carried over to my interviews with subsequent participants.

Nicole connected me with Meredith before our first interview. Throughout our interview process Nicole suggested many more contacts for me, although due to conflicting schedules and the fact that summer is peak season for most outdoor adventure leaders, no other contacts from Nicole became participants in the study.

While I have interacted with Meredith on brief occasions over the past couple of years in a professional capacity, that had been the extent of our relationship prior to the

interviews. Meredith works for the same organization as Nicole and has held many titles throughout her career. She currently works on recruitment and retention. My research topic of female outdoor leaders seemed to be of particular interest to her, because of her position with the program, as well as personal curiosity. This interest was displayed in her excitement to participate in my study and her eagerness to share contacts with me. I conducted all three of our interviews in Meredith's office. Her enthusiasm for my study was noticeable. She was very kind and energetic, and this contributed to an interview atmosphere of comfort and ease for me.

Similar to the interviews with Nicole I utilized my interview guide, but also let our conversation emerge and have flexibility, depending on Meredith's story and things she thought were relevant to her path and perspective. I listened to, and referenced my notes from, each previous interview with Meredith in preparation for subsequent interviews. I found this resulted in a more customized interview guide, and provided a starting point for each subsequent interview.

My interviews with Allison started shortly after my interviews with Nicole. Allison was a contact I received from Sarah. I worked a rock climbing course with Allison about two years ago. Since then she has taken an administrative role at the company and was eager and available to participate. We conducted all three interviews at her house and I felt very comfortable interviewing her.

She has paid a lot of attention to the topic of gender inequality throughout her life. She would often reference an article she had read, instead of readily telling her own story and experiences. During her interviews I noticed that she spoke hypothetically or theoretically, although I intentionally tried to steer her toward discussing actual

experiences. While this created a very interesting and engaging discussion, it took a slightly different course from previous interviews.

**Subsequent candidate selection.** My work with the first three interview participants afforded me with increased comfort with the methodology for all my subsequent data collection. After completion of my initial three sets of interviews I worked a 30-day backpacking course and upon completion resumed locating new participants.

During my 30-day break from data collection I reflected on the first sets of interviews. As I hiked, I would find myself thinking about how the interviews went, or trying to remember some of the stories that had been revealed. This period of reflection and separation from data collection gave me time to get some perspective. While it is hard for me to define the exact perspective I gained, I do know that when I resumed interviews I felt more confident, was able to share my own stories more readily, and I feel that my participants and I more candidly discussed gender and struggle. I am not sure if there is an actual difference in interview content or outcome between the interviews that were pre-trip and post-trip, but I definitely felt different during them.

When I returned from my time hiking I had to acquire leads for future interviews. I revisited with my initial participants and got some new contacts. I began asking people to think of women who worked in other locations and for other organizations, so I could get different perspectives for my study. (Prior to this request, people had naturally been mentioning peers from the same program.)

Meredith had mentioned Chris, a friend of mine, as a potential participant. While Chris does work for the same program, she was available and excited to participate, so I

planned to have her participate as I located other participants and organized my travel direction. Once my travel had been decided, Chris mentioned she was travelling the same direction; so I left town earlier than expected and Chris joined me for part of the road trip. During that time I conducted our initial interview. After my first interview with Chris our paths diverged. Subsequent interviews were done over Skype in the following weeks. I was hesitant about Skype interviews because of the mutual storytelling nature of my study. I was pleasantly surprised with how easy it was to talk via Skype and I don't feel that it compromised the interview process. I do think that building an interview relationship face-to-face during the first interview was important and facilitated the smooth transition to Skype.

The interviews took me west. I contacted Laura, a woman in Washington who had been suggested by Sarah. I knew Laura from a training course we took together a few years before. Because Laura worked for the same program as prior participants I decided not to interview Laura, but instead ask her for contacts in the Washington area. Laura put me in contact with three women, all from different backgrounds and programs. The timing worked for two of them to participate, Diane and Casey.

I started interviews with Diane at her office and Casey at her house. These interviews were my first with participants I had never met. The interviews went well. Previously, I had just been asking participants to tell their whole story of outdoor recreation participation and their path to leadership during their first interview. With past participants this seemed to be enough of a prompt for them to easily fill up the full interview time, with Diane, and then again with Casey, that approach resulted in a slow start. Both Diane and Casey mentioned how awkward it was to share their story and took

a little bit of time to warm up. They required a little more prompting to really share their whole story and tell the details of their experiences. This may have been because we had no prior relationship and had not built a comfort level between us. For both of Diane and Casey the second interview had a much more comfortable vibe. Both of them really started to open up and delve into their past experiences more readily and completely. I also felt much more at ease in sharing my story with them as the interviews progressed.

Time did not allow for the completion of all three interviews with Diane and Casey to take place in Washington. Before our third interview, Casey had to head out into the field for work. I had to start driving south to get back to school before the third interview could happen with Diane. Diane and I were able to conduct our third interview via Skype shortly after I left her town. Unfortunately, Casey had a very busy schedule coming up and we have still failed to connect for our third interview.

During my time in the Northwest I also connected with Lauren. Early in my data collection process, Lauren had been mentioned as a potential participant by Nicole. I had not pursued her as a contact because I was not sure I would be heading her direction after my work on the 30-day backpacking course. I forgot about her as a contact, until she re-emerged through a different channel. Once I knew my path was taking me to the Northwest, I contacted my partner, who I knew had some acquaintances there, to see if she could suggest any participants for me. She suggested Tiffany. Tiffany was unable to participate, but she mentioned Lauren. I remembered Lauren being suggested by Nicole, and she was able to participate. My partner also connected me with Polly in Oregon, who became my final participant of the summer.

Lauren worked for the same outdoor program as my initial participants, but at a



different location in Washington. When I contacted her to see if she would be available she responded she was, but had heard that my interviews were about gender and she warned me that this topic was “very raw for her right now.” This was reflected in her interviews. She had thought a lot about the role of gender in her journey lately and had some strong opinions and feelings about her experiences as well as the greater impact and meaning of gender for our field and society.

Interviews with Polly, my final participant, overlapped with the contacts in Washington. We conducted two at a coffee shop in Oregon near her house and the final one in her home. Polly had been close friends with my partner. There was an immediate comfort level with each other, even though we did not know each other well. She was eager to share stories and was open about her experiences. I had also had lots of experience interviewing at this point and I was quite comfortable with the process. The interviews with Polly often went over the 90 minute structure of my study.

### **Data Analysis**

The approach used for data analysis was a multiphase process. The data analysis process was a modified categorical content analysis. The analysis model was adapted from a model used in a narrative study by George and O’Neil (2011) and included four phases. The first phase gains a holistic account of the individual stories. The second phase examines patterns across individual stories and included a categorical content analysis where parts of the story from the phase one narratives were selected and examined for themes or patterns across stories. The third phase involves a meta-analysis of all the participant stories and presents broader issues that emerged during the study.

The last phase contains theoretical analysis and includes an analysis within the larger theoretical literature.

**Phase I- Holistic accounts.**

***Allison.***

*Growing up.* I grew up in a city as an only child. One of the highlights from my childhood was getting to spend time with my cousins. They lived in Minnesota and every summer I would go visit for two weeks. Mostly, we did whatever we wanted, which was super fun. I remember biking to the gravel pit, swimming in the lake, and just running around in the woods.

Looking back, I do notice a gendered piece to that experience. My mom and dad had grown up in very gendered families. They really tried to make our household different than the gendered environments that they had experienced as children. They imparted in me the feeling that no opportunity was beyond my reach because of my gender.

However, when I spent time with my aunt, uncle, and their four kids, I was exposed to a more gendered household. They loved all their kids equally, but gender division still showed. For example, sometimes on Sundays the girls went to church with my aunt and the boys went to the farm to do work with my uncle. I liked playing outside more than I liked going to church, so having to go to church with the other girls was just frustrating. If there was a division of labor, my male cousins would help outside and do that sort of work, while the female cousins and I would more likely find ourselves doing chores typically assigned to women and girls. That may have been my first experience with gender and how my gender affected how I was seen and dealt with.

While I really enjoyed being in that other family and felt very cared for and very loved, it was a stark difference to my nuclear family. I think I was aware of the gender aspect of that experience as a child. I think it was easily set aside, because it wasn't my immediate family life. I was at somebody else's house: I was eating a little bit different food and I was buying into their customs and culture for the time I was with them. So, it was just something that I did and I didn't complain. I just kind of filed it away.

Visiting my uncle's family I got a taste of my mother's childhood experiences. I'm asked, "Why isn't your mom closer to her siblings?" I think part of the distancing process is a diverging values system. Because of that, I think I was raised with a little bit different value system than my cousins.

I would call my parents, like, liberal and progressive. My parents always told me, "You can be a leader." They told me, "You can and you should speak your mind." They would make sure I knew that I was no different and that I had the same potentials and opportunities as any man.

Those same values were being communicated to me at my school, as well. My parents sent me to a private school: a forward-thinking, non-denominational private school. I would still call my school a traditional hetero-normative environment that lacked diversity, but I do think it was forward-thinking and reinforced some of the values my parents were modeling.

My middle school and high school had an awesome outdoor program. One of the science teachers had formerly been an Mountain Trip School (MTS) instructor. The first trip I got to go on was in seventh grade. We went to an environmental learning center and I loved it! We slept in cabins, we got to go cross-country skiing, and we even did a night

ski and heard wolves. I just remember it as a super cool experience all around. After my experiences hanging out with my cousins in the woods, the environmental learning center was, sort of, the start of me enjoying being outside. I would say it was a seminal event in my history. I really connected strongly to the out-of-doors there.

I found out that the program ran a summer camp and I asked my parents if I could go the next year. They said, “Yes.” I went to a ten-day canoe camp there. It was an all-girls canoe trip with a female instructor. I mean, looking back, that was a pretty cool experience. It was just awesome.

I remember this woman instructor who was a badass. She would carry this huge wooden canoe on her shoulders in portage for what seemed like miles on end. I realized that she was very strong and I admired her for that ability. I don't think I realized that she was actually extra strong, because even strong men have trouble portaging a canoe alone. I just thought, “Like, wow! She’s really strong and it's cool.” While I do not think of her often, when I look back now (knowing what I know), I have profound respect for her. She was taking care of seven young girls, who physically were not developed or in a place to help much, and still was able to really provide me with an amazing experience. I am grateful that my experience was so good.

The camp, as a whole, was super cool. The camp was co-ed, but the programs were single-gender. So, you showed up and there were boys and girls. We would play soccer together, eat together, etc.; but you were only at base camp for a couple days before heading out into the field.

I know some co-instructors now, who got their start at those same camps in Minnesota that were single gender. In talking to them, part of their experience was a

culture of body acceptance. They told me that they did things like swim naked and that the girls just felt normal and comfortable with their bodies. While that was not my experience at my camp, I think it is really cool they had that culture at theirs. I actually think that's something that's lacking in our culture today. When I think about the bodies I tend to see in the media (the bodies I see around me on a daily basis in magazines), they're, like, "perfect" bodies. So, I wish we had more of a culture of that nakedness within our own gender, because I think it's empowering to realize that what we actually see in the media is not normal. I think we look at half-naked bodies of women who are paid to look good; I don't think girls see other bodies. They may just assume everyone looks like the women in the media, except for them.

I participated in the outdoor program again in the tenth grade by signing up for an optional program. Between tenth and eleventh grade I got to go to the Rocky Mountains. We piled, like, nine high school kids into a van and drove all night. It was amazing. We hiked into the Rockies and I remember we saw an osprey, right off the bat. Then, we spent 12 days out in the mountains and I got to climb Rockface (a multi-pitch alpine rock climb) as a 15-year-old! I remember feeling strong and feeling like I was in my element. I just loved every second of it. I have really distinct memories of getting tied into the anchors. It felt like I was just tethered to the side of a cliff. I remember thinking, "Oh, my God!" I remember making this step across what felt like a thousand foot chasm to get a picture. I kept hoping that the instructor wasn't looking back right then, because I didn't know if I was supposed to be doing that. It did turn out to be a really sweet picture, though. I just remember it being a really amazing trip.

It is so cool, because that trip has come full circle.<sup>1</sup> I worked an OTS course when I was 30 and took a group of students up the same climb on Rockface that I got to do at 15. I actually wrote the guy (who took me up Rockface) a letter, telling him that I just did the same thing with students; and I thanked him for putting me on the career path I eventually ended up on. I got a letter back, too, which was pretty cool.

Getting to take two students up the same route I had climbed 15 years earlier was amazing. The students I took were not the best climbers in our group and one of them actually asked me why I picked her to go. I told her it was because she had really great expedition behavior and because she was very reliable. I told her it was because she was a nice person and competent. That was actually a highlight for me as an OTS instructor, because afterward she said that was one of the best days of her life.

After the trip to the Rockies in tenth grade, I was able to go on a senior trip that was also offered through the outdoor program at my school. It was a winter trip in northern Minnesota. I wanted to go so badly at the time that I actually quit the basketball team to do it. I have no regrets about that decision: I loved it. We went out for ten days in northern Minnesota. We were pulling sleds and winter camping the whole time. I remember my friends on it saying, “This is crazy,” but my only emotion was, “This is awesome!”

I was very lucky to have had the opportunity to go on those wilderness trips in middle school and high school. They were pretty impactful and meaningful experiences

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>1</sup> Allison became really excited when telling me about her experience in tenth grade in the Wind River Mountains and I was really excited to hear it. Both of us have climbed Pingora as adults and spent time in the Wind River Mountain Range as professionals. When Allison told me the connection, I said “Really? That is Crazy!” and she replied, “Wait until I tell you the next part!” Our shared experience engendered excitement which, in turn animated telling her story.

for me. On those trips I felt like I could be who I was – authentically, me. I felt like I was a useful and valuable member of a team and I connected strongly with the outdoor environment. I just really came away from each of those experiences feeling like I had enjoyed every single minute of my time. After having such powerful experiences on my wilderness trips, I knew I wanted to be a part of providing those opportunities for other people in the future.

Soccer was a big part of my life through high school and college. I think I am lucky to have invested so much energy and time into one activity, and my best friends outside of OTS are soccer players. I also think my experiences playing soccer have been a contributing part of my development as a leader. I was the captain of the soccer team and that was training in leadership.

When I think about my experiences playing soccer, I think a couple of things are pertinent to how I have experienced gender in my life. I think an important thing to me about playing soccer, beyond sports stuff in general, was that we showered naked. On my college team there was a culture of being naked and that being an okay thing. I appreciated that, because I think it was the first time in my life when I'd seen other women's bodies, and it made me more comfortable with my own. I think I looked at my own body afterwards and thought, like, "Oh, I'm, pretty normal."

In high school I remember my mom trying pretty hard to protect me from body expectations in the media. For example, my mom was really adamant that I not read, like, *Seventeen* or *Glamour*. However, I still loved getting my hands on those magazines on soccer trips. All the other girls on the bus would have them. Now looking back, I am so thankful that she did not let me read that stuff. Instead, she would buy me things like

*Consumer Reports for Kids* and a soccer magazine, *Kick*. She didn't want me to worry about my image. I'm thankful, because I think I avoided some self-consciousness as a teenager. I mean, I went through throes and pangs of self-consciousness that every teenager does, but I think to a lesser extent.

I have noticed the differing portrayals of bodies in media as an adult, too. For example, when the women won the World Cup and Brandi Chastain ripped her shirt off. Brandi Chastain and a couple of other players went on the Dave Letterman show. His comment to them was, "You all are amazing athletes and you're wonderfully heterosexual." That was his comment on national television, which was not out of the ordinary for those times: I think it was 2002 or 2004.

The reason that stands out to me is that I think that that comment would not be acceptable these days and, also, I know those women and there's a lot of gay women on that team. When I see something like that in the media I just think, "Don't judge a woman by her cover." I notice similar prejudgment in climbing. Sometimes I hear people outside of our community say, "Oh, sure, she's a really good climber-mountaineer, but she's really manly." She doesn't fit the caricature of femininity that exists. There's this thinking that, if a woman is performing at the upper end of her sport, it's because biologically she's more similar to a man than a woman. Not because she's a woman who can perform at the higher end of her sport. So that's to me interesting and comes back to that cultural definition of what is femininity or being a woman. I think if a woman is not highlighted for her manliness, then the converse happens and she is sexualized. Sex is going to sell to the majority of Americans, so they pick the pretty people - men and women.



There's one climber I really look up to and try to follow in the media, because she is so hard-core. She's a role model of mine because she does not fit the normal definition of, "I'm going to wear a skimpy sports bra and ascend a sport climb." She's climbing freaking scary stuff in Canada where you don't get a helicopter if you mess up. It's awesome.

*Starting work in the outdoors.* In college my participation in the outdoor program was limited, because I played soccer. Two of the longer trips I went on were during spring break. I had heard about the trips through advertising with the outing club and, because they were over spring break, I could do them. It was awesome.

I went on the first trip my sophomore year. On the first trip we went up to Quebec and went backcountry skiing. We cut trees down and made a canvas tent and basically lived outside for two weeks in the winter. It was amazing. I loved the first year so much that my senior year I asked to be the student leader for the trip. I got, like, wilderness first aid training to prepare and I did some leadership stuff.

I really had no different responsibilities that second trip, other than the fact that I had been on the trip once before; but Student Leader was my title, and that was cool. Looking back, the mentor of that college program did exactly what he was supposed to do. He encouraged me to pursue something I was interested in. I didn't actually have that much more responsibility, but those trips did serve as some training opportunities for me.

The guy who ran our outdoor program trips in college was a bit of a mentor for me. Like my science teacher in high school he had also worked for MTS. So, after my college experience, I now had two people who could act as mentors. When I finished my senior year of college, I thought to myself, "Okay, I can go do corporate recruiting and go

work in NYC, I can go to the Peace Corps, or I can go work for MTS.”

I asked myself, “What have been the most impactful experiences in my life so far?” In the last ten years they had all centered on intense group activities. The outdoors and soccer were really my answer to that question. The only resumes I submitted for that summer were to MTS programs. I guess, as conscious as that was, I didn't really know how long I would do it. I can't say I thought I would be a professional, but I knew that's what I wanted to start my work life with. Still, I don't think I have ever decided to be an outdoor education professional. I think I just ended up here because I've continued to choose it. So, the summer after my senior year I went to intern for MTS. I really enjoyed MTS that first summer and decided to go back for a second summer and, once again, I loved it.

After that second summer, I decided to do an internship in the Senate. I know it sounds crazy, knowing where I am in life now. I wore high heels everyday, nice work clothes, and makeup. My internship was my first realization that the majority of people in power are people who don't look like me. I am a woman and most of the people in power are not. Most of them looked like me in skin color, but I was shocked at how few women were represented, which was an interesting experience. After my time interning at the Senate, I was testing the waters with some more traditional career paths when I got a phone call from MTS. They asked me if I wanted to go work a course. I think I walked into my boss's office the next day and quit: gave her my two weeks notice.

My parents' reaction to all of my choices has been interesting. I think my parents were still thinking that I was just in a phase. A lot of kids graduate college and they work at a camp or do that sort of thing, and then they "get serious" and go back to school. So,

for many, many years, I think my mother deluded herself into thinking that my outdoor career was a phase. I actually bought into that for a long time and told myself that it was a phase, too. In part, that was because I respected my parents so much and I wanted their approval. I didn't feel like I was getting the approval I wanted or needed working in the outdoor industry; so, I was, like, well maybe, this is a phase and I'll go back to school. I think now I have finally realized that this is not a phase. I very much believe in what I do and in this as a profession, and I don't necessarily need my parents to agree with every life decision I make.

*Time at Mountain Trip School.* At MTS they hire you as an intern and you get very little money, but you get room and board. Basically, they are trying you out. They didn't ask us to do any formal teaching or anything. They more just wanted to see that we were doing things right. I remember the guy who ran it was this "old-timer legend." He was very hippy-dippy. I was coming from this ivory tower, Ivy League education, and I was, like, "You want me to sit in a circle and talk about my feelings?" I thought, "This is BS! We have got to get things done." It is funny to look back at my impression of him. Because now, when I ask my students to sit down, I say, "Let's sit in a circle, so we can all see each other and communicate." I am just like him. I hide my hippy-dippy self in the guise of leadership, though.

As a whole, it was a super positive experience. I remember I really liked it. If you do well as an intern, they invite you back as an instructor the next year, and I got invited back. When I look back, I think they probably didn't think I was anything special. I think they probably thought, "Well, we'll take a chance on her and give her a course and see what happens. She's not going to mess it up, but she's probably not going to make it here

that long, either." Coming off of my internship I think I had some good training. I don't think you're ever ready to be an instructor until you actually start working and realize what kind of job it is.

I got offered work the summer after my internship, so I went back as an instructor. I loved it and worked there for (I think) five summers, in total. I am indebted to the people there; they taught me that I am not just going into the field to be the best outdoorsperson I can be, but to actually be an educator through the medium of wilderness travel.

While working at MTS I knew it was a community that I believed in and that I wanted to be a part of. However, becoming part of the community was hard. I think that people who have more experience in organizations like that are sometimes wary of putting too much energy into new people who might leave the next year. Because of that, I feel like it took me three years to feel fully integrated and valued in that community. That community feels really good now, but it took a while; and whether that is because of the program or me, I don't know.

During my time at MTS I noticed that they have a culture of training by apprenticeship. They would run training trips that any staff could sign up for. I appreciated the training opportunities I had there. I was engaged by and challenged by my work, and I truly valued the work I was getting to do. I felt like I was making a difference in young people's lives. Throughout my career my technical skill development has been a mix of seminars, informal trainings, different roles, and then pursuing training on my own. For example, at MTS I learned how to whitewater canoe. I learned primarily through staff trainings and then I sought out extra training on my own. I participated in

two whitewater canoe trips and really enjoyed them. After those trips I ended up paying for a five-day technical canoe-training course in Canada, at a school that had a strong relationship with MTS.

Another skill I began to develop at MTS was my rock climbing. During my basic training and work with rock climbing at MTS, I really knew I wanted to be a climber. So, one summer in Montana I convinced my friend Jen to go out and teach me how to sport lead. She was a climbing instructor for MTS and was a really competent climber. There was this tiny little crag near where we lived. Jen taught me how to put quick draws on bolts and how to clip the rope in. She taught me about rope management, too, and I just felt, like, “Great, I can do this!” After she taught me what to do, everyday I had free, I would go up there. I would set up a top rope on something and dial it in until I felt comfortable leading it. I loved it; it was amazing!

I do think my progression at MTS was motivated in part by seeking approval from people I respected. It felt good, being told that I had done a good job. I also really enjoyed the community as a whole and had some great mentors during my time there. One woman who was a mentor to me was Kathy Pitts. She was a mentor to me in my growth as an educator working with youth. She really challenged me to meet youth where they were. She helped me realize that the experience was not about me, it was about them. She helped me realize the power of letting go and allowing someone to have their own experience. My role is to guide it. I say this to people frequently, but I feel that I really learned how to be a good educator at MTS. I think a lot of my growth can be attributed to the very deliberate mentorship program they had in place.

I work for OTS now, and I think we're not quite as deliberate about that sort of

mentorship. I think we do a great job with some things like risk management, but I don't think that our mentorship, in terms of working with youth, is as robust as what I experienced in MTS. It was also a basic expectation at MTS that you would connect strongly and deeply with each student, which was a way of passing mentorship to our participants. A culture of mentorship and relationship building was important to learn the skill-set needed for that rapport to be built. It wasn't until I actually started working for a new company that I realized that not everyone was good at that. I realized how intensely we had focused on it at MTS. It was a cultural norm. I would offer that I don't have a lot of experience working outside of my specific program at MTS; I don't know that the emphasis was as strong at other MTS locations.

*Leaving MTS.* During my time there, I noticed that MTS went through many iterations and what I like to call “midlife crises.” One of these crises happened when I was becoming a senior instructor and starting to dabble in supervision a little bit. I remember I was working a course when they made the decision to consolidate and downsize. I wasn't necessarily devastated by the closing of the branches; I think I could have survived that. I was disappointed with what I felt like was a little bit of an underhanded way in which it all happened. I feel, like, in many regards, they considered the region where I had worked, to be like a stepchild and some of their other programs to be the important programs; and to me that didn't feel great. At the same time I was experiencing these emotions, I overheard a coworker say, “I am going to take this OTS instructor training.” For lack of anything better to do, I figured I would sign up, too.

*Technical skill development at the Outdoor Trip School.* I have worked for OTS for a while now and part of the reason I really appreciate working for them is because I

think they make it easy to develop technical skills. I took advantage of every single seminar they offered. I gained a basis of risk management fundamentals and skills on a seminar and then pursued the skill on my own through personal experience. I think that pattern is what has allowed me to find success at OTS.

During my climbing development I was lucky enough to be able to go climbing with more talented and accomplished climbers, but usually those were men. When I think back, I had some female climbing partners early on, but we were peers in our learning. Most of the climbers I was learning from were men. I'm very thankful that I got to climb with them, because I learned so much. Learning from them has inspired me to want to pass my skills on to others. Primarily, I want to pass knowledge on to younger women who, I think, don't always have access to more experienced climbers who will take them climbing.

Looking back, I don't know if this feeling was real or not, but sometimes I felt that, when I climbed with more talented men, there was awkwardness or weird expectations present; like, they might have a crush on me and I didn't reciprocate. They had gone out of their way to help me out, and then I felt, like, "Oh, what do I owe them?" I think that dynamic can feel a little sticky sometimes. I realize that it can happen between more experienced women and younger women, too, but I feel less of a power dynamic with other women than I do with men. So, I would like to offer other women the opportunity to grow and learn with me.

I remember climbing with a guy who I was also kind of hanging out with; and while there was never any inappropriate pressure, I felt like our friendship took on the dimensions of our climbing relationship. Climbing was something that I really wanted to

be good at and he was already really good at it. I didn't feel like I was an equal partner in it, because he had these skills that I very much admired and wanted. I felt like he had more power in the relationship and that the power imbalance bled into our friendship away from rock climbing. I was very self-conscious about not being a good climber and I let that bleed into how I interacted with him in other areas of our relationship together. I've heard other people say that it can be hard to learn from your partners, i.e., someone you're dating. In reality, very often, climbing partners are dating each other and I think that can be problematic.

I tend to see people sticking with people they are familiar with and used to. During my progression I would often see men, sitting in the hallways at OTS, talking about their last climbing trip, or the one they wanted to go on. I thought to myself, "Well, I want to go on that climbing trip. How do I get invited?" I would express interest, but I was hesitant to ask to join them, because I was a new climber and they weren't approaching me.

I have had many role models in my climbing career. There is one OTS woman who stands out for me. She was my supervisor for a long time and I would climb with her. I was very grateful to her for that; but, when I wanted to start doing more Alpine climbing, she wasn't really a role model there, because that wasn't where she spent her time. So, for that, I had to turn to men, mostly. I found that I can connect very strongly and deeply to some men, but I usually connect more quickly to women. If I wanted to climb, I had to work hard at some relationships with men, and they weren't, necessarily, people I would have picked to hang out with.

I think that there are men who are equally intimidated about entering a sport like



climbing, where consequences can be pretty high; but, I think the difference is that they can look at people in positions of power, like supervisors in that skill type, and see more people who look like them: maybe don't act like them, but look like them, as men. I think there are more obvious pathways to get to where they want to go and I really do think that having role models is pretty important. I believe it's important to have role models who you can identify with. While I think women can identify with men, I also think some women will identify more strongly with a woman. We need diverse role models. If you don't have role models available, it's a different obstacle to hurdle, and I think there are fewer women in our field to look to.

Because I have experienced this, now I just want to be a positive role model. I want to give back to other young women what was given to me, because I think they don't have as much access to role models as young men. I think I offer a safe learning environment and I care about OTS. I think OTS is going to be a stronger organization when we have more technically competent women; and I think getting them training, before they show up at OTS, so that they really perform well on their seminars, is as valuable a way to support women as anything else I can think of.

*Women's seminars.* I have participated in a few women-specific seminars at OTS. One, which I benefitted a lot from, was the Rock Climbing Primer Seminar. I took the Primer before my instructor training. It was six or seven women and a female instructor and it was just the boost I needed to be able to feel confident going out and performing on my own. I needed to have someone, with more experience, look at my gear, and what I was doing, and say, like, "Yes, you are not going to kill yourself." I have distinct memories of leading a 5.6 climb and having my instructor check my gear. She looked at

me and said, "Your gear is good. Your movement is good. Your rope-management is good. You just need to go out and climb more." That was the go-ahead I needed. It was an all female environment and it was really great. I met a climbing partner on it and she was great. I did some of my first "trad" climbs with her. The seminar had many aspects that were amazing; but just meeting a climbing partner, who I felt comfortable with, was such a gift.

There are a lot of differing opinions about all-women's seminars at OTS and I think I've just progressed in how I view this issue over the years. Originally, I saw it as strictly a male-female thing, now I see it as more of a cultural gender-construct thing. I think, originally, when the women's seminars were established at OTS, there was a pervasive idea that women learned better in an all-female environment, because women tended to be more hesitant to speak up in a group, coupled with other thoughts about stereotypically feminine traits. The original idea was, if we wanted to support women, we needed to put them in an environment where they wouldn't have to compete, essentially, with the more dominating male presences.

Now, I think there are men, also, who very much fit into that category of being more soft-spoken, not being a driver, being less confident about their abilities. So, to me, it's less of a sex thing, and more of a culture we construct. We culturally label people as masculine or feminine. I still believe women's seminars are important for many reasons, and I've debated this ad nauseam with some of my co-workers; but I believe we are a stronger school when we have role models of both genders. I work for a school where we have more men working in every single discipline and so, for that reason, the women's seminars are valuable. If you increase the number of women taking a seminar, you will,

almost by default, get more women in those programs. I have also heard women say that they're empowered by those seminars, because they rarely work with other women in the field; and so, it's a nice opportunity to build bridges, share experiences, and meet some new friends, which is exactly what I experienced on the Primer.

It has been interesting hearing other people's views about gender at OTS. I feel, like, on my best days at OTS, and with my friends, I'm just a person. Sometimes gender plays into that, but mostly we've accepted each other to the point where gender isn't a blatant part of our day-to-day interactions together. We are who we are. Sometimes it's easy to think we're making a big deal out of nothing. Then other days, I am aware that we're not actually over it and we're not making a big deal of nothing. For example, I was talking about the diversity inclusion initiative at OTS with a very good friend of mine and he said, "I feel, like, it's like beating a dead horse." At the time, as is usually the case with me, I did not respond immediately. I haven't talked to him about it since, because, usually, I have to first sort through my own feelings, before I can respond intelligently. But, looking back, I wish I had said, "You know, I bet it doesn't feel like a dead horse to somebody who's not feeling included every day." For someone for whom that is a daily occurrence, it is not a dead horse; it's very much part of their experience. That conversation highlighted for me that intent and impact are very different. I don't think my friend ever intends to be exclusive, but the fact is that there are many cultural practices, including some that I practice, that are very exclusive; and that's why this is not a dead horse.

I think if nothing else, the women's seminars at OTS provide a space for women to realize that structural sexism still exists. Our students come to our school having

experienced it. Some of them are aware of it and some of them aren't; but it's our job as educators to be aware of it, and talk about it, and to do whatever we can to support all of our students. For me, those are valuable conversations. It's become less about how women learn and more about empowerment, talking about these things, and giving women the resources for whatever skill they want to develop at the school. So, if they do find themselves in a situation where they're not psyched about the way inclusion is being practiced, they have this sort of galvanizing experience to look back on and say, "I know there are other like-minded people at this school. I know I have allies. I know if I engage in this conversation, I'm not alone." Those are the reasons I think the women's seminars are important.

I have noticed gender more at OTS than at MTS. I think part of the reason gender didn't factor in for me as much at MTS was because I wasn't in the minority as a woman.<sup>2</sup> It was a space that felt very equal. There were role models of both genders in positions of power who were comfortable with whom they were and their gender, and that was a great example to have. I came to OTS and gender became a bigger issue, because there are fewer women here. I think OTS is doing the right thing to talk about it and make an effort to change the story. Until I had experiences where I was very obviously in the minority group, I think I had a harder time empathizing with other people's struggles with

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>2</sup> I told Allison about a similar experience I had when I worked for the Girl Scouts. I also notice gender on a regular basis at OTS. I think, because they are making efforts to increase female participation and their female instructor pool, gender is talked about candidly and on a pretty regular basis. I told Allison about working for the Girl Scouts and how different that was. It's a single-gender organization, and while we had a few male instructors, almost everyone that worked there was female. I noticed that, while the fact that it is a single-sex organization highlights gender to begin with, on a day-to-day basis we never thought about gender, because there wasn't anything to think about. We just did our camp tasks and no one thought twice about it.

structural discrimination. Now, having gone through my own process of understanding how structural sexism affects me in my life, I have so much more empathy for other people and their different struggles. I, maybe, can't fully understand others' struggles being a minority, but I can empathize. I think that empathy piece is what sometimes is lacking in the experience of my white male co-workers. They can maybe understand academically that some of this is going on, but I think it took me having my own experience to really understand.

I think because gender is something OTS pays attention to, my experience has been affected. Now this is murky water I am starting to wade into here, but I think that, as a woman, I may have been called for a course before many men, because they wanted gender-balanced instructor groups; and I am okay with that. I know I have been qualified for every position I have gotten, but I also think being a woman is an experience I can put on my resume. I've climbed this many grade 4s, and I've also walked through the world as a woman. I think OTS values gender-diverse instructor groups, because they think it serves our students better, and I do, too. To be relevant as an organization, we need to have representatives from the populations we're serving. It's naïve to think that we can have one segment of population representing us and do the best job possible, we need all perspectives represented, if possible.

*Mountaineering progression.* When I started at the school there was a wonderful Women's Resources Coordinator. She would call me and ask "How are you doing? How is your career at the school going? What courses are you working? What are you doing on your personal time? Where do you want to go? How can I support you?" She was a great mentor for me. At one point, I applied for two different mountaineering seminars

and she pushed me towards one in the Pacific Northwest. It was the seminar with the higher level of glacier travel and it would allow me to work in more locations. So, I took that one; I was assessed at the second level of instructor. Honestly, I think I was on the line and could have been assessed a level lower, as well.

I worked my first course up there with a pretty burnt-out lead instructor and his level of mentorship was low. He was a mentor in that he let me do a lot, but it wasn't high in that he would not necessarily coach me a ton. I think, at that point, on my first mountaineering contract, I needed a lot more coaching. I needed skill-set development, and, looking back, I wasn't getting a lot of that from him; and I think, for that reason, I did not grow that much on that course. I did not leave that course feeling super successful; but I think that I have an attitude of, "Well, that sucked, but I am not going to let that slow me down." Because of that, I think I have put a lot of effort into my own development.

I kept working and progressing, and was lucky enough to get placed on courses with some good coaches, and eventually worked up to being assessed as a lead instructor. I got scheduled to be the lead instructor on a mountaineering course. I have to say I was a little nervous. I generally like to feel over-prepared for a role (which I think may be a little bit of a gender thing), and I cannot say that I felt over-prepared going into that course. I think I did a good job, but I think I was overly conservative at some times.

I recently took a mountaineering seminar in Alaska for women. It was an interesting mix of participants. We actually all had a significant amount of experience between us and we were all just kind of looking to solidify that experience. I think our group's high experience level was noteworthy, because there is a stereotype at the school

that women's seminars don't typically have as experienced participants as a co-ed seminar. They are sometimes viewed as developmental and not assessment based.

Generally speaking, when a women's seminar is run, there is another concurrent one that is co-ed; but what has happened, in the last two seminars I have taken that are women's seminars, is that the co-ed one ends up being all men. For this one, there were probably five women, total, and three of us applied for the co-ed one; but they bumped us to the women's one (which I am fine with) to fill it up. I am glad I ended up on the women's one. We had more experience, as a whole, than the "co-ed turned men's" seminar had. It felt really good to be with an all female group that was, on paper, more experienced than the all men's group. I perceived that as an anomaly.

It was interesting, but also I think when women get signed up for that all women's seminar and it was not by choice, it could be detrimental. I had a couple of women on this seminar tell me, "I signed up for the co-ed one and would have preferred to be a participant on that; because the reality is, I am not going to work with women in this program, I am going to be working with men and it would have set me up better to be working and establishing relationships with people I might work with in the future." I thought that was an excellent point.

Now in my career I have taught and taken women's seminars, and it has been an integral part of my progression at the school. Men do not always agree that women's seminars are a good thing. When men start whining about the women's seminars, I want to say, "Listen. Any time a women's seminar is run, it opens up more space for men on the co-ed seminar, because women inevitably get put on the women's one, which opens up space for you."

*Working as the only woman.* There have been many times where I am the only female on a course. One example of this was when I worked a mountaineering seminar. It had a male co-instructor, ten male participants, and me. During that seminar I was especially aware of my place as the only woman and although it was potentially irrational, I was worried; if I made a mistake, I would be told it was because I had been forced into the position prematurely, rather than a human being who made a mistake. I think, sometimes, people in minority groups can have more of a spotlight on them and sometimes can't just make a mistake as a human being. Instead they are perceived as making a mistake for whatever stereotypes are attached to them. I get nervous that if I make a mistake, all of a sudden I made a mistake as a woman. I may be perceived as having been given the position because I was a woman, not because I am competent, and confident, and ready for the role.

I try to remind younger instructors at the school that they are human and they get to make mistakes. I tell them, "Don't let anybody tell you, you were pushed into this prematurely. If you are ready, you are ready." I think there are a lot of men making mistakes and nobody ever says to them, "Oh, you were promoted prematurely off that seminar, because you're a man." Even though, maybe they were. It's just not something we say, because it's not at the forefront of our experience. I felt like I was ready for the role I had, but the fear of making a mistake and being accused of premature promotion was in my head.

I remember another mountaineering course where I was working with a male-co-instructor and all male students. I was the only female and, overall, it was a fine experience. The guys were really nice and I was really confident. I remember, the very



last day of the course, we were all standing around in a circle and just kind of shooting the breeze and waiting for the bus to come or whatever. The guys started making jokes about how rugby women tend to be bigger and manlier; the implication was that they were butch and thus not attractive. I remember I was angry and a little hurt by the way they were talking about these women and my male co-instructor was participating in this discussion. I felt like I wanted to say something, but I didn't, because I felt like I was alone and saying something would have been pointless. I just didn't feel up to fighting that alone. I don't think the men misogynist or overtly sexist, but I do think it was this micro-aggression against women. I felt like there was a lot of a value attributed to women, based on their sexuality, and how desirable they were to men, and that was frustrating. I wish my male co-instructor had taken on that fight and really been an ally, instead of encouraging the conversation. That could have been an educational opportunity.

On the flipside, I have experienced a time when a man was a wonderful ally to me in that regard. This fall I worked an all-male course with a male co-worker and had a totally different experience. We had this cool conversation with our students about inclusion and at one point the students pointed out that there were no women in our group, even though I was sitting right there.<sup>3</sup> My co-worker, this awesome guy, said, "Oh, uh, wait a second, like, we got a woman sitting right there." It was interesting,

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>3</sup> I told Allison that I had experienced the same thing. I told her that often my male co-workers or participants do not see me as a woman. It is interesting to me, because I identify as a woman and all of my students would logically know me as a woman, but when compared to another more feminine instructor on a course, I am often taken out of the female category in their minds. I am defaulted to becoming "one of the guys," because they view me as masculine when compared to the ideal image of a woman. I went on to tell Allison that strangers who are not paying attention often call me "Sir," which I think is because I do not fit the stereotype of a woman.

because the student didn't offend me. I think I understood what he was trying to say, which is, there are no peers who are women in this group. But, I did appreciate my co-worker stopping the conversation and, at least, saying that he saw me as a woman. I felt, like, in that way he said that my experience in this group as the only woman could be different than his, and I appreciated that. I thought he was role-modeling really well for the men.

I think they probably staff me on these all-male courses, because they think I can handle it; and I can. I am who I am. I'm a woman. I'm a driver. I'm outspoken and, even when I'm wrong, I'm real confident about being wrong. But, for me, knowing they staff me on these courses because I have a more traditionally masculine leadership style is problematic. I think we're less likely to staff a more soft-spoken, typically feminine leader on an all-male course, because we're worried about how the men will receive her. While I think there's growing awareness about this, I do think that OTS values a more traditionally masculine leadership style. I think that value at OTS is a symptom of the culture in which we exist. There's a lot of research that points out that, even though it's maybe not the most effective leadership style, it is the most pervasive one in our culture. We're a product of our culture and so, therefore, we also value that.<sup>4</sup>

*Becoming a supervisor.* Recently, I transitioned to a supervisor role with OTS. I had expressed some interest in the position and I had some people recruiting me. I had

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>4</sup> Allison and I discussed how we both have a very masculine leadership style. I told her that I thought that my leadership style was directive, confident and assertive. She pointed out that she had a similar leadership style and that those are traditionally seen as masculine qualities. Both of us agreed that we thought our leadership styles were valued by OTS over others. I told Allison that I think I have succeeded because I have a masculine leadership style; but, also, I think I may have succeeded, because I'm a woman with that "ideal" masculine leadership style. She agreed and told me that she has had the exact same experience.

some specific career goals that I wanted to accomplish before taking on that new role. One, in particular, was that I wanted to be the lead instructor on a Rocky Mountain mountaineering trip. To me, doing that before my promotion was important, and I feel, like, part of that desire may have been because I want to feel overqualified before taking on new tasks. I will also admit that I was driven to lead that course, because a woman hadn't been a lead instructor on one of those in a long time and I wanted to be a role model. I wanted to do it and show that it could be done. I wanted to have had that experience, so that I could coach and mentor other women towards that goal more effectively.

I know research tends to suggest that women, more than men, want to feel overqualified for roles they're applying for and I think I have felt that; I think that is true about me. It's been interesting, because I have seen men take on supervisory roles, even though they had not been lead instructors in that course type before, but for some reason I felt the need to be the lead on another Rocky Mountain mountaineering course before supervising. I would rather have people think, "She has a ton of experience. She totally knows what she's talking about." My sense is that people tend to second-guess women more than men, and maybe that's what drives this lack of confidence for me. I don't know that people actually do second-guess women more. It's just this sense I have.

*Raising awareness.* Raising awareness about things that affect our field is important to me, and that includes gender. I'm definitely conscious of the people with whom I start conversations about gender. Generally, I choose to talk about gender with people who share similar views, because I find that I can learn something new or have a meaningful conversation that supports what I believe to be true. I will engage with people

who don't share my views, but I find that I do so less frequently; in part, because I want the conditions to be right. My personal experience, currently, is that the push-back is subtle; it's below deck, if you will. I don't think it would be a surprise to anyone that the school right now is putting increased emphasis on building a diverse instructor pool and valuing that diversity. I think people who don't agree necessarily, they're not super vocal about their disagreement, because people in powerful positions think they're wrong. They feel like they need to voice that dissent subtly and behind closed doors and only around certain people.

When someone is being sexist or racist, do I say, "F' you! You need to change and get with the program"? Or, do I say, "You're on your own educational journey right now"? As an educator, I think my obligation is, in most cases (unless it's blatantly derogatory), to talk about their experience and what led them to believe what they do and help educate them about the impact of their words and where we are trying to move to. This stuff does come up for me in my profession. For example, I had a co-worker, who didn't get the contract he wanted, say, "It sucks being a white guy at OTS." I wasn't able to deal with it in the moment, because usually I have to sort through my emotional reaction before I can come to some objective, helpful conversation. But stuff like that happens.

A woman I work with, who's a supervisor, just told me that there's a new guy working in their office. She was looking for a climbing partner and she said to him, "Hey, do you climb? I'm looking for some climbing partners." He said, "Oh, yeah, I climb. I'd be happy to take you climbing, I have a harness you can use." That is frustrating on a number of levels for me. I think the intent there was wonderful. He wanted to help

someone go climbing; but, the impact was, "Oh, you're a woman, so you must, therefore, not have as much experience as me." If a young woman hears that enough times, she might use it as motivation to continue to grow, but eventually I think it will be disempowering. That is fuel for me, and a reminder to me, that though people have really good intentions, a broadening of perspectives may need to happen.

I do think these micro-aggressions are present and I believe there's a stronger culture of mentorship among men at the school. That's an advantage that's not formalized, but very real. When our school only has men working mountaineering courses in the Rockies, I think fewer women hear about all the awesome things that happen on the courses. Part of the reason I wanted to become a rock-climbing instructor is because I heard people saying how great it was. I think that we need female role models sharing their experiences with other women and sharing tips about working with mostly men, etc. That informal mentorship network is a way to increase participation in male-dominated activities, and I think that happens more for men, because the majority of role models in these fields are men. They tell their younger male coworkers these things sooner.

Having been a woman going through the channels of, and working my way up through, the organization, I have a unique perspective on what it is to be a woman doing that. It's a perspective my male co-workers can't offer. Just like I don't know what it's like to be a man working. I can ask, but I can't inherently know. I really want to be a mentor for women and start building those networks for incoming women in our field.

Throughout my career I have been able to negotiate through some tough experiences, in part because I gain strength from my conversations with who, in my opinion, are clearly thinking and have a vision for how to better support all people at our

school. I know that there are going to be more hard times for me in the field where I am uncomfortable, but I also want to be sure I offer that ally-ship to other people: just being an ally, helping people know they're not alone, ever. I want people to feel like, if they do speak out or share a different opinion, that other people will be there to back them up. I want them to feel like they don't have to do it alone, because I have often felt like I had to do it alone.

I think there is a type of woman who is more likely to be successful in this field: a woman who is outwardly confident, driven, and someone who is able to see a goal and actively pursue it. I look at women who I came in at a similar level as, but I have succeeded in different ways than they have. Within the organization I've moved up and taken on more responsibility faster. I think a large part of that was because I went and hung out with people who I maybe didn't love; but I wanted to get to climb and I knew I would learn a lot and that it would help me get to where I want to go. I'm sure I have access to structural privilege as well. That's certainly helpful. I also think I like the challenge that comes with breaking stereotypes. Working in a male-dominated field fuels that in me.

I think true success will mean, not only, can I thrive in this field, but also that anybody who wants to be part of this field can. We will succeed as an industry when gender doesn't have to be a barrier. That's why I try to focus on how I can make this a more welcoming space for everybody, and more importantly, how can I make it a welcome place for people who are underrepresented?

I think there are a lot of factors that could increase female participation in our field. I think the broader culture in the United States needs to support and accept that

gender looks like a lot of things and that many women enjoy being in the outdoor as much as men. I also think more role models and mentors can lead to more opportunity. If there are more women and people going outside, who will take girls and women with them, there will be more opportunity to learn how to do things like rock climb. More opportunity means more access to equipment.

Having positive mentors and peers around me has been so valuable to me. Having people who told me I was good at this, and that I could do it, was really helpful. I feel lucky that I get to go to work and go to a place where I feel valued: it feels safe; I feel engaged; I feel like my contributions are worth something. At this point, this line of work is almost tied up in my personal identity. My work and who I am as a person are ground up together. It's helped me clarify what I believe to be important in the world. For example, I believe structural sexism still exists. Therefore, I engage, almost at every turn, in conversations about how women fit into OTS and how we can make our organization different from the dominant culture; which, in my opinion, could do a better job of supporting both men and women.

***Chris.***

*Growing up with Dad and sisters.* When I think about what sparked my initial outdoor passion, I attribute some of that to my dad. My dad modeled a love of the outdoors for us. He really spent a lot of time outside. I remember when I was really young he would go on these ski trips with friends. They would always go on a full moon night; they would ski out and dig in. So I think a love for the outdoors was something my dad set up for us and instilled that value in my sisters and me.

We were a family of three girls and I think my older sister and I definitely learned

from Dad to love the outdoors. My sister Beth is the oldest, I am the middle child and then Sandy, the youngest, is three years younger than me. She seems very different from my older sister and I; she's a glamour girl. My parents divorced when my little sister would have been in kindergarten then. In those formative years she didn't have as much time with Dad and I think that, as a result, the love of the outdoors was instilled in her less.

From the time I was five years old we lived on 13 acres. We had this little trail network on our own land and my older sister and I had mountain bikes. We would race around on our mountain bikes, build forts in the forest, and just get really dirty. My dad was really into building forts with us. I think those experiences outdoors ingrained a value in us that I didn't realize at the time.

One of my really funny memories from my childhood was cross-country skiing with my dad. He would always try to get us to go out skiing with him, but at six years old my motor skills were not good. I would go out skiing with him and end up in a tangled pile of skis and poles, yelling to my dad to come help me! While I was lying in the snow helpless, I had no idea how valuable those moments would be to me in the future.

Overall, growing up we spent a lot of time outside: mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and then, later on, hiking with Dad. After childhood we kind of diverged from that, or I did, at least. In college, that is kind of when I started to come back around to spending a lot of time outdoors.

I went to a small liberal arts college for my first year and it was this ruckus party scene. That was not my scene, at all. I knew there had to be more to college than that, so I did my first college outing club trip in February of my freshman year. We hiked a pretty



large mountain near by. It was a pretty intimidating experience for me. The outdoor community at my first college, as well as the community at the university I transferred to, was very close knit and it was difficult to break into. I ended up going on only one trip during my whole time in college, but I am glad I did; it was a great experience.

The trip was at the start of my second semester of college. I think I found out about the trip through a bulletin board posting in the dorms. One of the girls living on my floor told me she was going to do the trip and so I decided to do it with her. It was just a one-night trip mountain climbing trip. When I signed up for the trip I knew almost nothing about what climbing to the top of this mountain in the middle of February would entail; but, I thought, “Sure...whatever...I’ll go.”

I remember the leaders from that trip: one was a smoking hot senior, which makes him memorable to me, and the other was a marathon runner. He had a grizzly outdoorsman quality about him. He had this big orange beard and a real strong-man vibe. I remember both the leaders being a little callous. They did not spend much time building interpersonal connections with participants, but I really enjoyed the experience, nonetheless.

They prepared us well for the trip, but it was intimidating at first. Before the trip I went to pick up my gear. They had a big gear locker and they gave me crampons and all the other equipment I needed. While I was getting my gear, I remember them talking to me and using terminology that to someone who is totally new to outdoor recreation didn’t make any sense. I did not know what any of the equipment was or how to use it. All the while, they were talking to me like I was supposed to know all of that. I left that meeting thinking, “Ahh...oh gosh,” and feeling pretty uneasy. However, once we actually got to

the activity and to the hike, all was okay.

It ended up being my only trip, but I remember it being a fantastic experience. I chose to leave that school shortly afterwards, because it was not the right school for me. Before I transferred, I remembered this question going in my head, thinking, “Where can I find my community here? Where is there a community I want to be a part of here?” I think I found that in the outdoor program, if only briefly. After that trip I knew outdoor recreation was something I wanted to be a part of my life. I wanted to keep pushing myself, because I saw that I was really capable.

After that year, however, I transferred schools and saw my place with the crew team, so I didn’t really integrate myself into the outdoor club at my new school. The outdoor club at my new school was a group that was kind-of elite and very hard to break into. It was an interesting feeling for me, because a college club is supposed to be really accessible, but I felt the outdoor club was very cliquish. I knew I wanted to learn, but I didn’t know any of the outdoor club people and they did not reach out to anyone. The people that were part of the club would always sit together in class. I remember them talking about their adventures and various trips and feeling intrigued, but also intimidated. I thought to myself, “Where do you start with beginners? How do beginners fit into this?” That wasn’t clear to me as an outsider.

I never did break into the outdoor club at my new school, but I did start hiking with a group of co-workers on a regular basis. I worked with a couple of guys, one of which, Brent, later ended up becoming my boyfriend. We blew off work one day and went for a six-hour hike and we had a great time. After that day those guys became my hiking buddies for my senior year of college. Hiking with them was great. I was the only

girl with a group of boys, but I felt supported and included in our adventures.

*The path to OTS.* Even though my participation in outdoor recreation was limited throughout college, I felt a constant pull to be outdoors and a desire to join the outdoor community. My pull to the outdoors had long included a desire to take an OTS (Outdoor Trip School) course. It was something I had always wanted to do from the time I was about 14 or 15; it was just never the right time. I was going to go do an OTS course after high school, but I had this nagging feeling that, if I did, I might not go to college afterwards; I knew a college degree was something I wanted. Again, I almost went on an OTS course during my junior year of college. I was really unhappy in school at that time; I just hadn't found my place in school and really wasn't enjoying my time there. That time, I went as far as enrolling in an OTS semester course before the same trepidation about not finishing school came rushing back. I ended up not attending the course.

Next thing I knew I found myself in my senior year of school, and while I had gotten myself back in the outdoors hiking with Brent and our co-workers, I was still really unhappy in school and still dreaming of taking an OTS course. I was getting closer and closer to graduation and realizing I needed to start thinking about and planning for what would be next. The expectation to have a paying job when I graduated, coupled with the general ambiguousness of life after college, kept me pensive.

I had received a job offer to work as a paraprofessional at a local middle school. It seemed like a good next step; I would be close to my family and my boyfriend. However, I would be following in a long line of teachers in my family and I was not sure how I felt about that. It felt like I was being shooed into Dad's company or something, like going right into the family business. I didn't like that feeling. (I want a job to be my

own job, something that I totally earn on my own.) I didn't want to feel like my career was attached to my parents' role in education. So, on a whim, I applied again for an OTS course. I told myself, "Okay. This is my one time to do it, something I have always wanted to do. If I don't do it now, I am not going to do it!" So I did.

I felt really supported in my decision to take an OTS semester. An OTS semester is not cheap and it was not something I could afford on my own. My parents had not been planning on that expense, but my parents realized how important the course was to me and they chipped in as much as they could. I covered some and my grandma covered the majority of the cost. While I felt tremendous support from my immediate friends and family, I think anyone that leaves for something as foreign for people as an OTS course gets some really superficial questions like, "Oh...you are going to go do what for three months?" But I felt a lot of support from the people who mattered in my life. They gave off this feeling of "Yeah! Chris is going to rock this!"

It's funny, when I look back on my path in life, how random moments pop up that remind me of how long I have wanted to pursue an outdoor adventure career. I remember taking my first WFR (Wilderness First Responder) course in college. The Instructor of that course was a former OTS Instructor and I remember walking up to him and saying "John, I think I want to be an OTS instructor." I had never taken an OTS course at that point. I think I just had always, some place in my brain, been fantasizing about it. I mean I had no backcountry skills or experience, but I just thought, "Hey, one day I really want to do that."

That WFR course with John was a real motivator. I really respected John. I remember looking at him and thinking he was so rugged and outdoorsy, which I equated

with being super cool. The course itself felt so practical. I don't remember what John's reaction was when I told him about my future goals. I picture myself as this timid, quiet girl coming up and speaking out of the blue. I am pretty sure he kindly told me some steps I should take if I wanted to make my dreams a reality, but I'm pretty sure he wasn't thinking to himself, "Oh, yeah. This girl can be an instructor."

*Trail crew.* I graduated from college in May and knew I would be leaving for a three month OTS course in September, so I got a summer job leading a trail crew. I was placed as the trail crew leader for a team of seven high school girls. It was super physical work and our all girl team was very empowering for me and the girls on the crew. I had originally applied to work for a different program in the same company, working with developmentally disabled participants, but they hired me for the all female trail crew instead. I didn't really have much long-term direction at the time, so I took the job thinking, "Why not?" It ended up being a really good decision.

I really enjoyed the physical aspect of the work. One specific task our crew was assigned ended up being a huge highlight of the summer; we built a rock culvert. Re-building the rock culvert was so cool, because men and oxen originally built it in the 1850's. I had a group of seven high school girls and we rebuilt it with our own hands, which was just very exciting. I am pretty petite, myself, and many of my high school crewmembers were, as well. Just stepping back and watching the physically demanding work we were accomplishing was very cool. It felt very outside the norm of traditional women's work, which felt so great to be a part of. I am pretty sure that the company purposefully sets up a couple of all female trail crews each summer, which I think is great. The value of having an all female crew was immense; it was a really empowering

thing.

I'm not sure about the organization's motivation behind the all female trail crew; but, looking back on that summer, I do think there are some things that could have been done to make the experience even more powerful. I realize now that a group can experience a more impactful outcome, depending on how curriculum is structured. If I could do it again, I would put intentional thought into the curriculum I presented. Having the participants really realize that the work they were doing all summer was typically in a male-dominated domain, I would have presented the girls with curriculum that specifically focused on women in the workplace. I would have liked to do special things like bringing in a professional who is a woman in a typically male-dominated field. I think bringing in a woman working in fish and game or construction could have inspired them to break into those fields as well, or, at least, not rule them out. I have this sense that girls grow up dreaming of being nurses, models and dancers, because that is what the storybooks tell us. I think exposing them to women in typically male dominated fields could counteract some of that and that trail crew was a great setting to do it.

That trail crew was my first leadership experience. Not only did I have a great experience doing the trail crew, but I also felt very supported by my friends and family during that endeavor. I think that when my family heard my plans for summer, they thought, "Of course Chris is doing this. No surprise there," (which was really funny to me). I also felt very supported by my boyfriend Brent. We were living together and I would come home from a rough day dirty, muddy, and in my heavy duty trail gear. Brent would come home before me from his office job all clean and put together, and by the time I got home, he would have dinner waiting for me. I had to laugh a couple times at

how completely reversed we were from what is considered traditional gender roles. I just kept thinking to myself, “This is great!”

*OTS as a student.* My OTS course was life-changing. It gave me a lot of clarity that I didn’t have before. My first section was a ten-day hike. I remember some of my peers on that section saying, “This is the hardest thing I have ever done.” The heavy backpack, the hiking, the weather, all of it combined was the hardest thing they had ever done. For me, it wasn’t the hardest thing I had ever done. Rowing crew in college kicked my butt and put me through some of the hardest situations I think I have experienced. So, in comparison, while the 10-day hiking section was hard, it was not the hardest thing I had ever done. Physically, I felt good. However, psychologically, I struggled.

I felt very anxious and very scared, because everything was new to me and totally out of my comfort zone. I had a lot of anxiety on the course, and while I kept it under control most of the time, I was scared of everything. One thing that stands out from that section was a scree field we descended. At that time, I was just learning the risks of being outdoors and didn’t understand reasonable risk-taking yet. I was paralyzed with fear. While I was able to get down the scree field eventually, I remember being so afraid. I said to my group, “I do not want to go down that.” I was convinced that there had to be better ways to get down and I did not understand why we had to go this way, which seemed so dangerous to me. Conversely, my group didn’t understand why I was so afraid.

It ended up being fine; once I got down, I was fine. I knew I was strong and physically capable, but there was an emotional barrier for me. When we got down the scree field I dealt with a second emotion: bruised pride. To get down this hill I had to set

my pride aside and let the instructor physically hold my backpack as we were descending. I think it calmed me down and made me feel like I was okay, but I remember feeling so belittled and feeling so ridiculous, because I knew I could do it and fear was really the only thing holding me back. Looking back on that course from my vantage point now, I have had a pretty incredible transformation. I was paralyzed a number of times on that course, but similar situations feel like nothing to me now.

That fear I felt backpacking continued with me to our rock climbing section. I was terrified of climbing and I hated it when we started. I remember saying to one of the instructors, "I have to reprogram my brain. I have been taught, taught from a really young age, not to climb high and not to put myself in these situations again and again." I had to deconstruct what I had learned through all of my childhood. I do, however, think that experience of fear has made me a better instructor, because I can put myself right in the shoes of that student who is scared. Being scared is such a normal reaction; lots of student's brains need reprogramming.

I remember one instructor was so patient with me. One day he let me top rope the same 5.7 climb, probably six times in a row. There have not been very many times in my life, when looking at athletic ability, I am at the very bottom, so I felt a little silly repeating this relatively easy climb for most people over and over again. I went from being totally white-knuckle-gripped to being able to calmly process what should come next. I had this moment of clarity, realizing that I can actually relax while climbing. That was a turning point for me and that was the first experience I had, where someone really carved out time to see progression in me. Climbing camp ended up being a real transformative moment for me.



Our next section was 30 days in the canyons and once again, I was afraid of nearly everything. We would be walking on the slick rock and I felt like I was going to wipe out on every step. I started to get that feeling of “Why the heck would any one do this?!” again; it was very interesting. Looking back, I feel disappointed that I didn’t get past my fear, but in that moment, I couldn’t. I tell myself now that “You have got to start somewhere;” so, I guess it’s okay, that I was afraid.

When I think about what contributed to my fear throughout that course, I really think about how children are socialized to be afraid of “dangerous” activities. I see it a lot in parenting. I hear parents, all the time, telling kids things like, “Don’t run around without shoes on, you are going to cut your feet.” I think it is really well-intentioned parenting, but it can build a set of fear values. What I needed to do was set that aside and re-learn what is and is not, in fact, a dangerous situation.

As a whole, my OTS course was life changing; it gave me a lot of clarity that I didn’t have before. It gave me the ability to channel my skills and see that I was capable of doing the things that had scared me. It was an important experience to my leadership progression, really showing me the value in finding something you are passionate about. In the time I was a student on that semester, I saw how passionate my instructors were about OTS as their employer. Coming off of my OTS course, I wasn’t sure where I was headed, but I knew I wanted to work in outdoor education.

*Becoming an instructor.* I was hoping to get an internship with OTS after my student course. I had asked one of the instructors about the internship and she gave me a run down of what it entailed. She also gave me a very strong reference and coached me through those next steps.

The internship was a fantastic experience. It facilitated a very fast connection for me with the school. I built relationships with the staff in town and I also was able to build relationships with the instructor community very fast. That was just the nature of that position and I loved it. As that internship came to a close, I looked at the community around me that I had become a part of and knew I didn't want to leave it.

Knowing I wanted to stay, I went to speak with Gabe. He was and continues to be a real mentor of mine at OTS. He hired me to work the summer season for him. I was able to continue to build connections in a different section of the school and continue to broaden the connections I had with OTS instructors. I took a couple of other jobs with the school after that and in the time I was there, I applied for instructor training.

At the time, I didn't know if I was the right candidate for an instructor training. My student course had been my only expedition experience, and in terms of instructor training applicants, I felt that I was on the low end of experience levels. I did feel, however, that I had a strong background in education positions and different leadership experiences like the trail crew, which potentially helped make me a viable candidate. I decided to apply. I felt like the people that were doing the assessment of instructor training candidates knew me really well from my time in the community. They knew my skills and how I was developing, and they would know if I was ready for that step or not.

I got accepted to the instructor training and it felt awesome. I had word of mouth that I had been accepted before the official offers were delivered. One of the women that had been my instructor on my student course came and told me in person. She is someone I look up to, so to have word-of-mouth from her was really fun and exciting. It is a committee process to be selected and knowing that all those people supported me and

saw development opportunities in me felt really good; it validated my skill set for me.

On our course we had some intense weather and getting demolished by storms ended up being a pretty regular experience for us. I remember, during one of the three-day-long storms, as it rained, hailed and snowed, I could no longer function at the level I wanted to. I remember just being wet through and through. It was around 34 degrees and I was feeling so beat-down that I just could not keep it together. I really needed to take care of myself. I felt like I could barely handle myself at that moment and I knew I could not manage putting any energy toward group tasks. I knew the instructor training was one big evaluation and I knew, in that moment, I was not taking care of myself very well. I was distraught about it. I was just overwhelmed by all the factors of the situation.

I think I was struggling internally during that moment, because I was supposed to be performing at the highest caliber during this evaluation. I basically felt this sense of “Don’t mess up.”<sup>5</sup> I remember one of my instructors on the training, who I had previously become friends with while working in town, say, “Chris, you are having a really human moment; you are feeling beat-up right now.” That was a really powerful statement for me and I have used that phrase since with my students. Knowing he was a very competent person and learning that, to him, this seemed normal was really helpful. A lot of people experience this and it does not mean I am less competent because of it. He was able to label it for me and I was able to step back and see that “Yes, I am having a human moment.” That was all I needed to get past it and that was really cool for me to

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>5</sup> I had taken the same instructor training a year prior to Chris and she knew this. We reflected together briefly on the pressure you feel during an instructor training. I mentioned to her that I felt the same trepidation on my training; i.e., a pressure to prove myself and prove my competence and skill set to my instructors and peers.

realize.

A lot of instructor trainings can be kind of “cut throat.” People want to get positively assessed in order to work after it, and there is a chance that some people might not be; but as a whole my course was actually very supportive and very fun. We wanted to build and foster relationships and get and receive support, but we were also trying not to talk too much about the vulnerability that we were all experiencing and not show weakness. As instructors with students, now I think most of us really try to cultivate relationships and build a culture where asking for support is a good thing, so the instructor training is this weird situation that is just a little skewed from the vibe of a normal course.

All in all, the hiking section really worked us as a group. It was hard and it was tiring, but I felt happy with my effort and what I put into it. After the hiking section we moved on to our rock climbing section. I went into the climbing section knowing I was not going to be assessed as a climbing instructor. The weather was warm and the pressure was off, so I had a blast. I have found myself going through cycles with rock climbing; I climb really well for a little while and then I stop climbing. When I start up again, I need to rebuild my confidence and get my climbing head situated again. The instructor training was one of those times for me and I had really great instructors to help me do that.

I got to go on an all female climbing day while on my training. We were a team of three, and my friend Lana led the whole thing. I remember that climb being very run-out between bolts. I was so impressed, because Lana had the best lead head I have ever seen. Instead of panicking or getting scared, she kept saying that looking for the bolts felt like an Easter Egg hunt. It was great to be a part of. I remember telling the other girl climbing

with us, I was so happy Lana was up there leading and not me, because she was so calm and confident.

It was great getting to do an all girls multi-pitch. I think there may have been a little talk between our instructors about how it would be neat to send us girls up together and we were excited to do it.<sup>6</sup> I remember the boys on my training being a little more of the machismo type of climbers. They would want to go climb hard things and kind of show off, but Lana ended up being the only student that got assessed to be a climbing instructor from our training. I think the instructors had confidence in her as a leader, which was awesome. It was just such a fantastic experience; we really had so much fun.

*Climbing development and community.* Before becoming an instructor I had become really excited about climbing and had become pretty involved in the climbing community. When I moved to town after my student course, the only climbing experience I had was from that course, the one where I was totally petrified most of the time. I was living with two other interns and none of us were any good at climbing, but we decided we were going to go over to the bouldering gym and try to figure it out a little bit. I ended up meeting a boy who took me rock climbing a lot. I didn't always feel

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>6</sup> I asked Chris if she thought the instructors had put thought into an all-girl team, because on my instructor training I had a similar experience. The only other girl in the group and I were being assessed as instructors for rock climbing. As the pre-test to go on a multi-pitch with students, all we had to do was swap leads on a multi-pitch with an instructor watching. My instructors put me and the other girl together on the multi-pitch. There were four guys getting assessed, as well, and they purposefully put me and the only other girl together. We went with a male instructor, because our course didn't have any female instructors. The instructor told us, at some point during the climb, that he put us on the climb together on purpose, so we could be in an all-female learning environment, because he thought it would be valuable.

I told Chris that I was still not sure how I felt about that experience for a couple of reasons. First, the instructor was not a female, so it wasn't an all-female learning environment, and second, I didn't want any special treatment. I was trying to prove myself as a competent climber, not competent as a "special" type of climber.

supported when climbing with him. There were definitely moments climbing with this guy where I thought I was going to stop climbing, because I was so afraid of some of the situations I was in. I look back at moments with him and think, if somebody with a higher skill set (e.g., a friend, an instructor, a significant other, whoever that person is), introduces climbing to you in a way that doesn't fit your skills, it's going to be a really negative experience, and that's what I experienced with this particular guy. I thought I was totally done with climbing after climbing with him, but I realized that I didn't have to be done with climbing; I just had to be surrounded by supportive, kind and encouraging people. You know, I have noticed that climbing with some men can be really patronizing and not supportive and I am incredibly particular about who my climbing partners are now.

While climbing with him was mainly a negative experience, in a way, he opened the door to climbing for me. As things became less and less good with him, I really started climbing a lot. I think I just had this feeling of "He sucks, he totally sucks," and that pushed me to climb more and prove myself. I ended up spending a lot of time climbing with my friends. During that time, what I was capable of climbing accelerated really quickly. I went from doing the first sport lead of my life to leading hard 5.10's, which felt so cool. I have noticed that when I am feeling beat-up (and it typically involves a boy), I will throw myself into learning something new. That's what I did with climbing.

I ended up living with a woman, Susan, who had been in town for a number of years. She was one of the pillars of the rock climbing community there and a personal trainer. She became a fantastic climb partner for me. She was incredibly supportive. She

was patient with me when I was scared. I did the workouts she had crafted with a couple of girls I was climbing with and I got really strong really quickly. It felt great! I felt like I was beat-up in one aspect of my life, but I was going to be strong, physically strong, in another aspect.

*Different experiences within the climbing community.* I have had a lot of really positive experiences in the climbing community and I have also witnessed some “jackassery.” I call guys that are engaging in “jackassery,” Dude Bros. One example of Dude Bro “jackassery” happened to my friend Don. Don was a total goofball and he stood out because he was really tall, probably 6’4”, and had an awesome mullet. Don was going out to and the local guys were celebrating a birthday on top of the climb, drinking beers, and throwing cans down to the ground. One of them even yelled out, “Nice mullet, dude!” to Don, as he passed. That example just bubbles up for me when I think about some of the “jackassery” that exists.

I can hang with Dude Bros and climb with them, when and if I need to, but in general that isn’t really my climbing style or the supportive community I seek when I climb. When I picture that group of climbers, I picture male climbers that are really machismo. They tend to be really acrobatic sport climbers, who are climbing really steep climbs, and are very vocal about their abilities. I consider myself a really delicate climber and delicate climbing does not really fit in with the Dude Bros.

It’s interesting that, while I don’t often climb with Dude Bros, they do influence me as a climber. One day I was working on a climb that is hard and a lot of people really hate. For some reason I like it a lot and I was working on the moves one afternoon. I was climbing through this hard part in the climb, the crux, and I slipped but was able to regain

control and pull through the move. When that happened, some Dude Bros were down below - machismo guys. For that particular group of guys to see me at my limit was really exciting. While I don't think that should have mattered to me, for whatever reason, it did. I think that just having them see me climb hard, recover from a near fall, and not take a whipper, makes them see me as a valid climber. In a lot of climbing cultures, I think it is that machismo vibe that rules the community, and I think, sometimes (maybe a lot of times), in that town it did. Anyway, it was really exciting for me to keep it together in that moment after almost falling and for them to think "No, she's got it...she is in it."

A similar moment of proving myself happened during the period of time that I had been doing workouts with Susan. I was at the gym climbing with a guy that I think of as one of the community strong men. He is an OTS instructor and very competent. He is a very technically proficient guy and a great climber; I would say one of our most advanced rock climbing and mountaineering instructors. At one point during our workout he looked at me and said "Holy shit...you are strong!" I don't think I even said anything back to him, but it just felt so good to have one of these hard men tell me I was strong and surprise him in that. It was a really cool and very positive moment for me, but I also questioned why that surprised him to begin with.

Another experience I had in the climbing community was one day climbing with two women from OTS. They were both rock climbing instructors and very competent. The three of us went out for a chill afternoon and when we got to one of the climbs they both looked at me like "Well, are you going to put this up or what?" I looked at them, sort of laughed, and said, "Okay." It was a funny moment, because, climbing with women, I have mostly experienced a really open and accepting atmosphere, a low-



pressure situation where I don't have to worry about being afraid. This was a bit of the opposite end of the spectrum of what I normally get climbing with women. I think they were sizing up my ability.

I recently climbed with two men that live here in Utah, my current home. We went out to climb a steep overhanging 5.10b route. The route necessitated a lock-off, which takes a lot of upper body strength. I have noticed that particular type of climbing is something I need to train for and some men can just power through those moves. I sometimes wish my biceps were bigger! I know that most men have better upper body strength than most women and the climbing community really values that particular physical ability. At climbing competitions you see it all the time, prizes for the best Dyno moves and who can hold heavy things the longest. You don't see the competition of who can balance on this tiny foothold the longest, which is really where women often excel over men in climbing. But that's not valued in our community, or valued less than that brute strength of "I can hold this up."<sup>7</sup> That's not valued in the media, too, because you don't see the pictures of that, you know.

One of the guys I was climbing with that day really struggled on the climb, as well. I think the difference, though, is that there is generally more doubt in people's minds surrounding the ability of women versus men. I just feel like there is this doubt surrounding the technical skills of women. That preconceived doubt in my ability has been a bit of a roadblock for me. Men may say things like, "Are you sure you want to do

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#### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>7</sup> Shortly before our interview together, a climbing competition had come through town. We were both around for parts of it. I was telling Chris about how the competition included a special challenge of carrying planks of wood in your hands and it was solely a competition of upper body strength. I told her how frustrating that was for me, because it highlighted a male physical trait.

that?” or “Do you know that skill?” I just think, “Yes, I do! Back off!” I have noticed that the outdoor community is kind of a masculine culture and I think that questioning happens a lot less to men.

While I have definitely noticed differences in the way I feel climbing with men versus with women, I don’t think it is a straight difference, simply based on gender. For me, I have noticed that there is a feeling of general support when I climb with women and I don’t necessarily know that I find that in most men. At least, that is hard for me to come by in a male partner. However, I look at my experiences with Brad, one of my favorite climbing partners ever, and he is great to climb with. He is supportive and kind while we climb, and not in a very patronizing way, like a lot of men have been with me. As a whole, I do think there are qualities in climbing partners that I appreciate, help me climb better, and make me feel like I am in a comfortable environment, and, so far, the majority have been in women. I have also noticed that most of those positive qualities, for me, are those stereotypically considered to be feminine. For me, to operate well with a climbing partner, I need to share a unique trust relationship with them, which is something I do not often find with men.

Finding people that I trust and that help me develop as a climber has become important to me. I have found climbing with and learning from my friend Melissa and other really strong women has resulted in really positive experiences. I avoid what can be a really patronizing learning experience with men. I really try to find people who I can learn from and feel supported by, without a doubting of my ability attached to it.

All the different experiences I have had climbing with people have shaped my ability to select climbing partners I am comfortable with. I can be selective, and I will say

“No” to most people. I don’t want to go climbing with someone if I think they are going to be an asshole, or if I think they’re not going to be safe. My experiences have also affected how I treat my climbing partners. I find, as I share my skills with other people, whether it’s formally as an Instructor or informally as a friend, it’s really important that the people I climb with feel supported and challenged to an appropriate level. I think a lot about that now.

*Working for OTS.* After my instructor training I got work. I worked my first OTS course that summer. I went into that first contract and I ended up with the best lead instructor ever. He was fantastic and he had so much confidence in me. His confidence in me really went a long way and was a really powerful experience for me. I had so many opportunities to learn and grow.

At the end of that summer I left and I went to a job in Utah. I was going to work for a boarding school in their outdoor program, but was still trying to get more work with OTS. During that year at the boarding school, I was able to lead a short OTS professional course. It was a nine-day contract, leading backpacking for a girls’ school.

That was a really, really fun experience. My students were seventh grade girls and it was a large group. The course was broken up into seven different sections, so we had seven different instructor teams that were all preparing for the course. OTS scheduled all female instructors to work the course, and so 22 female OTS Instructors were all prepping together. That was so fun! You never see that many women getting ready to go out and lead backpacking at the same time.

The coolest part of that course was that the women instructing took over the town for a couple days there. That is not something that exists within our faculty, you never,

ever see that many women in one spot. It was so funny! For me, the biggest takeaway, as an instructor on that course, was seeing all these really strong and confident women together. It was similar to working with the girls on trail crew. The outdoor industry is traditionally not a women's profession, so to have all of these incredibly strong and technically capable women in one spot was amazing. I admire every single one of those women. They are just these powerhouse women. Where I live now in Utah, I am so far from any women that do anything like that, so to be surrounded by those women was really, really cool; just being surrounded by women that hold these values true to themselves.

The course in itself seemed very simple. Our students were just really happy girls and we had no tears during our five days of backpacking. That was a surprise, because I was prepared to encounter some hard times and tears with our students. We had a dozen seventh grade girls and no tears at all. I think they realized that camping is cool.

Our first night we had a rainstorm, which was really neat. We had our evening meeting and it was drizzling on us. The girls were just sitting there, acting like learning in the rain was perfectly normal. As instructors, we were thinking, "Well, this is weird. This is not ideal. I don't really like sitting in the rain;" but the girls were totally fine.

I was working with a woman who worked mostly out of another area and so she hadn't seen much of the terrain we were on. Because of that I was able to coach her, which was really cool. That was the first time that I was in that position where I could coach someone else and my lead instructor totally trusted my decisions and supported me, which was really wonderful.

All in all, it was a great course experience and I received some excellent feedback

from it. One piece of feedback I got was, when being stern or consulting students and giving directive orders, I should try to explain the intent behind it. They thought I came off a little intense. I was totally okay with that feedback; in that instructor team, I agree, I took on that role.

I think, in this case, working an all girls course, the evaluation expectation would be different if there was a male instructor.<sup>8</sup> We have some instructors that are very nurturing, but I think, personally, that I lead in a more masculine way. I think there is a spectrum of traditionally women's characteristics and traditionally men's characteristics and I think that, in that spectrum, my leadership falls towards more of the male side. I am more directive and have a traditionally masculine leadership style. It is interesting to me. Recently, I was talking to my friend Mark, who is not connected to OTS, about different communication styles. I was explaining to him that, as I lead and as I communicate, I am as direct and use as few words as I can. I think, in terms of being an instructor, my very straight-line and very direct communication style is usually really appreciated and I think that's, traditionally, a more masculine style; but, I think, with all girls and with that younger age group, I was perceived as harsh and not delicate enough.

*Most recent/ most difficult course.* My next and most recent course was this past summer. The course, as a whole, was a lot of work, but also really rewarding. We had three instructors: The lead instructor Chuck, a new instructor Jen, and myself. Chuck did not demonstrate much confidence in Jen and I, which caused some issues. I felt like there

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>8</sup> I told Chris, during our interview, about an all female course I had worked that same summer. It was similar to Chris's course in that it was a group of young (14 and 15-year-old) females, who already knew each other. I received similar feedback on that course to Chris's. I was told by my students that I could have been more nurturing. While I do not think I treated my students any differently than I treated other groups, this was the first time I had received that kind of feedback.

were times I would voice my opinion about something to Chuck, and it wasn't really received. So finally we had a conversation about it. I just said, "I feel that my ideas are not being heard very well, and I want you to know that we all come to this course with a variety of skill sets. I want you to acknowledge that." I went on to point out that, "I don't want the ideas of Jen and I to just be brushed aside." It was an interesting conversation and I think we learned from it as an instructor team.

Our team worked through that and I think that my concerns were really important things for Chuck to hear. For me, that relationship with my lead instructor was a big change. I went from having so much input in that first contract, and having so much trust and confidence, to having very little. From my course with Chuck, I realized that not every course would be like that first one was. I also learned, however, that I wanted to make sure that every instructor had a voice on my instructor team and helped Chuck realize that it was not just his course, that we were a team. We made decisions together.

It is interesting to think about this past course in comparison to my first. I don't know what the different factors were that played into this, but I felt like I had to prove myself so much to Chuck. I don't know if it was because I was young, or because I was a woman. I don't know what it was, but there were so many doubts from him and so much that I felt I needed to prove to him. We had challenging discussions about it, because he did not trust my decisions. I think if the course with Chuck and my first courses had been flip-flopped, I would be feeling very differently about my competency as an instructor. I know I am a good instructor, but if that had been my first course I think I would have had a lot of self-doubt. Instead, with the order they were in, I came off of that first course feeling like my skills had been affirmed and validated, which gave me confidence to have

those discussions on my most recent course.

*Working in Utah.* So, throughout my time working as an instructor for OTS, I have been working during the school year at a boarding school in Utah. While I am working in Utah, I miss my work with OTS and the people there. But, financially, I need the stable work during the year. I like to have stability in my life and I like to have a home. I like to know when my next paycheck is coming and this job gives that to me.

I had heard about the job through OTS connections and the man I was going to be working under had worked for OTS, as well, so I was excited to take the position. The initial job I took here was with the outdoor program. I was in that position for probably six weeks when I figured out that it was not the right position for me. In that position, I had a supervisor that was a really hard person to work with, and so I transitioned out of that role to a different role in the school.

My initial job with the outdoor program started out great. I drove into this little town in Utah with a largely Mormon population of about 3,000. I am not Mormon, so that, in itself, made me feel like a bit of an outsider. I was excited, however, to work with the man I knew from OTS. I was excited, because I thought we would have similar values, coming from working for the same company previously, but things quickly went downhill.

I started noticing that I would be given responsibility, but not given enough detail. I was not given any specifics, such as time frame, etc. So, it would be passed off to me, then he would ask me a question about what I had been working on and he would pull back the responsibility, taking over the project. It just made me feel awful. After he took the responsibility away from me, he would not actually do the work; so, I ended up fixing

his lack of work. This delegation, and then lack of delegation and blame, led to some bullying in the workplace from this supervisor. It got to the point where I finally had to go to his supervisor and say I would not work for him any more. I still have serious distrust for this guy.

When I try to think about what was the root of our issues together, I think a few underlying pieces are that he doesn't manage people well in general, but also that he doesn't work with women well. I think he really doesn't work well with women that he feels threatened by. I honestly think he was worried about a woman coming in and doing his job better than he did. I don't even want to be around him socially. I remember times when he really twisted the truth in a situation. Because of that, I felt like I needed to cover myself and only work with him through email. It just felt really totally awful having to cover my butt all the time, because I had such distrust for this guy.

I've thought about how my experiences, specifically at this school, have affected me. I think one thing I've been able to do with the feelings of being really hurt is remembering that I am a really competent person in the outdoors. In the outdoor arena I know what I don't know and I feel confident in my skills. I have been able to work on putting aside my need to prove myself and not have that bother me. On a professional level, I know I am a good leader. I have evaluations that tell me so. I have realized, here, that I do not have to put up with doubt and I do not have to prove myself to this vindictive supervisor.

In my new job at the school I plan the weekends for our boarding students. I have found, even without specifically using my outdoor skills on a regular basis, I can still teach a number of things that are really important to me. I joke with my students that I'm



a life coach.

We have a bouldering room at the school and I climb with the students sometimes. I have realized I don't need to formally hold the role of outdoor educator to be a good adult and a good teacher in their lives. I have seen that unfold with one student in particular. He only started climbing probably in February of last year and he loves it. So, as often as I can, I open up the climbing room and I have a number of students come in to climb with me. The senior student is pretty strong and he can do these really bicep-intensive moves. Then I will throw in a really delicate move, which is the kind of climbing I do well. I fall off on his bicep moves and he falls off on my delicate moves. I think for a 17 year old boy, who is learning to climb, it is pretty awesome that he is learning from a young female. I think he is seeing the value of delicate climbing. I want my students to see the values and the strengths of female climbers. I hope those values continue to where he doesn't become like some of the men in the climbing community.<sup>9</sup>

When I look for things [related to climbing] to share with my students (e.g., I was looking for videos to share with them in the fall), it's always dudes climbing. It's always guys like Chris Sharma and Adam Ondra in the media. When I think about female

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>9</sup> Here, Chris said, "I hope those values continue to where he doesn't become like these guys you were talking about." I had told Chris a story about running a rock wall at a university and how the whole place had a very masculine and macho feel. What was valued and important was being strong and looking good. I told Chris that I had heard one of my staff members say that what he liked most about working there were girls in yoga pants. I perceived it as a sexist, sexualized, and gendered environment. Walking around, showing off muscles, made you cool there.

I told Chris that I had experiences with climbing in a small town, similar to those she is experiencing. I tried a few times to find climbing partners and every time the same themes came up. The men I climbed with seemed to believe they had superior climbing skill. They valued physical prowess, as opposed to athletic skill, to the point that they almost made fun of my partner and I.

climbers in the industry, we have girls like Sasha DeGulian , who wear the shortest little shorts and a sports bra. I don't have a problem with her as a climber. She's an amazing climber, but I have such a problem with her, because she is an incredible climber, with no clothes on. I feel like the strong female climbers that are getting media attention are being subjected to objectification and are becoming sexualized women in media. I just wish that women could go be awesome climbers and also put some damn clothes on. I wish all climbers, men and women, could simply be excellent climbers and take the body out of the situation. I hope I can counteract some of that media influence for my students.

Overall, being in Utah has been an interesting experience for me. In Utah, women are not considered leaders. I think women as leaders are undervalued here and maybe that's because of the influence of the Mormon Church. I think for women to receive positions of authority they really have to very much prove themselves. That is something that men don't have to do here. I think, because men have historically pioneered the outdoor world as a whole, there are still strings of that that exist. However, I think it is a lot less powerful in other places than what I have been experiencing here in Utah. I feel like, when I go back to my work at OTS, that pressure to prove myself as a woman will be there, sure, to some extent, but compared to Utah it will be a huge breath of fresh air

*The Frank story.* I recently went on a trip to the Tetons with my friend Frank. While I love spending time outdoors with Frank, there were some interesting things that occurred this summer. Frank is very experienced in the outdoors; he had previously been a backcountry ranger at a number of different parks. We were hiking together probably seven or eight miles a day and he would not let me carry the backpack until probably the third day. It was confusing, because I knew that he knew I just got off this backpacking

course, he knew what I had been doing during the summer, and he knew I was a strong and capable person, but it was the third day before I carried the backpack at all! In my mind, I kept thinking, “This is weird... this is a little patronizing.” But, I let him carry it. I figured, “Whatever, he can carry the backpack. It’s heavy; sure he can carry it.” It was really very interesting.

At one point we met this couple and we went into this really cool cave with them. The guy in the couple was from the area and he grew up going into this cave. We were in this section of the cave and I am crawling ahead in this really tight spot. I hear Frank behind me talking to the couple and he says, “Yeah she’s an OTS Instructor ...she’s an EMT!” I was crawling around up there by myself and thinking how weird this was. First, Frank is being kind of really patronizing (I couldn’t even carry the backpack, until the third day of hiking together), and now he’s here with this couple and bragging about my skill set! It was just like a very strange thing.

The couple we were with had very traditional roles. At one point on our cave exploration, we had to do a down-climb section. The man in the couple went down first and Frank went down next. Then the guy from the couple says, “I’ll get my lady. You get yours.” The guy starts spotting his wife on this down-climb and Frank humors him and kind of spots me as I down-climb. I am sure Frank was thinking how ridiculous that was, because he knew I was a good climber and just fine down-climbing that section. He didn’t say anything to the couple though; he just went ahead and spotted me anyway.<sup>10</sup>

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>10</sup> When Chris was telling me this story, I brought up the idea of “ally-ship.” I told Chris that, when I heard her story, I wished that Frank had turned around and told the couple, “My girl is actually a way better climber than me and I do not need to spot her.” Chris enthusiastically agreed. I mentioned that I had had similar experiences. We both agreed that we want men not to sometimes think of us as competent, and sometimes lift us up and defend our capabilities, but

Then we were coming out of the cave and walking over a section with water flowing down this little rock face. It was easy enough to step down; we just had to be careful and not step on something slippery. Frank was wearing these minimalist shoes and I was wearing rock climbing approach shoes. I was fine in my rock shoes, but Frank was treading very carefully and he was slipping a little. It was just this weird moment, where like I saw him about to fall and get hurt, and I am trying not to hover and trying not to spot him. I was just thinking, “he is going to fall here...” I knew that it would bruise his ego, if I were there spotting him, saying, “Don’t fall,” but I do that with my students all the time! With Frank, I was just a friend, so it was a different story. I felt like I could not act up to my level of competency, because he would get a bruised ego. It was such a weird day, I just felt something weird going on, and I still don’t think I know what it was exactly. I remember it as funny.<sup>11</sup>

I think of Frank as a very progressive thinker.<sup>12</sup> He will call himself a feminist,

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

stand up in the moment and be an ally. This also sparked laughter between us. For me, that laughter resulted from the realization that most of my male friends are so far from being that for me.

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<sup>11</sup> As Chris was telling me about her experience with Frank, she and I were laughing. At one point I asked her, “How can we be laughing about this?” I said, “If we aren’t laughing, we’re crying.” Chris started talking about picking our battles. I told Chris about situations where I feel as if I am “settling.” I just have to laugh things off, because that is the only way I can figure out how to deal with those situations. I want to have friends to climb with; even if they sometimes act patronizing, I want them as climbing partners. I told Chris that I want to fit in. She agreed. I explained that I also want change to happen personally, change to happen in our community, and change to happen in our industry. Chris agreed. I told Chris that situations, similar to those we experience climbing, cause me to reflect on my role and what I might do to facilitate change. She has the same reaction to those moments.

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<sup>12</sup> Here Chris and I discussed disconnect between beliefs and actions among our male friends. I told Chris about some of the guys I climb with and explained that they are nice guys. If you were to meet them in a room, they would be kind. If I asked them if they were feminist, they might not

but then in his actions, he does differently. I think I can look at that situation as funny, because I think he at least tries. I think there are people that distinctly and clearly put down women and others who just don't necessarily realize what they're doing. Frank doesn't realize what he's doing. I think, in part, it may be because he is from the South. He was brought up to be a gentleman and was raised in that value system. There have been times when he has told me that I have to walk on the inside of the sidewalk - just so many examples of what I consider a weird Southern upbringing. I think I can laugh about it, looking back, because he also recognizes my strengths. It is weird that he carried the backpack, but I think he also knew I was competent and he would never undermine that. Then, he was talking to the couple about my skill set and really flaunting my skills. I feel like some of the values are ingrained in him. I'm not going to change him at all, so either I can get really upset about it and want to shake him, or I can kind of laugh it off.

When I think about that situation a couple of things come to mind. The first is that I wonder how he talks about me, when I'm not there. Does he say, "Chris and I had a great time and it was fantastic?" I have thought about that a little bit, and I think I'm one of his friends that is the most proficient in the outdoors. So, I wonder, does he speak of me in that way, when he's speaking to his other friends? The other thing I think about is that he has been a backcountry park ranger for a while in a number of different parks and I think that could be the next job for me. I think it is an ideal career where I can bring in education and spending time outside. I think it would be a really good career for me. I have only become interested in this, because of the work that he's done - that he's talked

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#### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

say "Yes," but they wouldn't bash feminism. However, when climbing with them, they can be so patronizing and unsupportive.

about with me. So, I think about other park rangers and people seeing a strong woman in a backcountry park ranger position. I think I could really place a focus on female skills and really show women in a comparable arena.

Originally, Frank and I had planned to go rock climbing in City of Rocks, instead of going to the Tetons. Frank was a pretty new climber and I said to him “If I see safe skills from you and give you some really basic instruction, like I am psyched to lead you up a multi-pitch.” It would have been really interesting, because I would have been guiding him up. I was thinking about what that would be like and how he would respond to that. We had never hung out in a situation where I was the one with more knowledge. I am the one with greater experience. I was thinking about how that may change the way we interact together.

In romantic relationships I have never been the more technically experienced person. In college, my boyfriend was a bike racer and we would go out for rides together, but he was always faster and he was always more experienced. Then in climbing, I would say I have had two relationships. One of those was a very patronizing relationship. I felt very dumbed down and my skills really dumbed down. Then the second I felt really supported by him and really enjoyed climbing with him, but he was always a better climber than me.

I was totally looking forward to leading Frank on a multi-pitch and being the more experienced person. I don’t know how he would have responded to it, but it is really something I hope to do one day. I really want to take somebody that I am in a relationship with up a climb and have me be kind-of the expert there. I do think that, if I do that one day, it will be with the knowledge that it could change the relationship. I find that, with

the guys that I date, I am always learning something from them and they stimulate me in an intellectual way. I think a good healthy relationship reciprocates and both people are always learning from each other.

I think, in a lot of ways, my work and what I do is that learning piece for the men in my life. My work is so different from whatever they do and it is surprising for them to see me in that position, so they are learning a lot from that. Then I think, bringing in a physical ability component where I may have an ability that he, the man, might not, is something I want to experience. I think some men can feel really threatened by that, but I think “good” men don’t feel threatened by that.

*Why outdoor education is important for me.* There have been a lot of different pieces of my life that have played a role in who I am now. When I think about those pieces, they weren’t all necessarily outdoor pieces, but so many of them were. I think riding bicycles with my boyfriend in college, rowing crew while I was in college, running while I was in high school, those were formative pieces in me that were primarily outdoor pieces. None of those experiences, however, had an emphasis on communication in the way that I was taught as an OTS student.

Without reflection and communication I think that some formative experiences can get you set in roles that do not challenge you or facilitate growth. I look back at biking with my boyfriend in college, or climbing with my boyfriend at OTS. I had an inferior skill set. Without reflection, I got set in those roles. In those experiences, it was only learning how to bike, or learning how to climb, there was no larger discussion about articulating needs or communicating with one another that really empowers and facilitates growth.

I have found that, for me, it is really the people that make an experience. I have been participating outdoors my whole life and I think that has instilled a value in me and that I know being outside makes me feel good. But I think it goes beyond that, too. I think it is the people I am with that truly make an experience.

I have found people throughout my life who have been making experiences amazing and empowering for me. Going forward, I want to be that person for other people. I recently ran into one of my students in the grocery store. She had been a student of mine in the fall in the basic rock climbing class, which was kind of the gateway for her. She came running up to me in the grocery store and told me all about her summer. She told me all about how they did climbing, rappelling and different things. She told me that she was always the first person to climb or rappel. She always wanted to stay with the instructors and help break down or set up equipment. I was so excited, as she was telling me all of this. I felt like I had made an impact on her life, and to see her doing that stuff at 16 years old was so cool. I have had people empowering me and I want to be that for others. I want to be able to open up that door and do that for other people.<sup>13</sup>

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>13</sup> I told Chris that we were lucky to have taken a course at OTS. However, even there, I have had instructors, or have seen co-instructors, not being good coaches. I told her, I think sometimes there is the feeling that “I am supposed to be doing this, because I am an instructor.” However, I usually experienced instructors who really wanted to coach, who took the time, and made me feel comfortable. I told Chris that I had benefitted most from people who were really invested in my development.

Chris and I share a mutual climbing friend. Our friend Diane had been an instructor of mine, when I was an OTS student. I told Chris that Diane had been one of those people for me. She was an instructor who was invested in her students’ development, and, after my coursework with her, she became a friend, as well. In both roles, she took the time to coach me. She watched me do my first trad lead and then took the time to watch me do it again. I told Chris how valuable people like that had been to me.

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I think a lot about when we are our best selves, like when I am the best person I can be. For me, when I'm in my career at outdoor education and I'm teaching outside, I think that is the best person that I am. I think that environment really shows me as myself, my unrestrained self. When I am outside, teaching these skills, I am the best teacher and the best individual that I can be. For me, knowing that and holding onto that have been really important.

I think I can also affect the industry, just by being a female in this field. The outdoor industry is making a slow transition to more women working in it and I think I am a part of that - that all women who work in the industry are a part of that. I go about my day and climb, backpack, and do these different things, and other women observe that. When they see me do it, they realize it is okay to do these things, too. Women realize they can do this and it's acceptable. What people think of, when they think of their dream career growing up, is not usually outdoor education. But, I think demonstrating that this field exists for young girls and showing that women can be strong, powerful, and proficient outdoor educators is really the best thing and I think that's where we need to change.

Here at school, I boulder probably three nights a week and I have about five different girls that are coming throughout the week. One of the biggest things for me is simply the interaction with these students. I want to be an influential, positive adult in their lives. I think that my day-to-day interactions, as well as a shift in media portrayals

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### **Narratives of collaborative storytelling**

Chris and I agreed that we wanted to be that for other women. I told Chris that, "Talking about this makes me feel I'm not doing a good enough job, being that person for other people." She strongly disagreed, reminding me that, between interviews, I had taken her climbing and supported her first multi-pitch lead. She said, "You did that for me; and now, as I said, I'm really excited to take friends to do multi-pitch leads!"

of women, can really make a big change. I can interact with young girls and show them that they can be powerful and skilled, and, if the media would portray these amazing women climbers as strong and powerful women that are not in bikinis, we could really impact the profession.

While I can't directly make the media change, my work as an outdoor educator is on the ground level, and, for me, it's on that ground level that I can use leverage in the outdoor industry. I feel like I can facilitate a change through role-modeling and having conversations about gender within our industry. An example of this happened on my course this summer. I had an experience on the course where I was with three girls from my course and our lead instructor Chuck. The five of us together were going to scout a river and we ran into this group of men from Utah all wearing BYU sweatshirts. We ran into this group of men and they were asking us a number of questions about our course, and I was asking them questions. Before we split, they visited with Chuck and said something like, "I hope you have a great time with the girls." We walked on for a little bit and I realized these guys did not think I was a leader on the course. It may have been a Utah piece as well, but they thought I can't be a leader, because I'm a woman. It made me so mad, but I had a conversation with the girls about it. The girls could see I was so fired up about it and I was so angry, so we had a conversation about it. I don't think they would have picked up on that assumption from those men had we not discussed it. But if we, as female outdoor leaders, stop and have a conversation about why those men assumed I could not be a leader, because I am a female, we can actually make people conscious of it. I think about those conversations spreading and the power they could have.

*My future in outdoor education.* I guess I am really unsure what is next for me. I love the time I spend in the mountains, but I think in the next couple of years I will feel the desire for a family more. Whether that's just maintaining a relationship and keeping a partner in my life, or actually wanting to start a family. I think about having a home, and how people that I know live in their cars. They work a lot of field contracts and live in their car the rest of the time. I love working field contracts, but I also like having a home. Being able to balance those things is really important to me and I don't think that is something you can easily have while working in the field full time.

I have seen some women that come back to field instructing after their children make it to school age, but I think, in those early years, it's really hard to be a field instructor. I don't know if I'll have a family or not, but I think just looking at where I am right now it would be hard to even have a relationship. Most people outside of the very immediate outdoor community don't understand the work I do. They don't understand that I will go off for long, long periods of time. This last year I have tried two relationships and, in both, they said, "You are gone too much, we can't maintain this relationship." Having a partner in my life feels important. For that to happen, my partner either needs to understand my work and understand that I'm going to be gone for a month, but I will be back; or I need to structure my life differently, so that I can have that part of my life.

***Lauren.***

*Childhood.* As a kid I really loved being outside and I think I was motivated by the independence and "survival" aspect of it. I think it was a very empowering experience. I was just recently telling someone about this: I remember building forts and

stuff, and I would look at my sister, who was not practicing these skills as determinedly, and I'd think, "She's just never going to make it. Thank God, I will; but her... no." I just remember spending hours and hours creating stuff in nature and just being out there by myself. I think that was definitely a passion of mine. My parents also took me car camping. I remember it as a really positive thing for our family; but my parents went through a divorce when I was around ten and we did less of that stuff. I didn't really do outdoor stuff again until I was in college.

My mom instilled a pretty strong environmental ethic in my siblings and me. For example, my mom would never let us buy things that had too much packaging. I have this memory of being with my sister and we wanted to get those little chips that are individually packaged for lunch boxes. My sister was like, "Let's ask Mom if we can get this." I told her to put it back. I knew Mom was going to say that it was too much packaging. At the time it was miserable, but it really stuck with me.

I feel like, as a kid, I didn't really appreciate the environmental ethic thing. It is interesting because that ethic was not something Mom was raised with and it wasn't something that my dad was on board with. I think part of that and part of other aspects of my mom's raised consciousness was actually a result of my parents' divorce. I had the opportunity to see my mom learning and changing and becoming maybe a little more adventurous as a person. I think I was pretty inspired by that in subtle ways. I think she really instilled in me a sense that I could do whatever I wanted: be free and be educated. I think that definitely influenced me and then the environmental stuff came way later.

High school is when I started becoming more aware and more politically conscious. I remember we canvassed, as a family, for a senator who was very

environmental. I think it was around then that I started to come into my own political consciousness. My political consciousness became partly an environmental ethic, but also this larger focus on empowering other people and that's how I was drawn to outdoor education. I think the practices that I use in outdoor education are really a way to get people to critically think: to look at their life, reflect, and have this nice community experience. So, I developed awareness of my own values, ethics and things I wanted to support.

I went to a college that had a big outdoor education program. That was the first time that I was introduced to outdoor education as a field. I thought, "Oh, it's fun and it's also just really effective." I liked that. One of the main reasons I went there was because they had this outdoor orientation: a backpacking trip. I thought that sounded so awesome. I also liked that the school supported something like that and considered it important.

*College.* I started school and did my outdoor orientation trip. I still have some good friends from that trip, which is cool. It was a five-day backpacking trip and it just felt very adventurous. It really was a great way to start school. I really loved it. Jessica, the woman who ran that program, was actually a former OTS instructor. I think it was actually mostly her, to be honest, that I was so inspired by. She wasn't even in the field with us, but she ran the program and she was very cool.

I took an introduction to rock climbing class my first semester. I loved it and I realized that I was actually pretty good at it. Jessica also recognized that it was something I could really pursue and maybe be successful at; so she kind of mentored me, which was really awesome and I started modeling my life after hers. That was really great. I really loved climbing and the technical systems part of it, too. It was very exciting to realize

that I could do stuff like that. There was an element that was empowering, I guess.

Jessica was a huge part of my introduction into the outdoor community. She was so cool and kind of recruited me. I remembered her from orientation and then had her as an instructor during the rock climbing class. I didn't even know outdoor education was a thing. I just started chatting with her and going to visit her during her office hours and things like that. That's when she said to me, "Here's what you need to do. You need to do your WFR [Wilderness First Responder], you need to do this and that, and you could totally be doing this trip next year." She definitely went out of her way to take time to chat with me. That was really awesome.

It is kind of amazing to think about the time she put in. I remember that she was a cross-country coach and we went on runs a couple of times. I had told her, "Oh, that's something I'd love to do, but I don't have the experience." She was like, "Oh, my gosh! We can totally do it." She really went out of her way and that was amazing. I didn't really appreciate it at the time, but I think I would basically be a completely different person had I not met her.

Over the winter we trained to lead the next year's orientation trip and I took wilderness first aid in the spring. With that push, I just kind of started moving toward outdoor education as a minor. I led the trip again the year after that and during that second year I actually helped facilitate the whole training of the other students. I think Jessica just did that for me: she recognized that I had some unique skills in facilitating and she said, "There's a lot of people here who have technical skills. I think you have a lot to offer in terms of how to create, like, a culture that you want." I was like, "OK, I can do that. I got this."

Being a part of the outdoor education group at my school was very inspiring and I just really liked the community. It seemed like people were just cool, competent, and very easy to get along with. They did not seem to have a whole lot of like emotional baggage, which I think was a bit different than how I grew up. There was something about it that was just a little more even-keel and I really liked that.

My major was peace conflict and global studies. There was something about the activism in my family, as well as in my major, which, while very important to me, I did not like. Even though the issues themselves were important to me, it was very activism-based and very galvanized. I kind of scooted toward outdoor education a little more. Feminism and sexuality were my biggest interests in the activist realm, but I just felt like the emotional and aggressive part of it was not working for me in the end.

I started climbing a bunch in college after that; I sport-climbed a ton. My friends I had met in the climbing class and I would do trips down to the Red River Gorge and the New River Gorge. Then I got a boyfriend that could climb 5.12. While I was dating him, I realized I had this amazing opportunity to increase my climbing ability, because he was so advanced. I was like I really need to climb as much as possible while I'm with this person. We eventually broke up, but after we split he sent me a gri-gri (an expensive belay device) in the mail for my birthday that year. He said that he had seen so many women stop climbing when the relationship where they did most of their climbing ended. He said he didn't want that to happen to me; I was a good climber and I should not give it up. That was pretty amazing.

I really loved climbing. What I loved about it, initially, was just the movement felt so good to me. It felt graceful and I loved having something to do where you could be

outside all day and engage. I really didn't know much, and I think that was some of the happiest I've been in my climbing career. I feel like now, if I know the grade of something, then I all of a sudden I start getting this story in my head of, "Okay, this should be hard for me or this should be easy for me." It takes away the actual pure joyful experience of it. In my early climbing memories, I just really liked climbing for climbing. It was movement, and it was being outside, and it was hanging out. That's it.

The guys I was climbing with a lot were very strong and sort-of macho, but I wasn't trying to compete with anyone. I don't think I really cared. I felt like I was in this totally other zone and they were just cool climbers. So, I just observed them as this other culture that I wasn't really part of and wasn't really trying to be. Then when I started getting better, all this pressure for me started. I had this feeling where all of a sudden I was like, if I get better I actually could climb some of these things, and then I just started getting really weird in my head.

*Finding outdoor education after college.* My very first summer after college I worked for a camp that ran short backpacking trips, mountain biking, whitewater rafting and rock climbing. That was my first outdoor job. The organization itself was pretty disorganized: they didn't give us any time off when they were supposed to, and I think I got \$1200 the whole summer, which was kind of absurd. However, I did gain some experience, so I guess that was good. The main thing was, I learned to take a lot of the theory I had learned in college and apply it. When I was with my campers, it was great.

Next I took a totally non-outdoor related job and did not like the day-to-day work I was doing. I just got bored. I reflected on what I actually wanted to be doing on a daily basis and just kind of circled back to education. I thought, "What am I interested in, good



at, and has a long-term outcome while also having in-the-moment relationship-building and challenge?” The answer I found in that moment was a preschool teacher. It was the one thing I could do that fit my criteria and I was qualified for. I did that for four years. It was awesome. I had a great group of women that I would climb with and in the summers I would do outdoor education stuff.

Then again, I got a little bit bored. It was cool and I felt like I was doing meaningful stuff everyday, but I was also in a classroom most of the time and it just felt pretty limiting. The school was actually so flexible with me; I went to a job share with another woman. We would do month-long leaves of absence and cover for each other. It was so kick-ass. What [the school did that] was awesome is that I was going to leave, so I told them, “OK, here's what I want: I want to be able to have this flexibility, but I'm still committed to being here long-term. I just need full health insurance, and a raise, and then she and I will do this.” They said, “Sure.” It was awesome.

*OTS course.* It was during one of those summers that I was able to take an OTS course. A bunch of my buddies in school had taken one and I really wanted to. I took an outdoor educator course that included backpacking and sea kayaking. On that course I made it very clear to my instructor that I want to be an instructor someday. I had an interest before that course, but it was really seeing my instructors living their life and doing that job that made it, all of a sudden, become possible and clear to me.

The experience was awesome, but it was definitely a stretch financially. I had this determination like, “I am going to do this.” I got a scholarship and my work was really flexible with giving me time off. I just kind of went for it. I was such a bad student. I had way too much theory and I had no experience. That translated to me being a total brat: I

had this self-perception of being this like professional educator and, at the same time, I had zero outdoor experience. I had done backpacking on-trail during summer with 12-year-olds. I had this complete misperception of my own skills and then, when it got hard, I really wanted to blame the instructors. It just got into this weird place for me, where it kind of hurt my pride a bit, and I took that out on the instructors not teaching well enough. I wasn't really someone who wanted to learn the hard way, and yet that's the best way to learn; and so they're letting that happen, and then I'd be pissed at them for that. I did get recommended for an instructor training, so I was not totally out of control, but it's funny to think about now, seeing both sides.

As a whole, the course was great. Technically, I was so over my head, but I learned a lot, too. I saw my instructors and they were comfortable, happy and calm, and knew how to take care of themselves. I feel like I learned to be comfortable in the end and I was really proud of myself. It was really challenging and I could recognize that it was really hard and I had done it. That felt really good and I wanted to do it again.

My instructors had recommended me for an instructor training, and after my course the Women's Initiative Coordinator contacted me, which was a huge thing. She contacted me and I was able to ask her what I needed to do to get on an instructor training in the future. She and I came up with a plan for me for the next two years. She said I should work for other companies and I should prioritize companies that work in course areas where OTS works. That was a piece of advice I followed when selecting other companies to work for.

I decided to take my instructor training in 2009 and basically left my job at the preschool to do it. My hope was to start working full-time for OTS and I thought I would

probably do it for two years, and if I didn't like it, I would come back and do early childhood education again. I never did go back to preschool though.

OTS offered a pre- instructor training climbing seminar for women. I thought, "Maybe I can be a climbing instructor; that would be awesome." So I took the seminar. It was five days of climbing and then we would have chats about leadership curriculum and setting yourself up for success on the instructor training. We had this weird thing happen where one of our instructors had been there for a few days and then she had some sort-of family conflict and a different instructor took her place. The original instructor was great. She climbs so hard and was super cool. I really learned a lot from her. She actually failed her instructor training when she started and she talked about that. It was very interesting and a lot of that was related to gender and how she presented herself. It was very cool to hear about her experience.

The woman that replaced her kind of perpetuated some of the fear, feelings of isolation, and worries that I had. I tell people all the time that, just because you're a woman, doesn't mean you have any interest in feminism or supporting other women. In fact, I think that instructor may have felt so pressured in her career that she was pressuring us to not mess-up. I think she wanted us to be highly technically confident women and she did not want people to be able to say things like, "Oh, women at OTS are not as good with their technical systems." So I think she was really hard on us, with those sorts of motivations in mind.

I remember when we were practicing gear anchors. I had never placed a cam in my life and she just said, "Here ya' go; go build a gear anchor." I was really overwhelmed and it was taking us forever. I just remember her standing over us and

looking at us; it was not cool. It was not a cool learning environment for me right then and I actually went and cried.

It was very intimidating. I realized that I knew nothing about climbing at that point, which was kind of a heartbreaker, but was a good thing. It felt similar to my student course, where I thought I had all this knowledge coming in. I had all this muscle memory for climbing and I was pretty strong, but I actually didn't know anything. It was this weird setup again, where I was in this odd place: my self-perception being pretty off in terms of reality. That was just challenging for me to wrap my head around.

As a whole, I loved the seminar. It was great. I loved the other women on the course and they are still some of my closest friends. I really bonded with them. I had a great experience on that course that stands out to me. I was leading something that was a little hard for me. The replacement instructor was belaying me. I had just hooked a bolt. The next move seemed hard and I asked, "Can you take?" She said "No." I was like, "What?" She said, "No, I'm not going to. Either fall or go for it, but I'm not going to take it." That was, honestly, one of the best things anyone has ever done for me. It was hard, but she could see that that was my next step. I needed to just go for stuff, trust the system, and have a consequence. She could tell I had been getting by, because I was strong enough to climb the things I wanted to climb, but that was not really going for it in climbing. I thought, "Okay, fine," and I finished the route. I didn't fall. That was the first time I came face-to-face with some of my own climbing demons. I realized that was actually just about fear and doubt, and not about my ability to just focus and climb.

It was an awesome moment, with an awesome group, and I trusted her. I didn't think she was the best instructor, but she was another woman at least, and I did trust her. I

really needed that, and I can't imagine another scenario where that would have been a positive experience. If that had been someone else belaying me, or if it had been a different group of people, it could have gone very differently. I would have felt maybe really embarrassed or not wanted to just go for it. That group was a very empowering group to be a part of, so I feel like she was able to do that and it worked for me. I feel like there are other times I've been put on the spot and it really sucked.<sup>14</sup>

One time I really got put on the spot (and it didn't go well) was later in my career. I had become a rock-climbing instructor by this time and I got put on the spot demonstrating this full rescue progression. I was prepping for a course and the guy who was practicing the rescue progression with me was just really a jerk in that moment. When we practice rescues, we usually talk through what we're going to do, we do a piece of it, and then we do it. Instead of that approach, he said, "All right, 45-minute challenge. Go." I had to do the whole thing and it was not great. Even though I know all the skills, I did not do a great job. I was trying to problem-solve, using the terrain to our advantage, and he told me I could not use terrain. I understand that he wanted me to practice a specific type of rescue, but it was just the way he presented himself and the way he was talking to me that was hard. I thought, "He can see that I'm nervous; he can see that I'm not having a good time here." He didn't have to also, literally, have his arms folded and give me this attitude. He could have said, "Hey, nice use of terrain," or "I see what you're

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>14</sup> I told Lauren about a similar experience. I don't always respond well to being put on the spot; however, on this occasion it was just what I needed. I was climbing with my friend Mellissa. The climb was a bit above my comfortable grade. I asked Mellissa to take and she said "No." In the past I have been upset by that, but this time it worked. Mellissa and I were close friends and we had built a strong trust with each other. I felt supported by her and she was very encouraging; perhaps that was why it worked well for me. I felt comfortable and was not afraid of failing in front of her. I told Lauren that I remember it as an important turning point in my climbing.

doing, but I want to practice this fully weighted." Instead, he just made me feel stupid. It was just so demeaning.

I don't know what was so different about my experience on the women's course, and why that situation (of being put on the spot) was empowering instead of awful, but it was. The whole women's seminar was really good for me and I think really helped me push my climbing to the next level. I do think that seminar is effective, because it is all women. I don't know exactly why, but it is. I think there was this social "peace." It was just a little more comfortable for me. I remember going out to eat with the group after our seminar and someone asked about people's relationship statuses. They asked me if I had a partner or anything, and I just felt socially really comfortable with all women. I really don't think I would have if there had been men as a part of that. I think the social comfort is what led to me being able to take risks with other things that I really needed to.

*Instructor training.* I had a really good time on my instructor training and I felt like I was definitely set up to do well, which was a really helpful reminder. I remember one of my instructors saying, "You're here because we want you to work. You wouldn't be on this course if that weren't the case. We're just here for you to learn more and to set you up well to be an awesome instructor." That really helped and that specific instructor was just an awesome mentor to me. She was our course leader and I really liked the tone that she had. A lot of the course was hard for me, because I was on terrain that I had not been in before. We travelled on a lot of snow, which was new to me. I had three women as the instructors for my course and there were a lot of things that were really great.

There were also moments that were not so great. One day I remember was the day I was leading. It was a day where I was supposed to make decisions and lead the group.

My group was these three dudes, all back country skiers, and an instructor. I was trying to make a decision and said, “To be honest, I do not have the information that we need to make this decision; what do people think we should do?” It was a day with avalanche conditions and I had no real experience in snow. My group said, “You should just make the best decisions you can.” I didn’t want to just puff up my chest and put something out there just to have these three dudes be like, “Well, that’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.” I didn’t know anything about the terrain we were in that day and I didn’t know how to effectively manage it. I just felt very put-on-the-spot and awkward. The whole situation was horrible and very intimidating.

I explained that this was new terrain for me and I wanted their input, but they would not help. The instructor was not helping me either. I felt just like out-to-dry and it was just a terrible day. I finally just thought, “They want me to make a decision; I’ll just do this.” They were like, “No, that would not work!” I was like, “Yeah, exactly.” It was just embarrassing. We got back to camp that day and we had a debrief about it and the feedback I got was, “Lauren, I feel like you’re really having trouble making decisions.” I was upset. I didn’t think that decision-making was my problem; I was looking for input and no one would help. I felt very unsupported. I remember I thought to myself, “I will never work for OTS... I will never work for a place that would be so gross and unsupportive.” I knew that I would never do that to a student no matter what.

It was interesting, because later on in the course, the other woman who was my mentor said to me, “The other instructor told me that she thought you were having trouble making decisions, but to be honest I’ve never seen that in you.” I ended up doing well on my course evaluation. It was just an interesting recognition from this other woman who

could see that when I had the information, I was actually quite good. It was sad to me that the woman [who] was with me that day, couldn't really see that or have compassion.

It was interesting to me because the feedback in the moment was, "You are having trouble making decisions;" rather than, "That was really awesome self-awareness on your part to say, at the beginning, 'Let someone else do it.'" I, actually, really did proactively say, "Hey, I've never been in these conditions before; it seems inappropriate for me to be making decisions." That could have been rewarded. That is a really important technical leadership skill. I feel like, basically, what they wanted to see me do was make loud decisions and direct people. The message that sent me was, really, the minimum they needed to see was me being loud and direct, even if my decisions were not correct ones.

That's why I find gender to be so weird, because it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with biological sex. I could have had a horrible experience on the women's only course, but I had a good one. On this course, I had a female instructor, but I felt unsupported. Women can present in ways that are really anti-feminist behaviors and men can be super proactively feminist; so it's just very odd. I feel like women can feel this need to be technically competent and feel like they really need to prove themselves: going above and beyond to prove their skills, like the idea of you have to be twice as good to be seen as equal. Puffing your chest and being loud and direct is often rewarded and I think that perpetuates those behaviors. I think what's often valued in outdoor recreation is being masculine.

I finished my instructor training and I really did learn a lot and, over all, had a great experience. Then that winter something pretty cool happened. John was one of the



guys in my group that day when I was leading. He had been such a jerk that day. That winter we were working near each other and I did not have any backcountry skiing experience at this time. He called me up and said, “Hey Lauren, I really want to take you back country skiing. Get all the stuff that you need from the gear room and meet me on the pass. I want to take you out for the day.” I was like, “Thank you! That is so awesome.” I showed up with all my gear and he showed me how to use everything. We went out and dug an avalanche pit and he was showing me different stuff. At one point he said, “I just really wanted to take you out today, because I want to apologize for that day on the instructor training.” I was surprised. We had gotten into some arguments about that day later on during our course and it was no secret to anyone that he and I had had a lot of trouble. So it was really great that he and I went skiing and like we're friends now. It was just really cool to hear that he recognized that what happened on our instructor training was so bad.

I learned a lot more about placing gear and rock climbing systems on my instructor training. I was in an interesting place because I could climb at a pretty high level, but all my experience had been in sport climbing, so gear and systems were pretty new for me. I felt like I came off the course with really concrete next steps. By the end, I was very clear on what I needed to do in order to be assessed as a climbing instructor, when I took the seminar in the future, and it seemed realistic.

To increase some of those skills, I went on a climbing trip with a woman I met on the women's climbing course I had done before the instructor training. She and I did a personal trip right after my instructor training. It was great. We sort-of swapped skill sets. I was a pretty strong sport climber, but I didn't know how to place gear and stuff and she

was good at placing gear. That was a really good match and I learned a lot.

I took the rock climbing instructor seminar that spring and I got checked off for work, which was great. I actually took an all women's seminar for that step as well. That seminar was a total highlight in my whole OTS career and I still have a lot of good friends from it. I learned a lot and got a lot of good advice for working rock climbing courses.

*Progression at OTS.* When I took my instructor training they sent out this email that said like, “You'll probably get work for the summer, but we don't have enough work for everyone in the off-season, so you should plan to work for other organizations.” I set up some trip-leading with other organizations. I noticed a bunch of people that I took the instructor training with that either didn't need to work or had outside funds somehow supporting them. They were able to hangout and wait around for work. They actually got way more work than I did because of that. That is a pretty hard pill for me to swallow sometimes, when I look at some of my peers and think, “You're actually not ‘dirt-bagging,’ your family has money to support you.” For the first couple of years I just couldn't figure out how everyone had a nice car and could not work regularly. I thought I was doing something seriously wrong. Then I realized, “No, I have been supporting myself since I was seventeen; so my experience financially just looks different.” I really don't think there is a very good understanding by a lot of my peers of how limited access to this field is.

I started working in the field, part of the year, and working for OTS in town, during the winter. I stayed basically working for a combination of OTS and two other programs for three years. I realized that I really liked working with different

organizations because I was exposed to different populations of kids. I especially liked working with different populations of instructors. I liked the different styles.

Now I have moved towards working for OTS full time. I think that one of the coolest things for me now has been being the course leader on rock climbing courses. I really like being in the position where I get to sort-of set the course tone. I had a great course last fall where I was the course leader with two men as my co-instructors. I felt like I knew how to support them and what they needed. I felt like I was able to understand their culture and still have the camp represent what I thought was important. That was good. We even visited an organic farm one day. I think there's plenty of things like that that are valuable. Some people might say, "Oh, we should have gotten more climbing in." But I really believe that this is a course that needs to include all of these things and climbing can still be the focus. When you look at the schedules of climbing camps, I often see tons of hard climbing days or too many multi-pitch days. I think often that is about the instructors wanting to do those things and not really about the students any more. I work as a supervisor now and one goal of mine is to try to influence our program to notice what we do that is really about the students and what we do that is really about instructors.

When I think about my progression at OTS, I think I was pretty lucky to work with some really great people off-the-bat. Even the very first course I worked, my leader was super experienced and he said, "Oh, you need to think about leading now. I know you don't have that much experience, but you have the kind of critical thinking skills that's going to make it really easy for you to go into that role; so don't think that that's so far out of your reach. It really isn't." I could have easily worked a course for someone

who didn't take the time to actually reach out to me and paint this picture of what I could accomplish. The same thing happened with my job now. My boss here really went out of his way to say, "You should be setting your sight on what's possible higher." Those things have been pretty critical in terms of my actual progression from being interested, to being an instructor, to being in this role now.

I moved into this supervisor position because my boss really kind of talked me into it. So basically I've been working in the office here since last summer. I have mixed feelings about my current job. There are things that are very cool about it and I definitely like the stability, but there is something I am finding about this very specific lifestyle that I don't think is very true to who I am. The work I like just fine. I think it's challenging and interesting. I like problem solving and the moving parts, and I think I'm good at that, which feels good. But then, the culture that I'm in day-to-day and the things that I think are rewarded don't really represent all of who I am and that has become increasingly sad and lonely.

*Pressure and competing values.* My perception has definitely changed now that I am not in the field all of the time. I think, when I was in the field I was so "on" all the time, I didn't really stop to think about things. I really wanted to stop and think about some of my values. I'm glad I did. I just think for me what it has unveiled is that my values are not a great fit with all organizations. I don't really like some of the people I have to be around and I don't really share values with some of them. I don't want to always be the person who's bringing up issues. I don't know: I just don't like that character. Now I am just trying to figure out how to stay away from judgment and also do what I need to do for myself.

For example, my friend Becca and I went to a music class this weekend and people kept asking us, “Did you climb this weekend?” I feel like when my answer is, “No,” people in this culture look back at you with disapproval. It is definitely something I am struggling with. Becca and I were talking about it and thinking that when we come in on Monday and say we went to a music class, probably no one really is thinking, “Oh that's dumb.” It's probably all in our own heads, but when there's this dominant culture of, “Oh my God! That was so sick!” and just value placed in strength, then, like to ourselves, we feel like our actions are judged.

It is interesting, because on instructor evaluations I often get the feedback, “Climb more,” and I feel like I can climb plenty hard. I just am getting tired of having people judging me and telling me what I should be doing. I think the community I am in right now has this very powerful drive to like break barriers and smash grades: just a desire to go to this like extreme level. I will say, when I first started climbing, I was really into that. Now, though, I have sort-of reached this plateau where I'm fine. I can climb everything I need to on all rock climbing courses and teach things really well. I'm competent in the skills I need to be in. However, I feel like because I'm not identified as a climber who is really pushing it all the time, I get the feedback from people to “climb more.” They're like, “You should climb more for fun.” I feel like, “I don't want to; I want to go to a music class and not be judged for it.”

I think there is this thing at OTS, which is, you need to be climbing at a super active level and really value that above other things to make it onto, I don't know, on this like certain “cool list.” I recently worked with this woman and she and I were climbing together. We took other women to go have a female climbing day and it was so awesome.

Even the women were like, “This is the best day ever.” Straight up, it was amazing. We were talking about what is valued as climbers and this woman said, “You can on site 5.10C and set up any student level climb. What more do they want from you?” But, even with exceeding the needed expectations to lead courses, I feel like, every time, the guys I work with will put down, “Climb more” on my evaluations. I just don't like those conversations. I don't like them, and I'm not trying to climb 5.13, and I am fine with that. It is hard, because if I can climb twice as hard as any novice OTS student and I can do all of the work required for my job, why are they constantly saying that? I feel like to be accepted, I would have to identify with this bullshit culture that I don't want to identify with.

I hardly ever get to work with other women in technical programs, because there aren't that many. I've gotten advice from other women about climbing and I don't feel the same intensity or judgment. It's like there's something about it that I appreciate, because it seems to be coming from this place of trying to help each other develop comfort. I just really get this sense that the general climbing culture I am in now is more about meeting some sort-of image. I just think it doesn't have to be like that and I do not think that is most effective for our students.<sup>15</sup>

The location where I work now I actually feel like I've gotten a lot more support for my values than other locations at OTS. I have been validated in that the program here agrees that the intense climbing culture is not what's important in our students' climbing

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### **Narratives of collaborative storytelling**

<sup>15</sup> I told Lauren I was a climbing instructor and that I was considering pursuing the role. After my last course I had indicated that I wanted to work more climbing courses. I told her I was nervous and might reconsider. She said that I should still pursue it: “It doesn't have to be like that.” She pointed out that students benefit from seeing different climbing styles. I told her I was still planning on it, although I had gotten a taste of the culture and I was nervous that the focus on “image” would increase as I progressed.

classes and that's why I stayed here. I think the quality of the education we teach and the rapport building we have is what makes you a good instructor and I really think this program believes that. But, I think, at least for me, the whole effect that the intense climbing culture talk and stuff has had on me is, "Well, I'll just never be good enough." It's not motivating to me. It just feels like this thing that will never end and I'll never meet it. I think, too, that reflects my own feelings about meeting expectations or wanting to be viewed in certain ways, but I do think there is something about the outdoor adventure culture that I'm just getting tired of.

Becca and I recently did a mountaineering climb route together. We wanted to do something "just us," and it was awesome. It was so fun and it kicked ass and we remembered that we really like doing stuff like that. We just felt like there was nothing about being in the mountains or about climbing that needed to be like, "Yeah, we F'ing crushed it!" There doesn't need to be anything like that. You can be really proud of yourself, work hard, be tired, and that feels awesome! It doesn't need to be so dominating and intense. I just don't want to always feel like I'm not good enough for it and that my life is all about sports.

I feel similarly in my current role as supervisor a little bit too. I do think part of that is that I have less experience in a lot of ways than my male bosses, but I also don't do the posturing. I really don't present my climbing skills or act like a total outdoor nut. While I am an expert at these things, I don't go around making sure everyone sees that. There are definitely times where I will answer somebody's question, and then they go and ask the other guys the same question, and I hear them. I don't know if some of the mountaineering instructors I work with will ever come into my office and look at me and

actually hear what I say. When that happens [when they don't hear me] I try not to take it personally. But, I even notice it in our meetings and stuff, and I just think, "Well, I'm always going to be bossed around by men." That is what it sort-of is starting to feel like, because I will probably not get to work as a supervisor in an office where there is another woman able to mentor me.

*Power of perception.* I do think that being perceived as technically competent takes more effort on my part, because I am female. I think it is a combination of it being standard for most women and also just part of who I am. I think it has been a little harder or different for me to command respect than I think it is for someone who just physically looks a little bit more like a strong person. I've really had to prove my strengths I think. I also don't know if I had to do that, or if it would have worked out the same if I didn't; I just perceive it that way. I just don't feel like I can walk into a room and people are like, "Yeah, she's a climber." Whereas I feel like there are some men here that look a little bit more like what I would imagine people expect. I think students headed into a course picture those traditional men more as their instructors, and there is a certain amount of unease on my part, knowing that I don't fit that. I go into it already thinking, "What do I need to do to prove myself?"

To counteract that I usually end up really playing up my personality or really going out of my way to show off something I am really good at. Someone once gave me the advice to set up a really hard climb on the first day of a course and just crush it. Then let students, who you perceive are going to be the challenging men for you to work with on the course, try it and fail. I've done that before, when I had men who were my students who I felt were a little bit disrespectful or not perceiving me as strong and competent. I



have had students before, come ask me something. I'll answer it and then they will directly go and ask a different instructor, who's usually a different gender than me. I've run into that several times. I see a pattern like that and I will deliberately set them up on something where I can show off my strength and they will struggle. It works really well.

While that technique has worked for me in helping change preconceived perceptions of me, I don't know that that's really creating the environment I ultimately want on my courses. I don't want to create an environment where competition is so valued and I don't want to set an "I'm better than you" tone. Sometimes though, I feel like that's what it takes to earn this level of respect that I don't naturally get, which is frustrating. I think as a woman I have felt this pressure, where I can't just be me. I am always suspect. Most of it is probably just my self-perception, but I do think it comes from other folks, too, in subtle ways. To feel like I'm on the same plain, I often have to go above and beyond. There's this never-ending pressure to kind of "catch up."

Just recently I was working a course and my back really hurt and I would not ask for help. Even when my co-instructors said, "This is ridiculous; we're going to carry more for you," I refused. It was so sad. I am really small and it was just one of those realization moments where I felt like I'll never be able to do that for someone else and that sucks. I felt like it wasn't just that they were helping me out because my back hurts, it's like they can carry a lot more than me and that will always be the case. There's something frustrating about that that really doesn't sit well with me. There's this certain threshold that I can't get to that I do value. In those moments I feel inadequate, and then I feel embarrassed, and then I'm embarrassed at how embarrassed I am: it just does that spiraling.

In that specific situation I was miraculously able to verbalize the spiral I was going down to my co-workers. I was able to say that I was really embarrassed and ashamed and I didn't want to experience it. We were able to keep going and I was able to get past those feelings, once I said them out loud, which was great. It really comes down to an ego thing. My friend Jen believes that we all just need to kill our egos. I really do think that's what it's about. Killing what I think I'm supposed to be and who I believe that I should be. I think those experiences have helped me as a leader. I try to initially zero in on women on my courses that may face similar challenges and create a personal relationship, so that down the line we can talk about it and help figure out the actual root of feelings that may emerge for them.

*Gaining new skills.* I currently work hiking and rock climbing courses, and I'll probably work a mountaineering course next year. I really stayed away from mountaineering because I am small and carrying heavy packs is getting to be too much for me. The one I work next year may be my only one, but who knows, maybe not. I also just don't think mountaineering is like what I want to be doing. Regardless, I am getting ready for the mountaineering seminar this week. I have been mountaineering quite a bit this summer and last kind of getting ready for it.

I have been looking over the skill requirements to work in this area and I think I have them. I asked a friend of mine, who is a mountaineering instructor currently, about my plan for building and demonstrating my skill set on the seminar and her advice was, "Just be loud." She said if I am just loud, it would work. I think that is true and I also think that's a problem. What is rewarded so heavily in our field is being loud, directive, and outwardly confident.

I think I do mostly use that loud assertive leadership style. I don't think I'm the best at it, but I have been successful using it. It's interesting because I've seen other quieter people, who are way more competent than me, way more experienced than me, way more in tune with lots of other things than me, totally bypassed; and I've been rewarded. Good for me, I guess, but I can definitely see where we are really missing out as an industry.<sup>16</sup>

Another thing at OTS, too, and this is again just sort-of the nature of the beast with a big organization, but self-promotion is often the number one thing. I have been really good at self-promotion. I once heard my boss telling some interns, "Lauren is the master of self-promotion. Talk to her if you want advice." But it's true: I am not the best instructor ever, but I promoted myself and that is a big reason I have been successful. Self promotion is its own skill and it works, but it's not necessarily how you get your best talent.

On the mountaineering seminar, I am pretty sure I am going to be the only female student. I haven't thought about it that much, but it is in my mind. I really do just want to have a good time on the course. I think if I was going coach myself, which is what I should be doing right now, I would tell myself, "Okay. I can relax." I guess I actually do have a lot of confidence going into it. One of my good friends is one of the instructors

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>16</sup> I told Lauren that I had developed a pretty loud, direct, and confident leadership style throughout my career and often I felt rewarded for it. I went on to tell her about a course I had worked this past summer with young female students. I used my loud and direct tone; however, the feedback I received was to be more nurturing. One of my co-instructors was fabulous at listening and being calm and nurturing with our students. I really looked to her as a role model. During our debrief, she said she was so impressed with my energy and style and that she wished she was more like me. I told Lauren how surprised I was, because I had been looking at her thinking the same thing. I told Lauren that I think the louder, more assertive style is valued so often that it has become dominant and sought after, even though it is not always effective.

and she knows my skill set; the male instructor I am also happy to work with. As soon as those courses came out, I looked to see who was teaching. If it had been other people, for example the team that taught it last year, I wouldn't have done it. I'm just at a point where I am done with putting myself in positions where someone puts me on the spot and is a jerk. I am tired of feeling bad about myself and embarrassed; I'm just not going to do it. I will not put myself in that situation no matter how much competence I have.

I do feel disappointed about being the only female student on the seminar. I think seminars are a time when you really make a lot of great friendships. I'm sure I still will, but I think something that's been helpful for me in the past is being with other women on a seminar. I've taken women's-only seminars up to this point, I guess. You develop these personal relationships, which is ultimately actually where that skill building comes from. I guess having those relationships with men is just not as motivating to me.

I do have some assumptions that folks will be coming into the seminar with more experience than me, or that it's easier for them to find someone to explore these activities with. I also think it's easier for men to just go out try stuff and fail. I look at my brother, who is also entering the field, and when he climbs he just doesn't care about failing. He'll just fall off stuff and that is why he has progressed so much faster than me in that respect. I don't learn that well from failing. Part of that I want to transform. I want to be like, "OK, that's fear holding me back and I'm going to push past that." It's really interesting. I was just reading this leadership article that's about more feminine styles, and it said that the whole learn-by-failing thing doesn't really work for some people. It's not as effective for some styles. I don't know: I do have a couple good friends on the seminar and I'm sure we'll have a totally fun time, but there is some part of me that's just kind of bummed.

My friend just asked me recently why I want to take the seminar, and I really do want the technical skills development. I also feel like I'm really motivated by steep learning curves. I like being really challenged by technical systems, so I want to keep that going. It'd be fun for me to work a course where I feel like I am learning again.

*Expectations, rewards, and societal pressure.* It is interesting to think about how I have been influenced throughout my life. If I think about opportunities that some of the men I've worked with have had, to do things like rock climb, they seem different than mine. I feel like my opportunities and available time have looked different, for whatever reason. I do feel like a lot of that is related to what they're rewarded for and what I am rewarded for. I think my male friends have been rewarded for going out and having like a crazy adventure and I was rewarded for being a good early childhood teacher. Whether that's what I wanted to do or not, it was like I found the "reward band" for me and the "reward band" was over here for them. I think ultimately we all choose what we do, but I think broader society sets this string of rewards.

I don't think that it is necessarily always an obvious or direct thing. For example, when I think about my family's influence, I do remember talking to my mom and she's like, "OK, so let me just get this right... you are quitting your really good job, that you like, and you are going to do this climbing thing that you don't have an actual job for yet? Um, what are you going to do after that?" She's honestly saying it out of concern for me (I really believe that); but at the same time, I think the way I've seen my dad talk to my brother is so different. He tells him stories like: "You know what? Your uncle and I went out to Jackson Hole one winter when we were young and blah, blah, blah. . . ." I don't hear those stories about my mom, but my dad says stuff to my brother like that all the

time.

It's interesting to see my family's reaction to him doing this versus me. Again, I don't know if it's my family pressure, or if it's just me internalizing it, I mean I guess it's the combination of both. It's not like my family is disappointed in me; I think they're pretty psyched, but I have this internal pressure: I am definitely not doing what I'm "supposed" to be doing. Whereas, my brother, I think, feels much more like he can do whatever he wants, no pressure. I do feel like I'm in this little bit of a trap. I have external pressure that makes me feel like I should be more settled and stable, but I have internalized that too. In some ways, I feel I've been blessed by these total blinders, thinking, "Well, I like can do whatever the heck I want to do... of course I can!" That has never limited my imagination, but at the same time I'm so sensitive to recognizing what gets rewarded and what doesn't.

I definitely notice "reward bands" within our field also. I have a pretty petty example, but for me I really felt it. Last fall I was out climbing with some friends and my brother. I was having such a good time. A bunch of the guys climbed harder than me, but it seemed like it was mutually fun. One day we got back to the campsite and one of our other friends in the area had come over and left a note, inviting one of the guys in our group to climb with them the next day. I just felt like, "Oh, yeah, you know, people aren't really thinking I want to go ask Lauren to climb. I'm just kind of like an extra person." I felt bad that I didn't get a note. It was so petty, I know, but it was just a reminder that these folks that climb harder than me will climb with me, if they have to, but given the opportunity they will not climb with me. It hurt my feelings, but also I was like, "Okay, that's real. That's how it is." I also consciously know that I don't want that as the

motivator I have for climbing harder. However, all of a sudden that was where I kind of went. I thought, "Okay, I need to train and get stronger so these types of people want to climb with me." In reality though, I am thinking, "Oh my God, this is stupid! Who cares?" It's a struggle, though, because that's so motivating for me. I want to be in that in crowd, when the reality is there are reasons I haven't prioritized climbing hard enough to get there. I don't like spending all my time only doing climbing, and I have not prioritized it, and that's fine, but extremely frustrating at the same time.

I think I am just hyperaware of that stuff. I am hyperaware of when I don't fit in, or I notice when someone says something "off." It results in me altering my behavior all the time to fit into the situation. Even just recently I said something in a meeting, and looking back, I thought "You know what? I don't even believe in what I was just arguing for." When I came into that meeting I actually wanted to make the opposite point of what I ended up saying, and yet, because of the way the conversation was going, I kind of saw where I could add to that and maybe be seen as smart or as contributing, and so I did that. It was crazy! I thought about it later and I was like, "Why did I do that?" I went in with this intention of representing this other side and showing compassion, and yet the tone was kind of pointing blame at this one thing, so I jumped on board and was like, "Yeah, that thing!" It's really interesting. I do think I am very motivated, for better or worse, by external expectations. In some ways that serves me amazingly well in my life. Then I would say, in terms of me as a person and my own happiness and emotional health, it is a problem.

I think I've had this pattern of being disconnected from my sort-of essential self, or whatever you want to call it: the part of me that doesn't change, no matter what job I

have, or whatever. Now I'm trying to call on some of that original emotion and wisdom, and it's very foreign. I think part of this, seriously, is gender stuff. I have, my whole life, kind of adapted to what I know gets results, wanting results and getting results. That behavior has been reinforced in this really powerful way, and yet it's not necessarily the total of who I want to be. And so now I'm kind of trying to find some of that essential self and it's very difficult. I had this desire to be a powerful person and I knew that in our society women weren't powerful. So then I had to figure out how to do that, because the way I was wasn't going to get me to where I want to be. I wanted to like unlock that privilege. I think I got really good at changing to be that way, but that's really kind of violence against yourself in the end.

I have tried to be really intentional about that lately and aware of my motivations, because as long as you're seeking other people's approval, by design it will never be enough, because it's not part of you and what you're designing for yourself. It's some external thing that actually doesn't even really exist, other than all these little subtle messages. I'm just trying to keep that in mind, too.

*Outdoor recreation's impact.* Overall my participation in outdoor recreation has definitely been empowering. I think about, sometimes, where I was before I came to OTS, and where I am now, and it seems corny; but I seriously have this sense right now that anything I want to do I can do it and I 100% believe it. I don't know exactly what sparked that feeling in me. I could have been a pre-school teacher for really the rest of my life and been happy, but there was something about going to outdoor recreation, and mixing up my perception of time, where suddenly everything seemed available. I never really felt like that before. Everything felt available, and I just kept doing cool stuff and



having success, to the point where I felt like I should be able to think of absolutely anything and do it. That definitely has come from being around this community and also from having actual physical challenges that I really didn't think I could do and then I did. There's something about that that's pretty powerful.

I definitely do get a lot of satisfaction and purpose from my career. I feel like a part of a tribe in all these different ways. There's a lot of identity that comes with it, which has its own problems, but has some really nice things, too. I have a feeling of belonging and purpose. I also have personal challenge and growth. I feel like this is definitely evident at OTS, because we have such a great built-in system for reviewing performance. We go through these really intense experiences and you can't help but have significant growth happen. Something about that, at least for me, has given me this opportunity to see my own growth so concretely.

***Polly.***

*Growing up.* My participation in outdoor activities goes way back. My mom grew up on a farm and my father was a camper, backpacker, and things like that. I was apparently conceived in a tent, and I feel like there's this lineage that set me up for an outdoor life. My mom has this love for nature, and it's really beautiful, actually. My dad has this habit of getting out into the woods and camping, and that's been a big part of his life for a long time. I think those things combined really affected me.

I grew up in Southern California, so I was outside basically every day, which was really nice. We grew up going camping all the time. I think my earliest memory is of me in the back of a baby carrier on Dad or Mom's back, watching a trail come up and down as they walked. It is a memory, so who really knows if it is true, but I've always held

onto that as my first memory.

When I was really young I started going to nature camps. I remember wading in streams and dissecting owl pellets and feeling like, "Oh, this is the coolest!" I was a total tomboy and all I wanted to do was run around and to be outside. I think just the fact that we got outside as a family had a huge impact, because being outdoors became a real comfort area for me. It was the natural place to be and my parents were a big part of that. I'm sure they signed me up for stuff like nature camp and all that.

Both my parents are really encouraging about this stuff. I think my love for nature and animals and things is something I get from my mom. However, my mom is a little more fearful of the adventure activities. She doesn't necessarily enjoy hearing about me rock climbing or things like that. My sister, too, has been nervous about my participation in the higher adventure type sports. One time she called me when I was climbing in Red Rocks and I had service. I thought it'd be funny to answer the phone. I answered the phone and told her I was 300 feet up, and she did not think that was funny at all. My dad, however, loves the high adventure part of my participation. I think he gets to live vicariously through me, and his influence had a lot to do with why I took up things like climbing.

As a child I thought about joining the Girl Scouts, until I realized they wore skirts. I remember seeing a poster in my elementary school and there was a picture of a Brownie and a Girl Scout and they were wearing skirts. I saw that was the uniform and I was like, "No way! I'm not wearing a skirt!" I knew some of my peers were joining, but I remember that being the visual and I did not want anything to do with it. I think, too, I had this idea that the Girl Scouts sold cookies, went to museums, and did community

service. The Boy Scouts were out camping and doing adventure stuff, and that's what I wanted to do, and so I didn't want to be in the Girl Scouts. Actually, I don't think I even wanted to be in the Boy Scouts, I just wanted to be camping and outside and running around.

At some point when I was young, I remember we went whitewater rafting with our church group or something. I had such a good time and I saw these people doing this as a job. I thought to myself, "I want to do that job one day in my life.... At some point in my life, I want to say I was a river guide." I was probably 13 or 14 at that point and I just thought it was the most fun thing I'd ever done. I got to see the guides working it, and I thought, "You get paid to do this?" The guides were so cool, and there was a girl. I remember the girl very, very distinctly. I wasn't in her boat, but I remember seeing her on the back of her boat, and I was like, "Heck, yeah!" She wasn't very personable; I think I even tried asking her some questions and she wasn't really nice or interested in talking. I didn't care. Just seeing her out there was enough to inspire me.

*Playing boys soccer.* I ended up playing boys soccer between the ages of nine and thirteen. The league in my town had three options. You could play on the girl's league, the boy's league, or the mixed league, and I chose the mixed league. I was the only girl in who chose mixed league. No other girls chose mixed league and no boys chose it either. I was the only person, and so they put me in boys league and I played boys soccer for a long time.

I loved it! I was really tough, really aggressive, and I played super physical. They'd put me up against not very good players and I'd cream them. When I outperformed boys on the opposing team they would get made fun of ruthlessly by their

teammates, and their coach would be like, “Crap! She's not just out there, but she is good.” I took such joy in proving them wrong. I loved proving that I could kick their asses, and so I did. I played real physical and real aggressive. I was out there to play soccer because I loved the game, but also it became important to me to prove my point. Just because they assumed I couldn't play at their level, I was determined to show them that I could.

I became really close with my team. There were always people on it that didn't like the idea, but there were a lot of players on that team that either got used to it or didn't care. I'm sure when I first walked on that field, they were all like, “What the...! Who is this girl?” I guess I earned my place, but I'm sure I had to work harder to earn it than the other players. My coach loved me. Honestly, I don't know how I feel about this now, but at the time I could get away with almost anything on the field. Referees would never call anything on me. I'm not a dirty player, but I could slide tackle or do anything and I almost never got fouls called on me. I could just check people all day, because I was the only girl out there.

*4-H camp.* At some point, I started going to a 4-H camp. I got invited to go to 4-H sleep-away camp, I think starting in fifth grade. I would go out to camp and do canoeing, outpost cooking, camping and all sorts of things. They had arts and crafts, and drama and whatever, but I tended to just do the outdoor stuff. Then in middle school they started an adventure program.

I signed up for that program and it was really cool. I did a week of backpacking and I just had this incredible experience. It was this amazing bonding experience with all these other kids. That was really huge. Our instructors were great. I remember talking to

one of the instructors at the end, and him saying, "If you really like this, there are some other organizations you can go do stuff with. One is called the Mountain Trip School (MTS) and one is called the Outdoor Trip School (OTS)." One of my instructors from that trip I actually re-meet as an outdoor educator later in life. He and I ended up working together for three years, before I figured out that he was the first-ever backpacking instructor I had, which was ridiculous.

I did a couple more summers there and was introduced to whitewater rafting and a little bit of rock climbing, which I loved. Then I went to high school and I thought about what my instructor had said. I thought maybe I should check out those other outdoor organizations.

*MTS course at fifteen.* I took my camp instructor's advice and enrolled in an MTS course when I was 15. My parents were excited for me to do the trip and paid my way. I picked a course that involved mountaineering and whitewater rafting. It was a really, really interesting course. I think maybe a maximum of 30 percent of the participants actually wanted to be there. The rest were forced by parents or guardians, which resulted in a lot of the participants being pissed that they were there. I think our instructors really struggled with our group. There was a lot of reprimanding and interventions and stuff from the staff. I remember feeling really conflicted about the staff. Sometimes I felt like the way they were interacting with us was fair, and other times I felt really defensive. I didn't feel that everyone in the group was acting irresponsibly, or whatever it was.

The trip, as a whole, was really interesting for me, personally, because it was the first time where I was ever really challenged on who I was. I remember we were walking one day and the wildflowers were up to our hips. I had never been in that environment

before and it was phenomenal. As we were walking, I said something like, “Watch out for the flowers.” One of the kids turned around and looked at me. He was like, “You’re so stupid.” Then I have always had this little belly that kind of pops out: they were calling me pregnant. It was just mean shit like that. It was good, in the sense that I had to figure out what I wanted to stand up for in myself, and what didn’t matter. I realized that when that kid called me “Stupid!” for stepping on the flowers, that looking out for the environment was a legitimate concern for me. That is something about myself that’s really important. It was good that way; it really forced me to look at my 15-year-old self and “get real” a little bit. That trip was the start of really forming my personality. I have noticed that, naturally, I snap back at people when they snap at me; and, if somebody gives me attitude, I give it right back. I imagine those were the awakenings of that defensive part of me coming out, which I am grateful for. It gave me practice to stand up for myself, which is so important, especially as a 15-year-old girl with a growing body and dealing with all that.

It was really interesting. When I work a course now my interaction with my students is really important to me. That’s one of the main ways I judge the success of a course, I have a rapport with my students. When I think back on that MTS course, that was not a part of it at all. However, there was one female instructor who really had an impact on me. I never really talked to her or anything: she was just this flash. She may have been running logistics or something. I just remember having this moment one day where she got in the river, put her oars in and took a stroke. I saw her muscles, like, she was ripped. She had hairy armpits and hair on her legs. She was beautiful and she didn’t give a shit. That image of her has stayed with me for the rest of my life and really, really

shaped a lot, also, of who I became. She was this powerful woman who was doing her own thing. She didn't have to try to be pretty, and it counteracted all the body image stuff that my little freshman brain was getting bombarded with every single day in high school. She really became kind of the model of the woman I wanted to be: strong, capable, independent, didn't subscribe to societal expectations. It really had a big impression on me.

I remember going back home and not shaving my armpits. I started judging my friendships based on who could handle it and who couldn't. I realized that I didn't have to look this certain way and I didn't have to fit the *Teen Vogue* pictures. I could be strong and have muscles, be successful, and have hair on my legs and armpits, if I wanted to. Just seeing a person like that was really, really transformative for me, really important! I've brought that up with so many of my participants now, just trying to communicate to young girls this image of this person that could be.

Another thing that happened for me on that trip was I fell in love with the land. We were in Utah and I was kayaking on the river and I still remember looking up and the moon was still out. The rock and the river were so green, I felt like I was on another planet. I was like, "I am coming back to this place; I'm definitely coming back."

*College.* I went to a college that ran these pre-orientation trips. Prior to your freshman year you could try and sign up for the ones you wanted. The number one I wanted was rock climbing in the New River Gorge in West Virginia. I didn't get it because it was all filled. I was disappointed, and instead I was signed up to do community service or something I don't remember. I ended up going to this meeting and getting introduced to one of the trip leaders for the climbing trip. He told me someone had

dropped out and I could take his or her spot. I was so excited! That probably changed the trajectory of my life more than almost anything. I just completely fell in love with climbing. Since then, my entire placement in the world has been around where I can go climbing. I would never move someplace that I couldn't climb.

After that trip I started doing a lot of climbing. We would go to the New River Gorge to climb, and we had just gotten a climbing gym built in the school. I was pretty obsessed with it. I worked at the little climbing gym at my school and that was a huge part of my community. I would go to class, go to rugby practice, work out after rugby practice, and then I would go to the climb gym and I would climb. I was pretty jacked; I was climbing all the time, and loving it.

The scene at the climbing wall was really cool. Somebody, a long time ago, had started a petition to get a climbing wall at our school and it just hadn't happened. When I joined the school I joined the committee to get that climbing wall. My sophomore year they approved it and we got a climbing wall built in this little corner. It was tiny. We had this little bouldering cave and we had this column that went up to the ceiling; so it was maybe 35 feet: that was it. It was teeny-tiny, and I think it was a unique situation, because it was our baby. It was our project. There was a real sense of ownership and community there that was really cool. We set all the routes and we ran the gym. They eventually hired us all to be the managers and the staff. We all felt really close-knit. I'm still close with some of those people. It was really neat. I think if it had been bigger and more



established it wouldn't have had that feeling. We built the vibe we wanted.<sup>17</sup>

The rock wall became this really accepting place. Part of that may have been just the social culture of my school. It was a liberal and open-minded environment. It was full of feminists and half the campus was gay. So, it was a little socially different than the stereotypical climbing gym scene. There was “No, you can't do what I can do, because you're a girl” attitudes or anything like that. That wasn't a part of that community, which was pretty rad. We had people going through transitioning their gender while they were there, all sorts, and it was a real supportive and welcoming community, actually. It was pretty cool and special.

*OTS semester.* My junior year of college I did a semester with OTS. I did their semester, which was a month backpacking, a month climbing, and a month of sea kayaking. It was different from MTS in the sense that it was 17 to 25 year olds, and so we were all adults who chose to be there. I remember thinking it was different in other ways too, for example on MTS we had forced journal-time. Even just using the word “forced” obviously, I could say we had journal-time, but we had to journal. That wasn't the case in OTS. I noticed, immediately, that the MTS course focused more on reflection and soft skills and the OTS course more on hard skills, which is what I wanted. I loved it. It was the best time in my life.

I felt healthy and happy and just my own person on that course. I cut my hair all the way off, right before I went on the course. I got a real short pixie cut and I felt almost

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>17</sup> I told Polly about a very different experience I had while working at a rock wall. The rock wall culture I experienced was a very macho one. It was a mostly male-dominated environment, and the guys who were working there were very into climbing ability and grade. Also, women were sexualized there. I told Polly that was my only experience with rock walls, but that is also what I feel like a stereotypical “rock wall vibe” is. I was interested to hear about her contrasting experience.

asexual. There wasn't any attraction between anyone, and so it was a whole new dynamic for me to explore. It was really freeing, for three months to not even have to worry about that. It was also interesting cutting my hair off and seeing how people reacted differently to me. I got a lot less male attention. I also perceived people as being not quite as nice to me when I had short hair. They were a little more suspicious. It was really interesting. I actually really loved people's reactions.

OTS was amazing. I became really, really close to our course instructor. She was this amazing Australian woman that I really looked up to. We really got along. Her approval meant a lot to me. I really cherished that I could confide in her. She was really important to me on that semester. She even supported me after our course and ended up writing a lot of my letters of recommendation for the next few years.

I remember feeling an ability to really get to know the other instructors really well, too. It was wonderful, and it really cemented for me that I wanted to do outdoor education. I thought this is what I'd like to do, and I really excelled in the environment. I got really great feedback from my instructors, and I still have those forms. I really wanted to pursue it as a career. I loved it!

I do think I also gained the technical skills I had gone there to get. I got really comfortable with a map and compass, which was awesome, and I really got to practice my rock climbing skills. I got lots of opportunities to work on my trad climbing skills, which was great. I really fell in love with trad climbing and with multi-pitching. Since my course, I just have this comfort in the wilderness; it's like second nature. It feels good to be in the woods; I feel in my element. It was probably the happiest time of my life. I had been sick on and off since I was 14, and had been trying to battle that and contain

that. On my OTS course I felt so healthy: I felt amazing, physically! It was like the healthiest I had ever been; I was so content. I remember having this really intense feeling while backpacking. It was one of those moments in life where everything just becomes really lucid and bright. It was really important.

I had been in the environmental studies program in college, which felt like it fit my passions and my interests. After my OTS course I knew I wanted to take my passion for the environment and put it into outdoor education. I remember having this awareness that I was going to be a part of the environmental movement, which was really important to me; but the place where I could probably affect the most change was in the outdoor recreation movement, because that's where my passion was. So I thought, "Well, if that's where it works for me, and that's where I have a passion, then that's where I should go."

*Women's climbing trip.* I went back to school after my OTS semester for my senior year. My school had winter terms that were experience-based. You had to do three throughout your four years there, and one of them could be personal growth and development. I came up with the idea to organize a women's climbing trip for my winter term study. I was really attracted to the idea of being badass with a bunch of women. Women feeling empowered has always been really important to me. I think it is so cool for women to just take control of their own programs, activities, athleticism, or whatever, and have that be a supportive environment with other women. Even in high school, I really loved that. I didn't want any men on the trip, because I wanted it to be a totally female-led and successful female-led expedition. That's what I wanted.

I had experienced so much positive female role-modeling in my life, but I had also had experiences where I had dealt with sexism and bullshit. I had been told I couldn't

do stuff, treated differently, patronized or whatever, over and over. I had felt this sense of injustice my entire life that the things I wanted to do weren't as accessible to me as men, or people didn't believe I could do them. I felt like I had had more hurdles to overcome those sorts of things than boys. That always pissed me off from a very young age and really upset me. I felt like I had been growing up in a world where the things I wanted to do didn't fit with the stereotypical women's path, and I was really resentful of that. It was really important for me to be involved in activities or create opportunities for people where these things were celebrated and made accessible. That's still really important to me and that is why I wanted to create the women's climbing trip.

So I planned the trip and asked my friend Jessica to come. We needed more people to make it feasible and neither of us had a car. We ended up inviting this other girl who came to the climbing gym, too, who was terrible. (We didn't know she was so terrible.) Then we recruited Jessica's ex-girlfriend Deb to join, too, who was also into climbing and everything like that. The four of us went out to Joshua Tree, Red Rocks, and Bishop for our winter term. We did this month-long climbing tour. We killed it and I loved it. I had a really amazing time. After that trip I was sure I wanted to go climbing, everywhere all over the United States. I wanted to do Outdoor Ed and I wanted to go climbing all the time.

*River guiding in Utah.* I finished college and figured, "Well, I'm graduating and I need a job." I interviewed to be the head of a Junior Ranger program. I got the job, and I called to talk about the job. The guy basically convinced me not to take it. It was so obvious that this man hated his life, or just didn't want me to come. Either way, I was like, "I don't want to be near this person. Sounds like I don't want the job." Plan B was to

go be a river guide in Utah.

So I graduated college and went straight to Utah to be a river guide. My parents were not pleased. They thought I was wasting my good degree. I think they wanted me to go into an intellectual-based job. My dad, especially, had a hard time with it. He eventually came around, because he really loves this one writer who started his career off as a river guide in Utah also. I think he just pretended that I was on the same trajectory, too. My parents eventually came around to it, but at first they were not happy about it, at all.

I had started dating Jessica after our climbing trip and we moved to Utah together. We found a rafting company and we decided to work with them, because they were the only rafting company that didn't require you to pay for training first. They would train you on the spot, but then that whole first season you had to do these easier trips. We did a summer on the river there and really fell in love with the desert. I mean I just loved it!

We lived in this house with two other girls who were part of the same rafting company. They actually ended up having a real hard time with us. Many of the people in the community were pretty religious people, and our roommates were as well. They asked us if we wanted to get a house with them. We were like, "Sweet! That would be amazing to have a room." We thought we were going to be in tents all summer, so we were excited to have a shower and stuff. I remember, after they gave us a tour of the house, I told one of the girls, "Oh, by the way, I just want you to know this, so it's not a surprise: we're a couple." Her eyes got really big, but she said, "Okay." Living there ended up being this really wonderful cultural exchange for everyone. Her world was totally unknown to me and Jessica, and our world was totally unknown to her. I actually

learned a lot about where she came from, and she learned a lot about where we came from.

The whole culture, at least where we were in Utah, was not great. There were a lot of asshole river guides who just wanted to see us make out all the time. Then you could feel like, sometimes, the more conservative side of that town kind-of “making eyes.” It wasn't the best environment always. I think there are really wonderful people and wonderful river guides in Utah, but I don't think a lot of them worked for our company.

Some of our guides were really jerks. I fell in love with the desert, and it was a really special place for me physically, but socially, I kind of hated it. The atmosphere at my guiding company was very “party bro” style. I felt like it was frat boys, plucked out of a college party, and dumped in the middle of the desert. They were just gross and sexist. They loved thinking about Jessica and I making out and always wanted us to do it in front of them. They would just do gross stuff like that. I've heard that a lot actually, other women saying they had similar experiences at rafting companies.<sup>18</sup> I didn't feel physically belittled because of my gender. We didn't have roles within the company that were based on gender or anything, but we were sexualized for sure, and especially

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>18</sup> I told Polly about a similar experience I had while working for a river guiding company. It was a little less of a crazy party scene; we were actually expected to be quite clean-cut. I told Polly that I thought my boss was going for a good old-fashioned straight-laced kind of environment. Gender roles came with the culture he was trying to create. We separated the daily tasks into two teams: boat crew and cook crew. Boat crew would go fill the boats before each trip and did mostly manual labor. Cook crew would serve breakfast and dinner to our customers. It wasn't a rule that girls couldn't be on boat crew, but girls were rarely scheduled to do it. I told Polly that I got on boat crew a few times, but that I thought it was because I had a pretty masculine personality and was pretty large for a woman. I also told Polly that sexist humor and flirting was a big part of my company's culture, as well. That vibe was not only among the guides, but also a way that we were almost expected to interact with the customers. I told Polly that I felt as if the way people were relating to their boats of customers was very different. The girls would often be flirty and sexy, and the guys would be very showboat-like and macho. I told Polly that I did not fit in, within that culture, and I struggled.

coming in with a girlfriend. We were hyper-sexualized by the males in the community and that sucked.

*Moving to California.* As the rafting season wound down, I thought about what I might do next. Jessica is a year younger than me, so she went back to college for her last year. My family had moved back out to California, and I figure "Well, I might as well move out that way." I found an outdoor education school and started working for them. I wanted to work for the school I found because their brochure picture showed them taking out a big diverse group of students into the woods, and I knew I really believed in that. On my OTS semester I was really upset at how un-diverse the student body and the instructor body had been. It was a really great wake-up call for me: the racial make-up of the community that I wanted to be a part of. I realized how exclusive, or how difficult, access was. I think that is just the reality and I was really bothered by it. I really wanted to work for a company that was working with diverse students, to help encourage that diversity, so I took the job. It turned out that was kind-of a fluke picture. I mean, they just worked with schools from the LA area and a lot of them are not diverse at all. It was really interesting.

I ended up working for a few different organizations in California and eventually went to get my wilderness EMT certification. That was really great, though I spent all my money on it. While I was there I met this girl Jenna who was a wild-land firefighter. When I heard what she did, I asked her, "Oh, can I do that?" She was like, "Totally!" She told me you make a ton of money and it's really fun. She showed me how to apply and that winter I did. During that time in my life I was getting offered a lot of jobs. I think that was because I had recently gotten my EMT, I was a woman, and I had a degree in

environmental studies. I ended up getting a wild-land firefighter job in the eastern Sierra. I took the job and remember having this, "Well, here we go!" sort of attitude about it.

My first season was great. I was on an amazing crew. It was a seven-person engine and there were three women on our crew, which was kind of unheard of. Wild-land firefighting is white male dominated, to the max, and a very masculine culture. I had a young engine captain who was really interesting and smart. I think he was kind-of progressive. He just hired whoever he thought was good, so I got hired onto this crew. We all became like family: really, really close. One of my best friends is from that crew.

I think there is definitely a push to diversify these fields. I'm sure (as an applicant coming in) they don't get many women applying, so immediately my application went in the "special" pile. I do think I was qualified for the job, though; I had my EMT and I had a background in environment studies. I think some of the outdoor industries are starting to feel like they have to have some kind of balance within that job market, so they're more apt to hire women. I'm sure there are some men in there who really hate that direction and resent that.

I experienced some of that resentment from other firefighters. We had a really special crew where we had three girls and four boys and a lot of people didn't take our crew seriously. They would say we were at summer camp and that this was supposed to be firefighting. We were like, "We know! We are obviously here to fight fires." We trained really hard and did a lot of personal training and workouts. I was strong. I could do seven pull-ups at a time and 14 one-arm push-ups. I had to hold my own. I would wake up, do training with my crew, work, and then I'd go workout again. I'd have two hard workouts in a day, every day.



I was doing the extra workouts because I liked it, but also because I knew that I had to work hard to stay strong, because not only am I a woman, but I'm short and pretty small. I felt physically able to do everything, except where my size came into play was trying to reach the hose at the top of the fire engine. I could not reach it. It was a good thing I was a climber, because I knew how to improvise; so I could get to it, but it was so frustrating. I couldn't reach everything, and I couldn't carry as much as even other women on my crew who were bigger than me. I could do whatever needed to be done for the job, but it was obvious to everyone that I was a small woman. We would get into these larger fires where there were other crews around. Other male firefighters would just take over what I was doing, which I hated so much, or they would make comments and laugh. It was really obvious within that culture. I would walk through fire camp and all the eyes would be following me walking down, because not only are they judging me for being a female firefighter, they were also looking at me as a sexual object. That was a big part of the culture there.

I went back for a second year and I think the honeymoon phase started to wear out. Our crew started to splinter a little bit and the season wasn't as good. I decided that I was done with it and decided to go back into outdoor education. I worked for a few different companies in Southern California and started craving some things in life that I had been lacking. I wanted a bed and a kitchen. I started wanting these things that a career in outdoors does not always offer. My best friend from college lived in Austin, and a man I had started dating in California had moved there, too. I had visited several times and I liked Austin. I wanted a more stable home, so I moved.

*Moving to Texas.* I moved out there and moved in with my friend. I think that is

when things started to change for me. I interviewed at a guiding company in Austin, and in the interview the owner asked me what my professional goals were in the long-term. I told him that I really wanted to work with increasing access to environment education. I think I also mentioned working with girls and helping empower them to do things they may not ever have been told they can do. I ended up guiding for him, but he also introduced me to a local company that was starting a girls program. He suggested I go and see if they needed a girls program director. So, I did, and they said, “No. They didn't need anyone;” but I decided I would at least volunteer and get involved. That eventually led to me getting offered a position and getting to run their girls program.

It was a really interesting experience, and really challenging for me, for a number of reasons. The program was brand new and I got to be with the first class of girl explorers for the first three years of their program. I got really close with the program mentors and the kids and really loved them. I started my change from being in the field all the time to moving into a more administrative role with an organization. I was working with the program mentors, and since I started working with that organization the idea of mentorship just became really important to me. I loved that part of the program.

When I came in to run the girls program, I immediately realized how glad I was that I had decided to do it. One of the first things they asked me was, "So, how much should we reduce the mileage that the girls do, compared to the boys?" I was, like, "No!" It was an all-male office and I was so glad that I was there to offer perspective. I think they were just a bunch of Texas “good ol' boys” that didn't know any better. They thought that all kids should be able to have this mentoring opportunity in the wilderness, which was great, but not that all kids should have an equal opportunity. That was challenging,

but what was interesting, more than anything, was that I had a voice. I had a voice, and I had a program, which I got to kind-of create. It was really cool.

What I find most interesting is that, as the program got going and I took it over, I had to accept that it wasn't the same as the boys program. It was different. There were different dynamics, and the girls and boys needed more attention in different areas. There were these gender differences between the groups that I think I have not related to a lot, for most of my life. I thought, once we got into this wilderness environment, all that would wash away, and it didn't. I had to really come to terms with that on a personal level, that my experience as a woman was unique and my own. Just because I have a vision of being empowered and independent and things like that, it doesn't mean that's every girl's vision. I learned I needed to be very aware and sensitive to that and not so judgmental.

It was really interesting. By the time I left I was changing the girls program. I was never reducing their miles or taking them out of the physical challenges that the boys had. I still really believed that needed to stay the same for a lot of reasons. There was no reason to change that and the girls really excelled. I did, however, start to incorporate things like partnering with other girl's organizations. We also worked on social dynamics and communication, and we discussed how to deal with body image issues and those kinds of things. That's not to say that the boys groups wouldn't also need that kind of programming in different ways.

That was the really interesting part for me. I had to really step out of my own idea of my gender and my identity and look at a group, too, and accept that there are differences on larger scale. There was more resistance and antagonism on the girls' part,

especially socially. There was a very different kind of bullying and power dynamic. It was different from the boys, which was more cut and dry, and mixed more easily. With the girls, it was just so apparent and intense.

When I look at that experience, I wonder why those differences emerged. I wonder if that is also a symptom of what's going on culturally within our country. Are the pressures set up that there has to be these antagonisms and rivalries and putdowns all the time? Maybe it was the group size that caused the problem; I am not sure what it was. That was hard for me to swallow: that that was going on. I really didn't want it to be that way, and I never figured out how to fix it. Maybe there was no way to fix it. But, even with its challenges, I was really proud of the organization I was working for, and of the work I was doing. I really enjoyed it.

*Experience in the field.* Throughout my time working in the industry there have definitely been times where I am the only woman in a group. It is always really interesting for me. I've definitely traveled within groups of men on and off throughout my whole life and I'm very comfortable hanging with the boys and, I guess, being one of the guys. Lately, when I find myself in all male groups, I think about it really intentionally, and I try to make it known within the group that this is what a woman can also be like. I can be a woman and not just be one of the guys. I think a lot about gender and ideas about gender. Especially within outdoor recreation, I think about people's perceptions. I like it when it comes up with groups and we can have conversations about it and challenge assumptions. It comes up and we talk about it. Sometimes those conversations don't go on very long, but most of the time, at least, there's a stop-and-think moment, I hope.

It is important to me to have those conversations, but I do still come across negative situations all the time. In the general climbing community I come across it all the time, although I think less as I get older and as the times change; but I don't know, maybe not. One example of this, that happens often, is my husband and I will be out climbing and people will walk up to us, and instead of addressing both of us, they look at my husband and ask him, "How was the climb? How did you put it up?" In fact, I would have been the one who put up the damn climb. I'm the stronger in our couple. I am actually the climbing expert when we go out together, but it happens over and over, and over and over again.

My husband is really incredible and he really celebrates all these things about me. He's attracted to me because he thinks I'm a bad ass, and I think that's why I love him so much. I was attracted to him because I felt like, in this man, those normal expectations or gender roles aren't super-applicable. I feel great about that within our relationship, but with the outside world, I feel like it's just going to be there for the rest of our lifetime, at least. In those situations I don't, like, freak out at the people, but I also don't just let my husband answer the question. I tell them, I put up that climb and here's the crux and all that. I make it very clear that it's my climb. I'm not good at just standing around letting them talk it out.

I get annoyed now, more than anything, with these old climber dudes that come and say really patronizing things and they don't even realize. One time I was in Joshua Tree with a bunch of my old climbing friends. We were back in this harder crack area. The guy who was belaying me was just, like, hauling me up the climb, hauling me up through the crux. Finally, I just looked down at him and I was, like, "You do not need to

haul me up this.” He looked a little taken aback and then he just belayed me normally. I think he felt really sheepish about it actually, afterwards; but you know, I just hated that. A lot of my satisfaction came from thinking this person thought I couldn’t do it, and now I’m just doing it.

I just feel it so often. I feel like there are always older men who come in and assume they can just take over. It sucks! Most of it is really small things: words, eye contact, and who the questions are addressed to. It’s really small, subtle social cues that show who they expect to have the experience. I think those small things are really important and it’s a lot about perception. They affect me for sure. Men saying things like, “You want me to put that up for you?” or just barging ahead of me on a multi-pitch.<sup>19</sup>

It happened again just yesterday. I was the only woman staff member on a climbing trip. These two brothers walk up to go climbing and they didn’t make eye contact with me; they just start talking to all the other guys in the group. They didn’t even see me there, even though I was belaying, giving information, and asking people to do things. I think I’m pretty over-sensitive to those kind of dynamics and I look out for them, because I’ve experienced that my whole life; but I think those more traditional

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>19</sup> I told Polly about a time I had experienced something similar with older male climbers. I had been out doing alpine multi-pitch climbing and I saw this older man who was leading a young woman on a nearby route that ultimately ended on top of the same peak as my route. I had finished leading the top pitch, and I had a mix of gear, some of which was my climbing partner’s. We had some pretty old-school pieces that you do not see very often. As I was coming up, I saw the older man at the top and he looked at me, and then he looked at my gear and he looked a little surprised. I told Polly that I thought that for him it was a weird moment, because here was this young female climber with some old, weathered gear that had been well-used. He said something to me like “Nniiicce gear,” and continued to look at me strangely. I told Polly that it had actually been a pleasant interaction. I could tell that he was surprised, but the interaction was positive, so it stood out to me.

ideas about roles are still really pervasive in the climbing community. Although, I do think, I would have to say, less and less.

*Media portrayals.* I actually wrote a letter to *Rock and Ice* (a climbing magazine) about this, because they had done a special and it was called “Everyman’s Issue.” The idea was that it was an issue about all climbers, not just elite ones. All the photos were submissions from their readers and stuff, but it was called “Everyman’s Issue!” That was the big thing. It was strange, because on the cover was this picture of a buff woman climber, just killing it; but the semantics of what they were saying, over and over again, I couldn’t get over it and it really affected me. So I wrote a letter to the editor about the power of their words and how it could alienate a certain part of their community. I told them that I think, coming from the female side of the community, you have been marginalized over and over again in these small and insidious ways and it just builds up. I just wanted them to be aware of that and the power that has. I also wanted to recognize them for having a lot of women in the issue, but let them know the power of their word-choice. They published my letter, which was pretty rad, but you know that kind of thing still comes up all the time.

I like outdoor media, because in a huge way it’s inspiring; but, too, I do feel really aware of the gender imbalance and how that’s portrayed. A bunch of us went to a climbing movie showing, that one of the local gyms put on one night. We all went and watched this video and I was freaking pissed, because the only woman in the movie was this badass climber who I love, but they portrayed her in this awful way. I mean she’s one of the strongest climbers in the world and she kicks ass in real life. Her story in the film was the only one where awesome climbing ability was not highlighted. Not only did she

not successfully complete her climb in the film, but also the way they portrayed her was just whiney and bitchy. I don't know; it was just really upsetting. I was like, "What the F\*\*\*?" At the end of the movie, I went to the women's bathroom and (like no big surprise) three of the women in the bathroom were also talking about how much bull that was. I just was so upset, because when you're making a film you have editorial control and these issues are certainly pervasive in our community. You can't just be unaware of how portraying that in your films affects the community. How you choose to bring the story is really powerful. I am still very affected by those contents, and I feel like I've become even more aware of how gender is portrayed in the climbing community and where the imbalances lie.

One of my biggest pet peeves is going through an outdoor catalog and going through the men's section, which is like 20 pages long; then I get to the women's section and it's like five pages. Often I will see a pair of men's pants, technical pants that are awesome, and then I look for it in women's sizes and they don't have it for women. I'm like, "Oh my God! Those are the pants I want. They are so perfect... where's the women's version?" They do not exist. Things like that are so upsetting. I am tiny: I can't wear men's clothes, I need it in a women's size.<sup>20</sup>

I do think there's a movement now to get more women in these more "adventurer" roles, and so I think I notice it coming up a little less. I think even within popular media and, like, Disney, I see a little shift. I think times are changing a little bit,

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>20</sup> I have had similar problems shopping. I agreed with Polly that the female options are far less extensive than the male options. I told her that I noticed the female section for city clothes was much bigger than the male. (Outdoor clothing companies often sell both technical clothing and casual clothing.) I have noticed the number of gendered selections may be equal, but the proportion of casual clothes in the female section is far larger, while the male section has a far larger technical section. I told Polly that I have mostly defaulted to wearing the men's clothing.



which is good.<sup>21</sup> I feel like there is this movement within popular media to portray women less as these, like, silly sexual objects, and less in stereotypical roles and more powerful roles. However, I have noticed those roles have become, like, the hard-core violent women: like, *Hunger Games* and *Brave*. I'm a sucker for that stuff, because that's where my idea of my personal identity comes into play, that super-adventurer; but, I think it's still not super-multidimensional or promoting the range of what women are. The message is not "be whatever you want to be," it's "be a pretty princess" or "be a warrior."

I see it in outdoor media, too. I know this girl, and she is getting sponsored all over the place. It is awesome, because she climbs in like silly outfits and whatever she wants, and she's just killing it. But, then I see all the Climb Tech ads, and all the ads are this one pretty blonde girl in a bikini. She has a lot of makeup on and she's hot. I see those ads and it doesn't appeal to me. I feel like it's not for the female audience and that is discouraging.

*Dealing with feeling marginalized.* I think I have built up this little fury and fire in me from my experiences. In my life, I really like to prove wrong people who stereotype me. You know I've always had the personality where, if I feel cornered into something, I rebound way in the other direction. So, I think for me, people telling me I couldn't be a certain thing just made me want to be it more: prove them wrong. I don't know if that's a great thing, but that's part of how I came to be. People's reaction to that part of my personality is all over the place. It has caused some pretty stressful relationships, but then, also, some people really celebrate that about me, too. It's awesome when that

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#### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>21</sup> I agreed with Polly with regard to the shift she is seeing. I shared with her that, while there were so many things about the places I've worked for that were frustrating, I have also noticed a real desire to increase diversity.

happens and it really strengthens some of my relationships. I think a lot of people enjoy seeing a woman kind-of be, like, “Oh, f\*\*\* that shit...I can do it!” That’s helped me, I think, land some jobs, like firefighting.

I think I’ve put this stress on myself to do some things, not just because I enjoy them, but also because I have to do it to prove something. Having so many experiences of feeling marginalized has kind of fueled that in me. For example, there are certain physical things that have always been very difficult for me, and that has become very difficult for me to admit. I can’t physically carry as much as a guy who is six feet and weighs 180 pounds. That’s just a physics thing; so, like, I have to come to terms with that. Sometimes I’m forced to let go of my ego, of what I want to be able to do, and let somebody who’s stronger and bigger do that thing. I used to do things like carry extra stuff on my own. I would go to the biggest extreme intentionally, and not always so other people saw me, but also for me and my brain. I wanted to know that I could do it and that I should be able to do it. I’m letting go of that need now, which I think is good.<sup>22</sup>

Another way I think feeling marginalized has really manifested is in this awful, insidious, underhanded way, where I have a lot of second-guessing and self-doubt. Over and over again, society’s, like, “Are you sure that you’re the best at this?” and that has affected me. I was recently talking to a friend about this. I used to get really fired up by the idea of the fight and I liked it. Now, later in life, I’m almost just, like, more exhausted

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### **Narratives of collaborative storying**

<sup>22</sup> I told Polly that I share her desire and motivation to prove myself. I told her I have a similar feeling: if there’s something you don’t think women can do, that makes me want to do it; I am going to go out of my way to do it. I told her that it became a mission of mine to be scheduled on the boat crew of my river guiding company. Those boats were heavy and I would be carrying way too much weight. (I actually think they should have been carried by two people, because it would have been safer and more efficient.) However, carrying a boat alone had become this proving ground. I really enjoyed hearing the men on the boat crew say things like, “Oh, it’s Mary Ellen up there...she won’t need help; she’s got this.”

and saddened by it. I don't know if I just, like, lost my energy for it or what. I notice now that instead of doing things, like learning everything about my car before going to the mechanic so they won't rip me off, I just want to let my husband take it. The experience of going to the mechanic, and feeling belittled and taken advantage of, is stressful and awful for me, and I just don't want to deal with it anymore. So, for me, my reactions to marginalization have manifested in empowering ways and also manifested in underhanded, exhausting, shitty ways.

I'm optimistic about women having more freedom to pursue things that were traditionally male-dominated, but I worry that it's still going to be this move towards ascribing to this macho culture, as opposed to really deconstructing or looking at what makes sense. I worry that it's just going to be ascribing to this other messed up standard, that's also really damaging to boys. I worry that it will turn into girls just playing into that, as opposed to creating a better system for everyone. What I don't see as much of is a movement for men to be able to, also, really look at what expectations are placed on them, and what barriers they face to go do things that are more traditionally feminine; and that that is just going to get forgotten about in the empowering, because the powerful structure is this patriarchy. Women ascribing to it aren't necessarily very helpful. So I'm optimistic that things are changing, but I think that that is a real possibility, too.

*The impact of outdoor recreation.* Looking back over all of my life, I see all of my direct experience with the outdoors and understand that is where my deep relationship with the outdoors and nature comes from. For me, my experiences in the outdoors have had huge personal learning growth: my MTS trip when I was 15, and then my OTS semester when I was 20. You are living in this small communal environment; you can't

help but really confront the parts of your personality that work well and don't work well. It's, like, everything that happens in a normal social environment is condensed into this small community and there's no escaping it. For me, I had these really powerful and important learning moments about myself and how I affected people. I learned a lot about how to be a better person on trips. I credit a lot of that to the intentional facilitation of my leaders, and I was really inspired by that. I also credit that to just seeing women out there doing stuff. For example, I did not even talk to that woman guide on the river during my MTS course; I just saw her as strong and powerful, and she inspired me so significantly.

I realized that I had potential to have a lot of significance, because those people really helped shape who I was, who I am, and who I've become. When I talk about it, it sounds like super-weird, but the chance to be a part of that and just have the ability to be an example for others has motivated me. I was especially attracted to the idea of showing young women that there is another path. That it doesn't have to be this straight path that falls in the normal, socially acceptable lines of what it means to be a woman. Just the idea that you can be yourself, that there are different paths and you can just be whoever you are. That, to me, was really attractive, really exciting, and (I still think) really powerful. I wanted to be a part of that; I wanted to be able to have the potential to have as much influence as some of the leaders had had on my life.

I really do believe that pretty much every person benefits from experiencing the outdoors more directly. I believe there is, like, a biological need for it that affects every level of a person. I think it's beneficial for everyone. I have a really hard time saying that, because I generally don't think that something applies to everyone, but on a general level I believe that's true about the outdoors. Being outdoors feeds this basic human need,

because we are a part of it.

## **Phase II- Themes of individuals.**

### ***Allison.***

*Imprint of group experience.* For the most part, Allison's early exposure to outdoor recreation was through organized group activities, although as a child she was able to spend time with her country cousins. Allison recognized her group experiences outdoors as making a significant impact, both on her life and her career choices.

Allison had fond memories of spending time outdoors with her cousins. She grew up in a city and getting to visit her cousins in a more rural, country setting was a highlight for her. "Mostly, we did whatever we wanted, which was super fun. I remember biking to the gravel pit, swimming in the lake, and just running around in the woods." While Allison remembered the exposure to outdoor activities when visiting her relatives, she also noted her first exposure to gender expectations. "For example, sometimes on Sundays the girls went to church with my aunt and the boys went to the farm to do work with my uncle....Having to go to church with the other girls was just frustrating."

As she matured, Allison's outdoor experience centered around organized activities, the first of which was a required program sponsored by her school. "The first trip I got to go on was in seventh grade. We went to an environmental learning center and I loved it!" She noted that opportunity was important to her continued progression in outdoor recreation, "After my experiences hanging out with my cousins in the woods, the environmental learning center was, sort of, the start of me enjoying being outside. I would say it was a seminal event in my history."

After that, Allison continued to seek out similar opportunities and her efforts were

supported by her parents. “I found out that the program ran a summer camp and I asked my parents if I could go the next year. They said, ‘Yes.’ It was an all girls canoe trip with a female instructor.... It was just awesome.”

Allison continued to participate in organized outdoor activities in high school and college. Happily describing one experience, Allison said, “We spent 12 days out in the mountains and I got to climb Rockface (a multi-pitch alpine rock climb) as a 15-year-old! I remember feeling strong and feeling like I was in my element. I just loved every second of it.” Later in her career she took a group of students up that same rock climb and realized how important the experience she had as a student had been to her career trajectory. She ended up writing the leader a letter; “I thanked him for putting me on the career path I eventually ended up on.”

Allison participated in another trip her senior year, and then again in college. As she reflected on what contributed to her becoming a professional in the field, she identified those experiences as a young person as very influential. “They were pretty impactful and meaningful experiences for me. On those trips I felt like I could be who I was – authentically, me. I felt like I was a useful and valuable member of a team and I connected strongly with the outdoor environment.”

For Allison, those experiences were not only valuable because she was exposed to activities in the outdoors, but also because they involved an aspect of group achievement. “I asked myself, ‘What have been the most impactful experiences in my life so far?’ In the last ten years they had all centered on intense group activities. The outdoors and soccer were really my answer to that question.” After participating in these programs, Allison gradually became aware that she might want to work in a similar field. “After

having such powerful experiences on my wilderness trips, I knew I wanted to be a part of providing those opportunities for other people in the future.”

*Body image perceptions and the impact of the media.* Allison often conveys awareness of body image within her story. She attributed much of how she has experienced body image to socializing factors, in particular the influence of media. Allison further identified that women in outdoor recreation are either sexualized while participating or masculinized because they are displaying competence in the field.

Allison reflected on different socializing factors that influenced her body image early in her life. She noted that her mother made a conscious effort to shield her from some of the images that media, aimed at young girls, were trying to convey. “In high school I remember my mom trying pretty hard to protect me from body expectations in the media. For example, my mom was really adamant that I not read, like, *Seventeen* or *Glamour*.” She added that her mother “would buy me things like *Consumer Reports for Kids* and a soccer magazine, *Kick*. She didn’t want me to worry about my image.” While Allison did not have easy access to those magazines, her friends did. On soccer trips, she observed, “all the other girls on the bus would have them.” In the end, she came to perceive herself as being less concerned about body image in comparison to her peers and attributed that to her mother’s conscious media choices.

Allison discussed awareness of body image as a source of personal concern. She reflected on the experience of showering naked with her soccer team in college. “There was a culture of being naked, and that being an okay thing. I appreciated that, because I think it was the first time in my life when I’d seen other women’s bodies, and it made me more comfortable with my own.” Allison explained how important she thinks seeing real

bodies is in counteracting the body expectations that the media portrays and that she wished there was a more intentional culture of body acceptance for young girls.

I wish we had more of a culture of that nakedness within our own gender, because I think it's empowering to realize that what we actually see in the media is not normal. I think we look at half-naked bodies of women who are paid to look good; I don't think girls see other bodies. They may just assume everyone looks like the women in the media, except for them.

Allison's alertness to female body portrayals in the media has continued as an adult. She has noticed, while consuming different media publications, that athletic women are increasingly sexualized, and if an athletic woman does not fit into the societal definition of sexy, then she is masculinized because of her athletic ability. Allison first reflected on this when remembering the US women winning the World Cup. "Brandi Chastain and a couple of other players went on the Dave Letterman show. His comment to them was, 'You all are amazing athletes and you're wonderfully heterosexual.'" Allison noted that she thinks times have changed slightly, but the dichotomization of athletic women as either sexy or masculine persists in many arenas, including outdoor recreation. "Sometimes I hear people outside of our community say, 'Oh, sure, she's a really good climber-mountaineer, but she's really manly.'" She added, "I think if a woman is not highlighted for her manliness, then the converse happens and she is sexualized."

Allison has experienced this directly as well. She described a time she was working with all male students and a male co-instructor. "The guys started making jokes about how rugby women tend to be bigger and manlier; the implication was that they



were butch and thus not attractive.” While she was not personally being masculinized or sexualized, the objectification of women affected her. She said: “I felt like there was a lot of a value attributed to women based on their sexuality, and how desirable they were to men, and that was frustrating.” Another time when she was working with all male participants, she herself was masculinized. “We had this cool conversation with our students about inclusion and at one point a student pointed out that there were no women in our group, even though I was sitting right there.” Allison understood that the student was most likely referring to the fact that they had no female peers in the group, but she also appreciated that in this situation her male co-worker pointed out the student’s error. “I did appreciate my co-worker stopping the conversation and, at least, saying that he saw me as a woman.”

*Evolution of a leadership attribute.* Allison demonstrated a desire to be a leader from an early age and took advantage of leadership opportunities throughout the course of her experiences. Her personal growth as a leader included assuming official leadership roles, as well as using unofficial leadership opportunities to raise awareness about issues (which were often gender related) affecting her field.

Allison remembers her parents instilling in her the understanding that she could be a leader. “My parents always told me, ‘You can be a leader.’ They told me, ‘You can and you should speak your mind.’” Not only did her parents begin to instill a leadership mindset, but they also initiated her understanding of gender and that gender should not be a factor in opportunities. “They would make sure I knew that I was no different and that I had the same potentials and opportunities as any man.”

Allison attributed one of her first official leadership opportunities to soccer. “My

experiences playing soccer have been a contributing part of my development as a leader. I was the captain of the soccer team and that was training in leadership.” Taking on leadership as an official role continued for her in college while doing outdoor trips. “I went on the first trip my sophomore year.... I loved the first year so much that my senior year I asked to be the student leader for the trip. I got, like, wilderness first aid training to prepare and I did some leadership stuff.” Reflecting on that trip in college Allison pointed out that, in fact, she had very limited leadership responsibility, but she enjoyed being branded as a leader. “I really had no different responsibilities that second trip...but Student Leader was my title, and that was cool... but those trips did serve as some training opportunities for me.”

Once in the outdoor recreation field, as a professional Allison continued to take on leadership roles. At her first outdoor employer Allison became a senior instructor and then moved on to a supervisory role. This same trajectory was repeated when she started working for a different organization.

During her progression Allison exhibited intentionality in her decisions. She transitioned to a supervisor role with OTS, but prior to taking that new role, resolved that she "had some specific career goals" which she first wanted to accomplish. As she stated it, one goal, in particular, was that "I wanted to be the lead instructor on a Rocky Mountain mountaineering trip.” One of her reasons for wanting to achieve the lead instructor position on the mountaineering course stemmed from her desire to lead, particularly a desire to be a leader for other women:

I will also admit that I was driven to lead that course because a woman hadn't been a lead instructor on one of those in a long time, and I wanted to be a role

model. I wanted to do it and show that it could be done. I wanted to have had that experience, so that I could coach and mentor other women towards that goal more effectively.

Allison has also exhibited a desire to lead in an unofficial capacity by advocating for things she feels are important. “Raising awareness about things that affect our field is important to me, and that includes gender.” Her motivation for initiating conversations and putting effort into raising awareness is two-fold. First, Allison finds personal strength by engaging with others and discussing issues that affect her directly. Second, she wants to be support for, and ally of, other people as they negotiate challenges that arise because of their gender.

Throughout my career I have been able to negotiate through some tough experiences, in part because I gain strength from my conversations....I know that there are going to be more hard times for me in the field where I am uncomfortable, but I also want to be sure I offer that ally-ship to other people: just being an ally, helping people know they're not alone, ever. I want people to feel like, if they do speak out or share a different opinion that other people will be there to back them up. I want them to feel like they don't have to do it alone, because I have often felt like I had to do it alone.

Ultimately, Allison attributes much of her success to her active pursuit of leadership opportunities.

I look at women who I came in at a similar level...within the organization.... I've moved up and taken on more responsibility faster. I think a large part of that was because I went and hung out with people who I maybe didn't love; but I wanted to

get to climb and I knew I would learn a lot and that it would help me get to where I want to go.

However, for Allison, as a leader, true success means other women, too, are able to access leadership in outdoor recreation readily. “I think true success will mean, not only, can I thrive in this field, but also that anybody who wants to be part of this field can. We will succeed as an industry when gender doesn't have to be a barrier.” This goal is where Allison’s current leadership perspective resides, “That’s why I try to focus on how I can make this a more welcoming space for everybody, and more importantly, how can I make it a welcome place for people who are underrepresented?”

*Resolute pursuit of technical skill.* Throughout Allison’s story she actively endeavored to develop her technical skills, challenging herself to continue with (or in the absence of) support. “Throughout my career my technical skill development has been a mix of seminars, informal trainings, different roles, and then pursuing training on my own.” Allison sought out organized training opportunities and on her own worked to enhance her skills.

Allison has worked predominantly for two outdoor employers and both offered formal opportunities for her to develop her technical skills. When referring to her time at the Mountain Trip School (MTS), Allison stated, “During my time at MTS I noticed that they have a culture of training by apprenticeship. They would run training trips that any staff could sign up for. I appreciated the training opportunities I had there.” Similarly, while examining her development at the Outdoor Trip School (OTS) Allison said, “I really appreciate working for them...because I think they make it easy to develop technical skills. I took advantage of every single seminar they offered.”

While Allison has benefitted from these formal trainings, she noted that she also worked on her own to build proficiency. For example, Allison explained about learning risk management at OTS that “I gained a basis of risk management fundamentals and skills on a seminar and then pursued the skill on my own through personal experience. I think that pattern is what has allowed me to find success at OTS.”

Allison consistently responded to instruction by continuing to improve her skill set, whether the training experience was positive or not. For example, at MTS she began rock climbing, saying, “I convinced my friend Jen to go out and teach me how to sport-lead....After she taught me what to do, everyday I had free, I would go up there.!”

Even in the face of non-supportive encounters, Allison was resolved to enlarge her technical capability. She described an experience, working a course early in her mountaineering progression, when she was hoping her co-worker would assist her development:

I needed skill-set development, and, looking back, I wasn’t getting a lot of that from him...but I think that I have an attitude of, “Well, that sucked, but I am not going to let that slow me down.” Because of that, I think I have put a lot of effort into my own development.

Allison noted that gender dynamics played a role in some of her attempts to develop her skill set, particularly in her climbing development. “During my climbing development I was lucky enough to be able to go climbing with more talented and accomplished climbers, but usually those were men.” While she was thankful for those opportunities and they were invaluable to her skill development, she was aware of her gender during many of those experiences, partly because she perceived a pre-existing

power dynamic between men and women:

I don't know if this feeling was real or not, but sometimes I felt that...there was awkwardness or weird expectations present; like, they might have a crush on me and I didn't reciprocate. They had gone out of their way to help me out, and then I felt, like, 'Oh, what do I owe them?' I think that dynamic can feel a little sticky sometimes. I realize that it can happen between more experienced women and younger women, too, but I feel less of a power dynamic with other women than I do with men.

While Allison pointed out that learning from men could pose some problems, she also pointed out that accessing those learning opportunities at all could be challenging.

I tend to see people sticking with people they are familiar with and used to.

During my progression I would often see men, sitting in the hallways at OTS, talking about their last climbing trip, or the one they wanted to go on. I thought to myself, 'Well, I want to go on that climbing trip. How do I get invited?' I would express interest, but I was hesitant to ask to join them, because I was a new climber and they weren't approaching me.

Allison was determined to build her skill set and she was able to build relationships with people who could assist her; however, she did express the difficulty she faced in negotiating that. "If I wanted to climb, I had to work hard at some relationships with men, and they weren't, necessarily, people I would have picked to hang out with." Allison pointed out that men, too, may face challenges while building their skills, however she believes a technical skill development trajectory is more established for men in general.

I think the difference is that they can look at people in positions of power, like

supervisors in that skill type, and see more people who look like them--maybe don't act like them, but look like them, as men. I think there are more obvious pathways to get to where they want to go and I really do think that having role models is pretty important....If you don't have role models available, it's a different obstacle to hurdle, and I think there are fewer women in our field to look to.

For Allison, part of her ability to gain technical skills in activities dominated by men is finding motivation in challenge. "I like the challenge that comes with breaking stereotypes. Working in a male-dominated field fuels that in me." Thereon, Allison attributed some of her success in the outdoor field to her determination: "I think there is a type of woman who is more likely to be successful in this field: a woman who is outwardly confident, driven, and someone who is able to see a goal and actively pursue it."

*Evolution of awareness of value of a culture of mentorship.* Allison has experienced both formal mentoring and informal mentoring during her outdoor participation and career. While Allison has benefitted from mentorship, she believes her male peers have enjoyed greater access to informal mentorship. Because of this, Allison intends to actively seek opportunities to mentor other women, both for technical skill development and for achieving success in a male-dominated field; she hopes to facilitate a mentorship network for women in the profession.

Allison recognized the importance of the role modeling and mentorship she has received. "Having positive mentors and peers around me has been so valuable to me. Having people who told me I was good at this, and that I could do it, was really helpful."

When she was just an adolescent she remembers admiring her summer camp counselor. “I remember this woman instructor who was a badass. She would carry this huge wooden canoe on her shoulders in portage for what seemed like miles on end. I realized that she was very strong and I admired her for that ability.”

Once in the field as a professional, Allison experienced a culture of mentorship at her first employer, the Mountain Trip School (MTS), which was specifically directed toward becoming effective educators. “I think a lot of my growth can be attributed to the very deliberate mentorship program they had in place.” Allison went on to mention one woman in particular who helped develop her as an educator, “She really challenged me to meet youth where they were. She helped me realize that the experience was not about me, it was about them. She helped me realize the power of letting go and allowing someone to have their own experience.” Allison pointed out that she thinks this type of focused mentorship was the norm at the MTS locations she worked for and that has not been her experience at all employers.

I realized how intensely we had focused on it at MTS. It was a cultural norm....It was also a basic expectation at MTS that you would connect strongly and deeply with each student, which was a way of passing mentorship to our participants....I work for OTS (the Outdoor Trip School) now, and I think we're not quite as deliberate about that sort of mentorship.

While working for OTS Allison also experienced mentorship. Although it was not as intentionally focused on education as MTS had been, her role models and coaches assisted her in developing new skill sets and negotiating the organization, as a professional. Allison recounted the formal mentorship she received from the Women's



Resources Coordinator, an employee of OTS.

When I started at the school there was a wonderful Women's Resources Coordinator. She would call me and ask, 'How are you doing? How is your career at the school going? What courses are you working? What are you doing on your personal time? Where do you want to go? How can I support you?' She was a great mentor for me.

Allison went on to explain that the coordinator had helped her choose different next-steps and training opportunities.

Allison also had informal mentorship experiences at OTS, particularly in her rock climbing development. "I have had many role models in my climbing career. There is one OTS woman who stands out for me. She was my supervisor for a long time and I would sport climb with her often." While she appreciated the mentorship she received from other women, she did turn to male mentors for some of her skill development as well. "I was very grateful to her for that; but, when I wanted to start doing more alpine climbing, she wasn't really a role model there, because that wasn't where she spent her time. So, for that, I had to turn to men, mostly."

While Allison did have many positive male mentors, she also observed that it was more difficult to find and get connected with them. "I believe there's a stronger culture of mentorship among men at the school. That's an advantage that's not formalized, but very real." She explained why she believed a lack of female mentorship contributed to the lack of women working in technical programs. "When our school only has men working mountaineering courses in the Rockies, I think fewer women hear about all the awesome things that happen on the courses."

Allison pointed out that she thinks having female mentors in technical skills not only would contribute to skill development, but also could be a network to share strategies for succeeding in a male-dominated work environment.

I think that we need female role models sharing their experiences with other women and sharing tips about working with mostly men, etc. That informal mentorship network is a way to increase participation in male-dominated activities, and I think that happens more for men, because the majority of role models in these fields are men. They tell their younger male coworkers these things sooner.

While Allison has benefitted from male mentors, she argued that having diverse role models is important. “While I think women can identify with men, I also think some women will identify more strongly with a woman.”

Because of the power Allison believes mentorship can have, she intends to be a mentor for other women entering the field. “Primarily, I want to pass knowledge on to younger women who, I think, don't always have access to more experienced climbers who will take them climbing.” She wants to offer training to young women as they learn technical skills, and also offer a perspective for women of what it is like to be a woman in her field.

I think OTS is going to be a stronger organization when we have more technically competent women; and I think getting them training, before they show up at OTS, so that they really perform well on their seminars, is as valuable a way to support women as anything else I can think of....Having been a woman going through the channels of, and working my way up through, the organization, I have a unique

perspective on what it is to be a woman doing that. It's a perspective my male co-workers can't offer....I really want to be a mentor for women and start building those networks for incoming women in our field.

*Gender expectations.* Allison has felt affected by gender expectations in different ways throughout her career. She sometimes feels the need to be over-prepared before taking on new roles, perhaps as a result of her perception of other's gender-based expectations. Similarly, Allison has felt afraid to make mistakes, because of how those mistakes will be perceived. Conversely, Allison has been motivated by gender expectations, wanting to prove them wrong. At the same time, she worries that her success is, in part, the result of a leadership style that reflects the masculine gender expectations of her profession.

While relating her story, Allison described her progression in the mountaineering program at the Outdoor Trip School (OTS). "I kept working and progressing, and was lucky enough to get placed on courses with some good coaches, and eventually worked up to being assessed as a lead instructor." Allison was excited to reach this high level in a male-dominated discipline, but she did feel some trepidation.

I got scheduled to be the lead instructor on a mountaineering course. I have to say I was a little nervous. I generally like to feel over-prepared for a role (which I think may be a little bit of a gender thing), and I cannot say that I felt over-prepared going into that course.

Fortunately, she performed well on the course.

Her penchant for over qualification has occurred on other occasions. For example, Allison recently took on a supervisor role at OTS and similar feelings arose.

I had some specific career goals that I wanted to accomplish before taking on that new role. One, in particular, was that I wanted to be the lead instructor on a Rocky Mountain mountaineering trip. To me, doing that before my promotion was important, and I feel like part of that desire may have been because I want to feel overqualified before taking on new tasks.

Allison pointed out, “I know research tends to suggest that women, more than men, want to feel overqualified for roles they’re applying for and I think I have felt that: I think that is true about me.” Allison compared herself and her feelings of preparedness to her male peers. “I have seen men take on supervisory roles, even though they hadn’t been lead instructors in that course type before, but for some reason I felt the need to be the lead on another Rocky Mountain mountaineering course before supervising.” Allison attributed her desire to feel over-prepared to a sense that people assess women and men differently: “My sense is that people tend to second-guess women more than men, and maybe that’s what drives this lack of confidence for me. I don’t know that people actually do second-guess women more. It’s just this sense I have. “

Similarly, Allison has noticed a nervousness she feels about making mistakes, specifically, nervousness about being judged as a woman who has made a mistake. When reflecting on an experience leading an all male training, Allison stated:

During that seminar I was especially aware of my place as the only woman and although it was potentially irrational, I was worried; if I made a mistake, I would be told it was because I had been forced into the position prematurely, rather than a human being who made a mistake....I get nervous that if I make a mistake, all of a sudden I made a mistake as a woman. I may be perceived as having been

given the position because I was a woman, not because I am competent, and confident, and ready for the role.

While she was, in fact, confident in her ability and felt prepared for the role, she was nervous that others would perceive her differently. “I felt like I was ready for the role I had, but the fear of making a mistake and being accused of premature promotion was in my head.”

Because Allison has experienced this fear, she tries to encourage other women to have confidence in their ability and not be afraid of making mistakes.

I tell them, "Don't let anybody tell you, you were pushed into this prematurely. If you are ready, you are ready." I think there are a lot of men making mistakes and nobody ever says to them, "Oh, you were promoted prematurely off that seminar, because you're a man." Even though, maybe they were. It's just not something we say, because it's not at the forefront of our experience.

While gender expectations have affected Allison in adverse ways, she has also gained motivation from them. “I also think I like the challenge that comes with breaking stereotypes. Working in a male-dominated field fuels that in me.” Allison pointed out that she has been recognized for her ability to thrive, even when confronted by gender expectations.

I think they probably staff me on these all-male courses, because they think I can handle it; and I can. I am who I am. I'm a woman. I'm a driver. I'm outspoken and, even when I'm wrong, I'm real confident about being wrong.

Allison rationalized that she is able to thrive in male-dominated environments because she has a traditionally masculine leadership style and that, while she is a woman

surrounded by men, there is a deeper level of leadership expectations present that is also gendered. “But, for me, knowing they staff me on these courses because I have a more traditionally masculine leadership style is problematic. I think we're less likely to staff a more soft-spoken, typically feminine leader on an all-male course, because we're worried about how the men will receive her.”

*Implications of creating a gender balance.* Allison has given a lot of thought to how gender affects the organization where she is currently employed. In her previous employment she experienced gender differently than in her current work place, possibly because the gender balance was different. She appreciated the fact that her current organization is actively addressing gender issues and Allison explained that she believes she has benefitted personally from her organization's gender balance objectives. She also pointed out that increasing gender balance and women's representation in the field has been an uncomfortable transition for some.

Allison has been more aware of gender issues during her current employment than at her previous job. She attributed this difference, in part, to a more equal representation of women at her initial employer.

I think part of the reason gender didn't factor in for me as much at MTS (Mountain Trip School) was because I wasn't in the minority as a woman. It was a space that felt very equal. There were role models of both genders in positions of power who were comfortable with who they were and their gender, and that was a great example to have.

Allison pointed out that upon transitioning to her new job with the Outdoor Trip School (OTS) gender seemed more significant. “Gender became a bigger issue, because there are

fewer women here.”

Allison noted that OTS is taking action to actively address the imbalance of gender within their organization. “I think OTS is doing the right thing to talk about it and make an effort to change the story.” She went on to point out that if, as an organization, they want to serve female students, having female instructors is important. “To be relevant as an organization, we need to have representatives from the populations we're serving. It's naïve to think that we can have one segment of population representing us and do the best job possible.”

While Allison believed in the goal of gaining gender balance, she was unsure of the best way to achieve it. One program, which OTS has employed in its efforts, is training seminars specifically for female instructors. Allison has been a participant in, as well as leader of, these seminars. “Now in my career I have taught and taken women’s seminars, and it has been an integral part of my progression at the school.” While Allison has benefited from these women-specific seminars, her thoughts about them have evolved over time. Upon reflecting on her first women’s seminar, which was geared at advancing rock climbing skills, Allison said,

It was just the boost I needed to be able to feel confident going out and performing on my own....It was an all female environment. I met a climbing partner on it and she was great....The seminar had many aspects that were amazing, but just meeting a climbing partner, who I felt comfortable with, was such a gift.

Currently, Allison has put a lot of thought into the purpose of women’s only seminars. “I think I've just progressed in how I view this issue over the years. Originally,

I saw it as strictly a male-female thing, [but] now I see it as more of a cultural gender-construct thing.” Allison pointed out that she believed the initial intent of the seminars was to provide an all female learning environment because, “there was a pervasive idea that women learned better” in that arena. She believed that, “the original idea was, if we wanted to support women, we needed to put them in an environment where they wouldn't have to compete, essentially, with the more dominating male presences.” However while the organization continued these programs, she began to consider the gender dichotomy that these seminars were promoting.

I think there are men, also, who very much fit into that category of being more soft-spoken, not being a driver, being less confident about their abilities. So, to me, it's less of a sex thing, and more of a culture we construct. We culturally label people as masculine or feminine.

While she acknowledged this concern, ultimately, she still believed the women's seminars were important due to the significant gender imbalance she continued to observe. “I work for a school where we have more men working in every single discipline and so, for that reason, the women's seminars are valuable.” Allison explained that women benefit from these seminars in more ways than simply developing skills.

I think if nothing else, the women's seminars at OTS provide a space for women to realize that structural sexism still exists....It's become less about how women learn and more about empowerment, talking about these things, and giving women the resources for whatever skill they want to develop at the school.

Allison further reflected on a recent women's specific seminar she took. She pointed out that often a women's seminar is run concurrently with a co-ed option, which



can result in an all male seminar and an all female one. In this instance, the female seminar ended up including the more experienced participants, which to Allison was notable. “I think our group’s high experience level was noteworthy, because there’s a stereotype at the school that women’s seminars don’t typically have as experienced participants as do co-ed seminars. They are sometimes viewed as developmental and not evaluation based.” She noted that, “it felt really good to be with an all female group that was, on paper, more experienced than the all men’s group. I perceived that as an anomaly.”

While Allison appreciated that seminar, she explained initially she had signed up for the co-ed option and was moved to the female seminar to fill out the roster. She had no problem being moved in this case; however, she explained this is not abnormal and pointed out the problematic potential of those changes.

I had a couple of women on this seminar tell me, ‘I signed up for the co-ed one and would have preferred to be a participant on that; because the reality is, I am not going to work with women in this program, I am going to be working with men and it would have set me up better to be working and establishing relationships with people I might work with in the future.’ I thought that was an excellent point.

Lastly, Allison reflected on some reactions from her male peers to the organization’s gender focus. She pointed out an example of this when she was recounting her friend’s reaction to the organization’s focus on diversity.

He said, “I feel, like, it's like beating a dead horse.” At the time, as is usually the case with me, I did not respond immediately.... But, looking back, I wish I had

said, “You know, I bet it doesn't feel like a dead horse to somebody who's not feeling included every day.”

Allison observed a similar reaction from another male peer, “I had a co-worker, who didn't get the contract he wanted, say, ‘It sucks being a white guy at OTS.’” Alison didn’t respond immediately and explained, “I wasn't able to deal with it in the moment, because usually I have to sort through my emotional reaction before I can come to some objective, helpful conversation. But stuff like that happens.”

Ultimately Allison explained why she believed some of her peers have had a hard time understanding the push for gender balance within their organization.

Until I had experiences where I was very obviously in the minority group, I think I had a harder time empathizing with other people's struggles with structural discrimination...I think that empathy piece is what sometimes is lacking in the experience of my white male co-workers. They can maybe understand academically that some of this is going on, but I think it took me having my own experience to really understand.

Overall, Allison is pragmatic about gender balance at OTS and, by extension, in outdoor leadership organizations:

On my best days at OTS, and with my friends, I'm just a person. Sometimes gender plays into that, but mostly we've accepted each other to the point where gender isn't a blatant part of our day-to-day interactions together...Then other days, I am aware that we're not actually over it and we're not making a big deal of nothing.

***Chris.***

*Family support.* Chris's connection to the outdoors was engendered at an early age. She attributes a large part of her initial outdoor exposure to her family, in particular her father, and she cites her family as influencing and facilitating her lifelong relationship with the outdoors. Through his own participation, Chris's father role-modeled a love for the outdoors, her family encouraged outdoor play, and they supported her continued participation in outdoor recreation, emotionally and financially.

Chris attributes much of her passion for the outdoors to her father's influence. This took the form of role modeling, as well as shared experience. Chris explained, "My dad modeled a love of the outdoors for us... I remember when I was really young he would go on these ski trips with friends. They would always go on a full moon night; they would ski out and dig in. So I think a love for the outdoors was something my dad set up for us and instilled that value in my sisters and me."

Outdoor play was encouraged during Chris's childhood. "Overall, growing up we spent a lot of time outside: mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and then, later on, hiking with Dad." Playing outside was a regular occurrence for Chris and those experiences left a lasting impression on her. "We would race around on our mountain bikes, build forts in the forest, and just get really dirty. My dad was really into building forts with us. I think those experiences outdoors ingrained a value in us that I didn't realize at the time."

Her father went beyond simply supporting her desire to play outside. As a child her enthusiasm for all outdoor activities wasn't unlimited, but her Dad actively encouraged outdoor pursuits. "One of my really funny memories from my childhood was

cross-country skiing with my dad. He would always try to get us to go out skiing with him, but at six years old my motor skills were not good. I would go out skiing with him and end up in a tangled pile of skis and poles, yelling to my dad to come help me! While I was lying in the snow helpless, I had no idea how valuable those moments would be to me in the future.”

While the value of her father’s encouragement perhaps was not apparent to Chris at the time, she now looks back and recognizes its significance. Chris emphasizes the importance of her father’s influence by noticing a difference between her own value for the outdoors and her younger sister’s. “She seems very different from my older sister and I; she’s a glamour girl. My parents divorced when my little sister would have been in kindergarten. In those formative years she didn’t have as much time with Dad and I think that, as a result, the love of the outdoors was instilled in her less.”

Support from her family continued as Chris made choices in pursuit of a career in outdoor recreation. Her family supported her, both emotionally and financially. For example, Chris worked for a trail crew after college and remembers her friends and family being un-phased by, and encouraging, her choice. “I felt very supported by my friends and family during that endeavor. I think that when my family heard my plans for summer, they thought, “Of course Chris is doing this. No surprise there” (which was really funny to me). This emotional support continued when she decided to do a semester long course with an outdoor school. Chris said, “I felt a lot of support from the people who mattered in my life. They gave off this feeling of “Yeah! Chris is going to rock this!”

Finally, Chris family support has also been financial. Chris pointed out that some

of her activities have been costly and she notes, specifically, the outdoor semester in which she participated: “An OTS semester is not cheap and it was not something I could afford on my own. My parents had not been planning on that expense, but my parents realized how important the course was to me and they chipped in as much as they could. I covered some and my grandma covered the majority of the cost.”

While Chris very strongly attributes her childhood experiences to her current love of the outdoors, she seems somewhat equivocal about the impact of parental influence, in general. She later speaks of the fears she has experienced in the outdoors. She refers to concerns she sees parents expressing for children’s safety outdoors and believes that as children people are often socialized to perceive adventurous situations as frightening. However, it is clear that, for Chris, her family’s influence was positive.

*Effect of group acceptance.* Chris often spoke of the value of group involvement throughout her experiences. “I know being outside makes me feel good, but I think it goes beyond that, too. I think it is the people I am with that truly make an experience.” She demonstrated a desire to be included in groups, as well as expressed a multitude of benefits she had experienced from group involvement, and considered the role gender played in these interactions.

In one outstanding experience, Chris experienced her gender as impediment to group acceptance during some of her interactions with the climbing community. Specifically, Chris referred to a sub-group within the larger climbing community in her town; she called them the “Dude Bros.” She pointed out that this group’s values did not necessarily reflect hers, still they influenced her:

I can hang with Dude Bros and climb with them, when and if I need to, but in

general that isn't really my climbing style. When I picture that group of climbers, I picture male climbers that are really machismo. They tend to be really acrobatic sport climbers, who are climbing really steep climbs, and are very vocal about their abilities. I consider myself a really delicate climber and delicate climbing does not really fit in with the Dude Bros.

Chris experienced multiple levels of gender disconnect with this group. Not only were they a group of men, but also Chris perceived them as machismo, parading their masculinity. Chris felt alienated from this group as a woman, because she valued different behavior, both interpersonally and, especially, in climbing partners. This value is reflected later in Chris's story when she discussed what she looks for in climbing partners: "Most of those positive qualities, for me, are those stereotypically considered to be feminine," she said. Additionally, Chris mentioned that the actual climbing ability the "Dude Bros" considered elite favored a masculine build and Chris used a different style as a petite woman.

Chris freely pointed out the disconnect she saw between herself and the "Dude Bros," but also realized feeling accepted by their group had influenced her. "It's interesting that, while I don't often climb with Dude Bros, they do influence me as a climber." For Chris it seemed that the influence this group had on her was the desire for them to see her as a valid climber. She wanted them to see her as a member of the climbing community in the larger sense. When referring to a time she performed well, with a group of Dude Bros watching, Chris stated, "While I don't think that should matter to me, for whatever reason, it did. I think that just having them see me climb hard, recover from a near fall, and not take a whipper, makes them see me as a valid climber."

Chris's desire to be validated by them may stem from her perception that the larger climbing community in general, which she wanted to be a part of, reflected these gendered values as well. "In a lot of climbing cultures, I think it is that machismo vibe that rules the community, and I think, sometimes (maybe a lot of times), in that town it did."

Chris reflected on another instance where she was involved with an all-male group. Unlike her experience with the "Dude Bros," with this group, gender and gender values were not an overt part of the experience; however, Chris was still aware of her gender and the potential prejudice that could have been attached to it. While reflecting on a group of male friends with whom she became "hiking buddies" in college, she mentioned the emotional benefit she experienced from inclusion, "Hiking with them was great. I was the only girl with a group of boys, but I felt supported and included in our adventures. I could tell my friends felt like I was holding my own and able to keep up. They knew I was doing just fine out there and that was pretty exciting for me." While the men in her hiking group did not point out her gender, and she had no evidence that they questioned her ability at any point, it stood out to Chris as "exciting" that she so easily fit in. In a separate conversation Chris mentioned, "I just feel like there is this doubt surrounding the technical skills of women." This perception may have been what made her hiking experience a pleasant surprise for Chris and such a positive one.

In this example, as well as the previous, it is ultimately Chris who is making the judgment as to her own level of acceptance as a female in a group of men, whom she sees herself as different from. It can be gathered that she not only wants to be allowed in the group, but also for the group to value her as a female with a differing skill set.

Chris's gender impacted these experiences in different ways. With the Dude Bros Chris was aware not only of her opposing gender, but also of her differing set of values and her different physical strengths. While the men in her hiking group never pointed out her gender, that experience stood out to Chris. She had perceived men doubting her ability previously and, as a result, was anxious to prove to them that, although a woman, she was skillful.

*Desire to prove herself and the effect of validation.* Chris revealed experiences of both external and internal doubt in her abilities, which operated as a constraint on her development in outdoor recreation. She also used her perception of external doubt as motivation.

The external doubt she encountered was mainly from men and Chris attributed much of it to being a female in the outdoor industry. It is notable that in some cases Chris internalized their doubt, resulting in self-doubt, but in other instances it became a motivating force. Additionally, Chris often felt the need to prove herself as a competent woman and she looked for validation of her abilities from others. While external validation presented as a constructive piece in Chris's progression, as she matured she appreciated more and more being with people who did not question her ability and she developed a realization that needing to prove herself as a competent woman should not be necessary.

Chris described many times when others actively doubted her capabilities and competencies as a woman. One outstanding instance can be seen in a recent climbing experience she had with two men. She pointed out, while she found the climb difficult, so did one of the men she was with. They both struggled; however, she believes their



climbing skills were perceived very differently. “One of the guys I was climbing with that day really struggled on the climb, as well. I think the difference, though, is that there is generally more doubt in people’s minds surrounding the ability of women versus men. I just feel like there is this doubt surrounding the technical skills of women.” Doubt about her ability had been a pattern and she realized it had had an effect on her. “That preconceived doubt in my ability has been a bit of a roadblock for me. Men may say things like, ‘Are you sure you want to do that?’ or ‘Do you know that skill?’ I just think, ‘Yes, I do! Back off!’ I have noticed that the outdoor community is kind of a masculine culture and I think that questioning happens a lot less to men.”

Stemming from this prejudgment about her ability as a woman, Chris demonstrated a strong desire to prove herself. Chris described climbing with a former boyfriend. She felt unsupported and patronized and referred to the experience as negative. However, instead of letting that experience stifle her progression, Chris responded with motivation. “While climbing with him was mainly a negative experience, in a way, he opened the door to climbing for me.... I think I just had this feeling of ‘He sucks, he totally sucks,’ and that pushed me to climb more and prove myself.” Chris admitted that her ability to find motivation out of feeling put down by men is not abnormal for her, “I have noticed that when I am feeling beat-up (and it typically involves a boy), I will throw myself into learning something new.”

Later in Chris’s experiences a notable change in her perception occurred. Her own perceptions about her abilities as a woman changed and her need to be externally validated was quelled as a result. That recognition translated into her becoming more selective about her climbing partners, often preferring to participate with other women.

Finding people that I trust and that help me develop as a climber has become important to me. I have found climbing with and learning from my friend Melissa and other really strong women has resulted in really positive experiences. I avoid what can be a really patronizing learning experience with men. I really try to find people who I can learn from and feel supported by, without a doubting of my ability attached to it.

Additionally, later in Chris's progression she demonstrated the capacity to not only choose to be around supportive people, but also when confronted by men who doubt her ability to avoid internalizing their feelings. A standout example occurred with a male boss. She experienced many negative interactions with her male boss, which she attributed in part to her boss having a problem working with women, Chris stated:

I think one thing I've been able to do with the feelings of being really hurt is remembering that I am a really competent person in the outdoors...I have been able to work on putting aside my personal vendetta and my need to prove myself...to set that aside, and not have that bother me...I have realized, here, that I do not have to put up with doubt and I do not have to prove myself to this supervisor, who is so bad.

Chris not only experienced doubt and prejudgment based on her gender in multiple instances, but also over time developed ways to cope. While the instances of doubt persisted, Chris evolved from internalizing others' doubt, to being motivated by the desire to prove people wrong; and, ultimately, Chris developed confidence about her abilities and demonstrated intentionality in her selection of people she spent time with, choosing to be with people who shared confidence in her, often other women. She also

learned to self-support, referring to her confidence in her outdoor skills to dismiss unwarranted criticism.

*Impact of media.* Chris recognized that media representations of women participating in outdoor recreation have influenced the outdoor community. Chris did not identify any media portrayals that have affected her trajectory directly. Instead she noticed the indirect result that media portrayals of women have on the groups and communities she is part of and, in turn, how that has affected her.

Chris often noted a difference in values between men and women in the outdoor culture, in particular differing values for climbing skills. Chris reflected on an experience she had climbing with two men in Utah, “The route necessitated a lock-off, which takes a lot of upper body strength. I have noticed that particular type of climbing is something I need to train for and some men can just power through those moves. I sometimes wish my biceps were bigger!” Chris went on to discuss how she believed that upper body strength is valued in the general climbing community over other abilities. She further pointed out that ability really favors men and male body types over women. She charged the media as a disseminating force for that value:

At climbing competitions you see it all the time, prizes for the best Dyno moves and who can hold heavy things the longest. You don’t see the competition of who can balance on this tiny foothold the longest, which is really where women often excel over men in climbing. But that’s not valued in our community, or valued less than that brute strength of “I can hold this up.” That’s not valued in the media, too, because you don’t see the pictures of that, you know.

Chris now works with high school students and she is intentional about what

outdoor media she presents to them. She expressed frustration at the lack of female athletes being portrayed in outdoor media and the realization that when women are portrayed they are sexualized: “When I look for things to share with my students, it’s always dudes climbing ...when I think about female climbers in the industry, we have girls ... who wear the shortest little shorts ever and a sports bra.” She went on to point out that while the women portrayed are, in fact, elite athletes, their athleticism is often not the media focus. Chris said, “I feel like the strong female climbers that are getting media attention are being subjected to objectification and sexualized. I just wish that women could go be awesome climbers and also put some damn clothes on.” While she most noticeably saw outdoor women as being sexualized, she believed male climbers in the media should also be free from body image expectations. “I wish all climbers, men and women, could simply be excellent climbers and take the body out of the situation.”

Chris demonstrated a strong desire to contribute to change in the outdoor community and its value system, particularly in how the community views women. One of the ways she wanted to make change was in media portrayals. “I can interact with young girls and show them that they can be powerful and skilled, and, if the media would portray these amazing women climbers as strong and powerful women that are not in bikinis, we could really impact the profession.” While she acknowledged that media portrayals tend to maintain the status quo, she believed media could be a tool for change.

Chris viewed the media as having a significant amount of power in maintaining the masculine values attributed to outdoor athleticism. She further expressed frustration about the sexualization of female athletes in outdoor activities that the media promotes. Conversely, Chris placed a lot of power in the media’s ability to be a force for change, if

in the future they highlighted women's ability as opposed to their bodies.

*Impact of/on intimate relationships.* For Chris intimate partner relationships carried gender expectations which presented challenges for her. Chris perceived that the gender role expectations imposed on women with regard to having a partner were a significant constraint to her success as a leader in outdoor recreation. It can be reasoned, that for Chris, trying to fit into traditional gender expectations in a relationship was difficult, particularly because simultaneously, she was trying to be successful in a male-dominated field. Being in a field that valued masculine behavior and skills that are typically perceived as masculine, contrasted with the expectations her partners had for her, making it difficult to maintain heteronormative relationships. While Chris exhibited a strong desire to break gender stereotypes in relationships, she also realized the deep-rooted nature these expectations had on some of her partners and she monitored her behavior in response. Ultimately, Chris expressed the larger constraint her work has on negotiating a family in a society that is set up for traditionally gendered families.

Chris often spoke of her desire to change traditional ideas of what a woman's job looks like. She expressed a strong desire to be successful in a male-dominated field. While some of her partners responded well, from others her ambitions met with resistance. One experience that stood out as uniquely supportive of her desires occurred when Chris worked for a trail crew after college. Leading a group of high school girls doing trail work, Chris was particularly excited about her all-female team and the traditionally masculine work they were doing. "Just stepping back and watching the physically demanding work we were accomplishing was very cool. It felt very outside the norm of traditional women's work, which felt so great to be a part of." Chris remarked on

how supportive her partner was and it was clear that she enjoyed the reversal from tradition in which she found herself:

I felt very supported by my boyfriend Brent. We were living together and I would come home from a rough day, dirty, muddy and in my heavy duty trail gear. Brent would come home before me from his office job all clean and put together, and by the time I got home, he would have dinner waiting for me. I had to laugh a couple times at how completely reversed we were from what is considered traditional gender roles. I just kept thinking to myself, ‘This is great!’

Not only did she enjoy this role reversal, but also it potentially furthered her ability to be effective on her trail crew, not having to meet gendered expectations at home. Brent was doing traditionally female tasks like cooking, leaving her time and energy to devote to her crew.

All of her male partners have not necessarily reacted to Chris in the same way. Frank was a friend she had previously dated. She spoke at length about the interesting dynamic they had and particularly about an experience hiking with him recently.

While I love spending time outdoors with Frank, there were some interesting things that occurred this summer... It was confusing, because I knew that he knew I just got off this backpacking course...and he knew I was a strong and capable person, but it was the third day before I carried the backpack at all! In my mind, I kept thinking, ‘this is weird... this is a little patronizing.’ But, I let him carry it....

Chris went on to explain how gender roles became amplified, when she and Frank encountered another couple who were relating in traditionally gendered ways. “At one point on our cave exploration...the guy from the couple says, ‘I’ll get my lady. You get

yours.’ The guy starts spotting his wife on this down-climb and Frank humors him and kind of spots me as I down-climb.” While Chris believed Frank did not question her ability, she did feel like he was trying to maintain an image of masculinity in front of the other couple. “I am sure Frank was thinking how ridiculous that was, because he knew I was a good climber...He didn’t say anything to the couple though; he just went ahead and spotted me anyway.”

During that same excursion, once again she felt pressure to maintain a traditional gender image, if only to help Frank maintain his own. At one point, she noted that she was worried about Frank falling and thought about spotting him, but resisted. “I felt like I could not act up to my level of competency, because he would get a bruised ego.” In this instance her own perception of role expectations limited her action.

Chris commented on how weird the day was, as a whole. In what seemed contradictory, Frank validated her skills and even boasted about them to the couple. “I hear Frank behind me talking to the couple and he says, ‘Yeah, she’s an OTS Instructor ...she’s an EMT!’... First, Frank is being kind of really patronizing... and now he’s here ...bragging about my skill set! It was just like a very strange thing.” Chris reflected on that day with humor and was laughing as she told the story. She said, “I think I can look at that situation as funny, because I think he at least tries. I think there are people that distinctly and clearly put down women... Frank doesn’t realize what he’s doing.”

With Frank an interesting conflict between roles emerged and it appears that throughout that experience Chris was confronted with conflicting goals. On the one hand she wanted her friend Frank to feel confident and in control: she purposefully chose to act in a way that would not bruise his ego. On the other hand she needed to excel in the

outdoor arena because it was her career, Frank even bragged about her accomplishments.

In a later interview Chris pointed out that she had received positive feedback in her career by using a more masculine leadership style, “I think, in terms of being an instructor, my very straight-line and very direct communication style is usually really appreciated and I think that’s, traditionally, a more masculine style.” This masculine style, while received well in her career, can present a conflict when trying to maintain a heteronormative relationship. On, at least, that hiking trip with Frank, Chris chose to modify her directness.

Chris was often very optimistic about her ability to influence change in the outdoor industry’s view of women. However, when referring to Frank, it is clear she is also aware of the resilience of the beliefs she is trying to neutralize.

I feel like I’m not going to be able to change some of the values that are ingrained in him. I’m not going to change him at all, so either I can get really upset about it and want to shake him, or I can kind of laugh it off.

While Chris questioned her ability to progressively influence everyone’s perception of women, she is motivated by the prospect of defying gender expectations. She hopes, one day, to take a boyfriend out to do an activity that she has expertise in and that he does not. “I think, bringing in a physical ability component where I may have an ability that he, the man, might not, is something I want to experience. I think some men can feel really threatened by that, but I think ‘good’ men don’t...” She pointed out that, depending on the person, that experience together could either build their relationship up or break it down. “I do think that, if I do that one day, it will be with the knowledge that it could change the relationship.” She went on to argue that, for her, a healthy relationship



should include mutual learning and she is eager to be on the teaching side for a change.

“I find that, with the guys that I date, I am always learning something from them and they stimulate me in an intellectual way. I think a good healthy relationship reciprocates and you are always learning from each other.”

It can be reasoned that for Chris to be successful in her current career, she will need to continue to build her technical skills and she could easily find herself as the more competent person in that particular aspect of a relationship at some point. While Chris was excited about this prospect and did not directly articulate it as a constraint that would necessitate negotiation, she was aware that, as a relationship dynamic, it held the power to change the nature of whatever relationship she was in.

Ultimately, Chris reflected on how difficult maintaining intimate relationships as a female outdoor leader is in general, and she is already anticipating the challenges that are associated with it.

I think in the next couple of years I will feel the desire for a family more. Whether that's just maintaining a relationship and keeping a partner in my life, or actually wanting to start a family... and I don't think that is something you can easily have while working in the field full time... I don't know if I'll have a family or not, but I think just looking at where I am right now it would be hard to even have a relationship.

Chris went on to point out that the structure of the outdoor industry was unique. She had observed other women in the field struggling as they tried to fit their careers into a world that was set up for traditional families. “I have seen some women that come back to field instructing after their children make it to school age, but I think, in those early years, it's

really hard to be a field instructor.” Chris anticipated that for her to be able to have a family she may need to make some compromises in her career, or her relationship will need to be structured in a way that redistributes the traditional roles of wife and mother. “For that to happen my partner either needs to understand my work and understand that I’m going to be gone for a month, but I will be back; or I need to structure my life differently, so that I can have that part of my life.”

As is apparent in Chris’s story, many potential barriers arise when trying to create and maintain intimate, heterosexual, relationships and work as a woman in the outdoor industry. Chris has experienced gender to differing degrees within relationships and she has also witnessed the difficulty other women in her field have had while trying to balance a family and a career. For Chris it seemed that working in a field that valued masculine styles, and expected high levels of technical ability, contradicted with some of the expectations her partners had towards their relationship. This presented a challenge for Chris as she tried to exist in both realms. Ultimately, Chris expressed the larger constraint her work has on negotiating a family in a society that is set up for traditionally gendered families.

*Mentorship.* Often in Chris’s stories she talked about her role models and mentors. Chris identified role models and mentors who had helped facilitate her entry into the profession. She discussed the impact multiple mentors have had on her technical skill development and the different experiences she has had with men versus women, and she considered the power that seeing women succeeding in this male-dominated field has had on her. Chris also expressed a strong desire to be a role model in the industry and a mentor to people as they build their skills, in particular to be that for other women.

Early on in her experiences Chris identified her father as a role model for outdoor participation in general. As she was entering outdoor recreation as a career, Chris recognized other people that she looked to. Chris explained that, while it was not a conscious act at the time, in college she started identifying people who could be role models. She told a story about a wilderness medicine course she took; the instructor was a former OTS instructor. Chris stated, “That WFR course with John was a real motivator. I really respected John. I remember looking at him and thinking he was so rugged and outdoorsy, which I equated with being super cool.” She approached John and told him about the desire she had to break into the industry. “I remember walking up to him and saying ‘John, I think I want to be an OTS instructor.’”

When looking back at that moment Chris recalled John sharing some information with her, “I picture myself as this timid, quiet girl coming up and speaking out of the blue. I am pretty sure he kindly told me some steps I should take...but I’m pretty sure he wasn’t thinking to himself, ‘Oh, yeah. This girl can be an instructor.’” Here she self describes as a “timid, quiet girl.” While her self-perception did not preclude her speaking with John, it did color the way she perceived John’s reception of her, “...a little girl.” Similarly her self-image highly contrasted with the image she remembered of John, “rugged and outdoorsy,” a masculine image, which she looked up to.

She did eventually work for OTS. Gender did not seem to be a big issue in her mentorship early on at OTS (Outdoor Trip Scholl). She had positive experiences with mentors from both genders. However some of the key mentors who actually helped facilitate her initial entry were women.

One of these women was Chris’s instructor from her student course. Chris was

trying to get an internship with OTS and her instructor assisted her in that process. “She gave me a run down of what it entailed. She also gave me a very strong reference and kind of coached me through those next steps.”

She continued her progression, finding male mentors as well. Chris employed the help of a mentor when she took her second job with the school. “Knowing I wanted to stay, I went to speak with Gabe. He was and continues to be a real mentor of mine at OTS. He hired me to work the summer season for him.”

Not all mentorship Chris experienced was positive. As a result, she has become increasingly selective about where she seeks instruction. She explained the impact that a negative coaching experience had on her during her climbing progression. “There were definitely moments climbing with this guy where I thought I was going to stop climbing, because I was so afraid of some of the situations I was in.” Chris developed strong feelings about what mentorship should be after that experience.

I look back at moments with him and think, if somebody with a higher skill set (e.g., a friend, an instructor, a significant other, whoever that person is), introduces climbing to you in a way that doesn’t fit your skills, it’s going to be a really negative experience, and that’s what I experienced with this particular guy. Chris admitted that she thought she might be done with the sport after that experience; however, she found that she was able to continue her progression by finding other more positive mentors. “I just had to be surrounded by supportive, kind, and encouraging people.” Her initial negative experience had been with a man and for Chris most of these new mentors were women. “I have noticed that climbing with some men can be really patronizing and not supportive and I am incredibly particular about who my climbing

partners are now.”

One of these women, a roommate, was a seasoned climber. When talking about the roommate’s impact, Chris stated, “She became a fantastic climb partner for me. She was incredibly supportive. She was patient with me when I was scared.” When referring to another woman who had coached her during her climbing development, Chris reflected, “Finding people that I trust and that help me develop as a climber has become important to me. I have found climbing with and learning from my friend Melissa and other really strong women has resulted in really positive experiences.”

Chris pointed out that while she most often experienced positive mentorship from women, gender was not necessarily the determining factor. The nature of her relationship with the instructor and his or her instructional approach were most important. “For me, I have noticed that there is a feeling of general support when I climb with women and I don’t necessarily know that I find that in most men. At least, that is hard for me to come by in a male partner.” She went on to point out occurrences of men being positive mentors in her technical progression. “I look at my experiences with Brad...he is supportive and kind while we climb, and not in a very patronizing way, like a lot of men have been with me.” While she explained that male mentors can be and have been positive for her, she more often finds strong connections with women. She speculated that this might be because the qualities she perceived as positive are those traditionally considered feminine. “I have also noticed that most of those positive qualities, for me, are those stereotypically considered to be feminine. For me, to operate well with a climbing partner, I need to share a unique trust relationship with them, which is something I do not often find with men.”

Lastly, Chris discussed the impact that simply seeing other women succeeding in the outdoor field has had on her. She reflected on a unique experience she recently had when preparing for a course. Because a large girls group wanted to do an all female trip with OTS, Chris was scheduled to work as one of many women, all going into the field at the same time.

For me, the biggest takeaway, as an instructor on that course, was seeing all these really strong and confident women together.... The outdoor industry is traditionally not a women's profession, so to have all of these incredibly strong and technically capable women in one spot was amazing. I admire every single one of those women. They are just these powerhouse women.

Chris explained that most of the year she works in Utah and lacks positive female role models. Being surrounded by so many at once was remarkable. "Where I live now in Utah, I am so far from any women that do anything like that, so to be surrounded by those women was really, really cool; just being surrounded by women that hold these values true to themselves."

Not only has Chris noticed the mentorship she has received, but also she has developed the desire to be a positive mentor for others. "I have had people empowering me and I want to be that for others. I want to be able to open up that door and do that for other people." In particular, Chris wants to be a role model to and mentor for young women: she has made being a positive mentor and role model a priority and central to her leadership.

Chris observed that just by being a woman working in the outdoor industry she is a role model.

I go about my day and climb, backpack, and do these different things, and other women observe that. When they see me do it, they realize it is okay to do these things, too. Women realize they can do this and it's acceptable... I think demonstrating that this field exists for young girls and showing that women can be strong, powerful, and proficient outdoor educators is really the best thing...

For Chris, it appears, that mentorship and role modeling do not stop at participation. In fact, on multiple instances she discussed her desire to not only coach young women in whatever skill set they were pursuing, but also raise awareness about gender issues in the field. Just after college Chris led an all girls trail crew, and while she thought it was an empowering experience for her participants, if she could do it again she would have incorporated more intentional mentoring. "If I could do it again, I would put intentional thought into the curriculum I presented...having the participants really realize that the work they were doing all summer was typically in a male-dominated domain." When reflecting on the girls on her crew she said, "I have this sense that girls grow up dreaming of being nurses, models and dancers, because that is what the storybooks tell us. I think exposing them to women in masculine fields could counteract some of that and that trail crew was a great setting to do it."

Similarly, she was on a trip in Utah with a male co-instructor and a group of men was talking to them.

We ran into this group of men and they were asking us a number of questions about our course, and I was asking them questions. Before we split, they visited with Chuck and said something like, "I hope you have a great time with the girls." We walked on for a little bit and I realized these guys did not think I was a leader

on the course.

Chris was personally upset by this interaction, but she also let it guide her interaction with her participants. Chris was actively spreading awareness about gender issues in her field.

It made me so mad, but I had a conversation with the girls about it. The girls could see I was so fired up about it and I was so angry, so we had a conversation about it. I don't think they would have picked up on that assumption from those men had we not discussed it. But if we, as female outdoor leaders, stop and have a conversation about why those men assumed I could not be a leader, because I am a female, we can actually make people conscious of it. I think about those conversations spreading and the power they could have.

Chris has gained positive outcomes from her interactions with both male and female mentors. As Chris continued to develop she noticed qualities in mentors she appreciated: qualities traditionally considered to be feminine. She also has developed a desire to be a mentor to young women, not only in building skill sets and in outdoor recreation participation, but also in actively raising awareness about gender issues that emerge in her field.

***Lauren.***

*Familial support.* Lauren first developed a love for the outdoors as a child.

Lauren's parents allowed her to explore the outdoors independently, and also exposed her to camping through family trips. Her mother and father demonstrated different outdoor values. Her father was interested in outdoor activities and adventure. In particular, Lauren was inspired by her mother's "raised consciousness" about the environment after her



parents split... Whether Lauren finally internalized this difference in values as gender-related is hard to tell. What is important, however, is the proximate relationship or existence (common in cognition) between the already-articulated (mental model) fostered and inherited through her mother and her own final *mental* construction of who she wanted to be (a channel of environmental stewardship, awareness and experience).

Gender issues seem to have come to fore at a later phase of life. This is evidenced in the way her parents viewed Lauren's career, versus her brother's. Both have chosen outdoor recreation as a profession, but Lauren perceived the support for that choice, which she and her brother received from their parents, as unequal. I should clarify that this latter assessment is relevant in the general analysis of the narrative of Lauren's path to outdoor leadership. There is no evidence in the data that such a differential form of support from parents existed during the early years of upbringing (of both Lauren and her brother). Indeed, the argument will be presented in a later section of this thesis that there is a generic form of parental support, a form of *nurturance*, which is about exposing the world to the child--and that includes exposure of (or to) the outdoors and what the outdoor means.

As a child, Lauren experienced empowerment and developed a relationship with nature, mainly from independently spending time outdoors. "I think it was a very empowering experience....I just remember spending hours and hours creating stuff in nature and just being out there by myself." While her parents allowed her independent play outside they also facilitated some outdoor experiences for her and her siblings. "My parents also took me car camping. I remember it as a really positive thing for our family."

From Lauren's description of her family, it appears that her parents held differing

values and that some of their values fell along what might be seen as traditional gender lines. “My mom instilled a pretty strong environmental ethic in my siblings and me.”

Lauren pointed out that “it wasn't something that my dad was on board with.” In a later conversation she mentioned her dad enjoyed the outdoors in more of an adventurous way, which was something her mother did not.

Lauren witnessed her mother experiencing growth when her parents divorced, and it had an effect on the way Lauren viewed her mother, and also herself.

I had the opportunity to see my mom learning and changing and becoming maybe a little more adventurous as a person. I think I was pretty inspired by that in subtle ways. I think she really instilled in me a sense that I could do whatever I wanted: be free and be educated. I think that definitely influenced me...

Lauren witnessed her mother really blossom and it seems that her mother wanted to instill the same ethic of independence she apparently had found for herself in Lauren.

While Lauren experienced general support for her participation in outdoor recreation growing up, and her mother imparted in her a “you can do whatever you want” attitude, Lauren did point out a change in the support she had received after choosing outdoor recreation as a career; particularly, a difference in the way her parents supported her brother in comparison to her. Lauren pointed out that it was not always an obvious difference, but that she felt it.

One outstanding example was a conversation her mom had with her, asking her about the recent career changes Lauren had made. Her mother said, “So let me just get this right. You are quitting your really good job (pre-school teacher), that you like, and you are going to do this climbing thing that you don't have an actual job for yet? Um, what

are you going to do after that?”

While Lauren believes her mother’s intentions were good, and she was just showing concern, she was aware that the reaction her father had to her brother’s career in outdoor recreation was a very different one. Lauren pointed out that her dad enjoyed telling stories about his glory days to her brother, while she didn’t get that kind of reinforcement for her career choice. “I don’t hear those stories about my mom, but my dad says stuff to my brother like that all the time.” Lauren noticed not only that her father did not share in her career the way he shared with her brother, but also that she did not have a similar experience of vicarious sharing with her mother.

Ultimately, Lauren expressed that she did feel she received less support, in general, for her career choices than her brother; however, she also pointed out that she put pressure on herself and that this might have amplified the family pressure she perceived. “I do feel like I’m in this little bit of a trap. I have external pressure that makes me feel like I should be more settled and stable, but I have internalized that, too.” It is noteworthy that she perceived her brother didn’t appear to feel the need to settle down, “My brother, I think, feels much more like he can do whatever he wants.” While Lauren did not mention this directly, it might be that her brother was free from internal pressure because he was rewarded for his adventures, as in the conversations with their father. Similarly, Lauren pointed out that she logically believed she should be able to do whatever she wanted, but that part of the internal pressure she felt stemmed from an awareness of where she had been rewarded by her family and that had not been with regard to outdoor recreation. “Well, I, like, can do whatever the heck I want to do; of course I can! That has never limited my imagination, but at the same time I’m so sensitive

to recognizing what gets rewarded and what doesn't."

*Gender expectations: external and internal.* During her experiences Lauren faced expectations from others based on her gender. She has been perceived as less knowledgeable and less technically skilled than her male peers. Not only did these external expectations affect her in the moment, but also, at times Lauren internalized them, making them especially inhibiting. Lauren has developed some techniques to try to counteract others' expectations; however, they continue to impact her negatively.

Throughout Lauren's career she has experienced prejudgment towards her competencies and skill sets based, in part, on her gender. "I do think that being perceived as technically competent takes more effort on my part, because I am female." Lauren went on to point out that she is physically small and that her stature in combination with her gender played a part in people's perceptions of her. "It has been a little harder or different for me to command respect than I think it is for someone who just physically looks a little bit more like a strong person. I've really had to prove my strengths."

One area where Lauren faced gender expectations was in her role as a supervisor. She has experienced male instructors coming into the office with a question or looking for advice and not addressing her, instead looking for the male supervisors. "There are definitely times where I will answer somebody's question, and then they go and ask the other guys the same question, and I hear them." Lauren attributed this to her being less experienced than her male bosses, but also because she wasn't inclined to boast about her abilities. "Also I don't do the posturing. I really don't present my climbing skills or act like a total outdoor nut. While I am an expert at these things, I don't go around making sure everyone sees that." Lauren made it clear that these actions have affected her

negatively.

I try not to take it personally. But, I even notice it in our meetings and stuff, and I just think, "Well, I'm always going to be bossed around by men." That is what it sort-of is starting to feel like, because I will probably not get to work as a supervisor in an office where there is another woman able to mentor me.

It is notable that Lauren alluded to the positive difference having other women in the office might have on this dynamic. However, with few woman peers, bosses, or even female staff members, the bleak outlook seems likely to continue for Lauren.

Students, too, brought gender expectations to their interactions with Lauren. She described the preconceived picture of an outdoor instructor that students might have coming into a course. "I think students headed into a course picture those traditional men more as their instructors, and there is a certain amount of unease on my part, knowing that I don't fit that." It is noteworthy in this example that not only did Lauren need to negotiate the expectations her students may have had, but also she internalized their expectations and anticipated them, resulting in another negative effect: feeling uneasy.

Lauren demonstrated internalization of others' expectations in many instances throughout her story. Describing situations she had been in during her career, Lauren said, "I go into it already thinking, 'What do I need to do to prove myself?'" Lauren often expressed this same sentiment, anticipating mountaineering training that she had coming up, in which she knew she would be the only female.

Lauren's behavior on a backpacking course provides an example of the negative effect of her tendency to internalize external expectations. Lauren had experienced a

small back injury and was having a hard time with her heavy backpack. “Just recently I was working a course and my back really hurt and I would not ask for help.” Lauren went on to point out that her co-instructors were happy to carry more weight and relieve some of her load, but Lauren had a really hard time letting that happen. The entire issue was internal for Lauren at that moment.

It was just one of those realization moments where I felt like I'll never be able to do that for someone else and that sucks. I felt like it wasn't just that they were helping me out because my back hurts, it's like they can carry a lot more than me and that will always be the case. There's something frustrating about that that really doesn't sit well with me....In those moments I feel inadequate, and then I feel embarrassed, and then I'm embarrassed at how embarrassed I am; it just does that spiraling.

In this instance Lauren did not perceive her co-workers as judging her ability. The entire struggle occurred within. She had an internal expectation of herself that she could not meet, and as she mentions, can never meet because of her size, and that internal dialogue became a barrier in the moment.

Lauren has dealt with this by trying to have awareness about what is happening for her in those moments. “My friend Jen believes that we all just need to kill our egos. I really do think that's what it's about. Killing what I think I'm supposed to be and who I believe that I should be.”

Lauren has developed some techniques to counteract the expectations she faces from others. “To counteract that I usually end up really playing up my personality or really going out of my way to show off something I am really good at.” She once

received advice from a peer, which she has used to handle male students who may have particularly strong expectations about her ability:

Set up a really hard climb on the first day of a course and just crush it.

Then let students, who you perceive are going to be the challenging men

for you to work with on the course, try it and fail.

Lauren has tried this and found success in quickly changing students' perceptions; however, she did point out that, while effective, it might not be the best way to actually create the culture she wanted on a course. It seems that it may just support the masculine culture she has found herself in.

While that technique has worked for me in helping change preconceived perceptions of me, I don't know that that's really creating the environment I ultimately want on my courses. I don't want to create an environment where competition is so valued and I don't want to set an "I'm better than you" tone. Sometimes though, I feel like that's what it takes to earn this level of respect that I don't naturally get, which is frustrating.

Ultimately, Lauren described the impact that gender expectations have had on her. "Most of it is probably just my self-perception, but I do think it comes from other folks, too, in subtle ways. To feel like I'm on the same plane, I often have to go above and beyond. There's this never-ending pressure to kind of catch up."

*Mentorship.* Lauren has experienced noteworthy mentorship throughout her experiences. While Lauren has experienced support from men, many of the people who have advanced her career have been women and it is clear that strong female mentors

have been important to her. As a mentor and role model, herself, Lauren seems to be drawn more to role-modeling and working with women individually, as opposed to larger scale activism.

Lauren benefited from a strong female mentor early in her career. She had participated in an outdoor orientation trip, just at the beginning of college, and she strongly connected with the woman who ran the program. “Jessica, the woman who ran that program, was actually a former OTS instructor. I think it was actually mostly her, to be honest, that I was so inspired by.” Jessica had a large impact on Lauren’s college experience. Lauren took an introduction to rock climbing class from her and liked the experience. “Jessica also recognized that it was something I could really pursue and maybe be successful at; so she kind of mentored me, which was really awesome and I started modeling my life after hers.” Jessica also facilitated Lauren’s entry into the outdoor community at the school and helped her plan the steps required to becoming a leader, herself, of the school’s trips. That mentoring relationship continued through college, and it is clear that it was very powerful for Lauren. “I didn’t really appreciate it at the time, but I think I would basically be a completely different person had I not met her.”

As she progressed through her career, Lauren’s skill set did not always align with what was valued in the larger outdoor community, but Jessica really celebrated the talents and values Lauren brought to the field and rewarded her for them. Lauren was selected to help facilitate the training of other student leaders. “I think Jessica just did that for me,” Lauren explained. As Jessica told Lauren, “There’s a lot of people here who have technical skills. I think you have a lot to offer in terms of how to create, like, a culture



that you want.”

Lauren experienced another push from a female in the profession after she took an OTS course: “After my course the women’s resources coordinator contacted me, which was a huge thing. She contacted me and I was able to ask her what I needed to do to get on an instructor training in the future.”

Lauren has experienced other mentorship throughout her career, including from some men. At one point a man she had been dating, who was a strong climber, sent her an expensive belay device after they broke up in an effort to encourage her to continue climbing. “He said that he had seen so many women stop climbing when the relationship where they did most of their climbing ended....I was a good climber and I should not give it up. That was pretty amazing.” She also recently had a male boss encourage her to set her sights higher and he really pushed her towards a promotion. “My boss here really went out of his way to say, ‘You should be setting your sight on what's possible higher.’”

When reflecting on all the mentorship she has received, Lauren said, “Those things have been pretty critical in terms of my actual progression from being interested, to being an instructor, to being in this role now.”

It is evident from Lauren’s story that she developed a desire to be a mentor for others. Her mentorship manifested in attempting to build relationships and instigating change on a local level. While she had participated in outward activism, her focus evolved into empowering others through her work. “My political consciousness became partly an environmental ethic, but also this larger focus on empowering other people and that's how I was drawn to outdoor education.” What that looked like for Lauren was role-modeling and starting conversations in her field. She also mentored other women when

the opportunity was presented. She has learned from the experiences of gender she has had throughout her career and has assisted other women who might be experiencing similar struggles. For example, after struggling with expectations she put on herself to perform at a certain level, continually trying to prove herself, she put energy toward helping other women avoid similar obstacles. “I try to initially zero in on women on my courses that may face similar challenges and create a personal relationship, so that down the line we can talk about it and help figure out the actual root of feelings that may emerge for them.”

*Effect of masculine leadership style.* Lauren has noticed that in outdoor recreation a direct, assertive, masculine leadership style is valued. Early in her career during one of her training programs, Lauren was pushed to adopt this style and had a very difficult time understanding why it was so valued. While she has adopted a more masculine leadership style to be successful, she is still concerned by the value the industry is perpetuating.

Early in Lauren’s career she experienced a strong push to use an assertive and confident leadership style. During her instructor training for OTS it was her turn to lead the group for the day and demonstrate her leadership ability. On that day they were traveling on snow and avalanche terrain, which was terrain she had not seen before. (It is worth noting that competency in navigating that type of terrain was not a requirement for her employment at that point.) “I was trying to make a decision and said, ‘To be honest, I do not have the information that we need to make this decision; what do people think we should do?’” Her group was made up of three men who were backcountry skiers and a female instructor. The group refused to offer her any advice and Lauren felt forced to make a decision with which she was not comfortable. “I didn’t want to just puff up my

chest and put something out there just to have these three dudes be like, ‘Well, that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.’” In that moment Lauren was struggling with trying to be perceived as competent in front of her male peers, but also trying to make wise leadership decisions.

While asking questions and using your effective resources seem potentially valuable actions for a leader, they did not fit the leadership style that was valued. “It was interesting to me because the feedback in the moment was, ‘You are having trouble making decisions’ rather than ‘That was really awesome self-awareness on your part to say, at the beginning, let someone else do it.’” Lauren pointed out that her self-awareness and ability to exploit the group’s resources could have been rewarded, but it wasn’t. Instead, from that experience the take-away for Lauren was that they wanted her to use a more traditionally masculine leadership style. “[W]hat they wanted to see me do was make loud decisions and direct people. The message that sent was, really, the minimum they needed to see was me being loud and direct, even if my decisions were not correct.”

Lauren had another training coming up and she had been told that she would be the only female on it. Often, she expressed apprehension when discussing the upcoming course. One of the reasons for her unease was that she would be trying to prove herself in a male-dominated environment. She asked for advice from a female friend, who had taken the course previously.

Her advice was, “[J]ust be loud.” She said if I am just loud, it would work. I think that is true and I also think that’s a problem. What is rewarded so heavily in our field is being loud, directive, and outwardly confident.

In a later conversation Lauren directly stated that “I think what's often valued in

outdoor recreation is being masculine.” Consequently, Lauren has adopted a more masculine leadership style in her practice. “I think I do mostly use that loud, assertive leadership style. I don't think I'm the best at it, but I have been successful using it.”

Lauren also realized the negative impact that valuing a masculine leadership style, exclusively, has on the industry as a whole:

It's interesting because I've seen other quieter people, who are way more competent than me, way more experienced than me, way more in tune with lots of other things than me, totally bypassed; and I've been rewarded. Good for me, I guess, but I can definitely see where we are really missing out as an industry.

*Impact of masculine learning style.* Lauren often discussed struggles she experienced when learning new technical skills in outdoor recreation. For Lauren learning the actual skill was not the difficult part, instead Lauren faced challenges with the culture of learning in which she found herself. She pointed out that many of her learning experiences have been geared at masculine learning styles. She often experienced “sink or swim” type teaching, competition based teaching, and “learning by failing.” Lauren stated that she does not learn well this way, and she hypothesized that many women share her reaction; while she has seen men thrive with that kind of instruction.

One outstanding example that was a particularly negative experience for Lauren occurred when she was put on the spot (“sink or swim”). In this situation it was a review session of a skill in which Lauren was already competent. She was practicing a rescue progression for an upcoming climbing course. “When we practice rescues, we usually talk through what we're going to do, we do a piece of it, and then we do it. Instead of that

approach, the male instructor said, ‘All right, 45-minute challenge. Go.’” This “sink or swim” type of learning was not something that Lauren handled well. “Even though I know all the skills, I did not do a great job.” As Lauren used different problem-solving techniques, she felt very unsupported.

I understand that he wanted me to practice a specific type of rescue, but it was just the way he presented himself and the way he was talking to me that was hard....He didn't have to also, literally, have his arms folded and give me this attitude.

Lauren was not responding well to his teaching style and in return, he was not responding well to Lauren. It ended as a really negative experience for Lauren. She pointed out that he could have supported her problem solving style in a more beneficial way; however, he did not. “Instead, he just made me feel stupid. It was just so demeaning.”

It is noteworthy, that while Lauren did equate the learning culture she was in with masculinity, she also pointed out that women could subscribe to and do perpetuate it. “I tell people all the time that just because you're a woman doesn't mean you have any interest in feminism or supporting other women.” She discussed one particular instance when she experienced a set-up-to-fail learning environment with a female instructor.

I had never placed a cam in my life and she just said, “Here ya’ go; go build a gear anchor.” I was really overwhelmed and it was taking us forever. I just remember her standing over us and looking at us....It was not a cool learning environment for me right then and I actually went and cried.

Lauren reflected on what had influenced her instructor's teaching style and speculated that the instructor was reacting to the gender expectations she experienced in her own career. "I think that instructor may have felt so pressured in her career that she was pressuring us to not mess-up." Similarly, Lauren speculated that wanting to change the way women in general were viewed in the profession might have motivated the instructor. "I think she wanted us to be highly technically confident women and she did not want people to be able to say things like, 'Oh, women at OTS are not as good with their technical systems.'"

Lauren further explained the effect a masculine culture of learning has had on her when she was discussing the intense climbing culture in which she has found herself. Lauren is a very skilled climber and climbing instructor, but she has experienced this intense pressure to continually raise her level. The male dominated, competition based learning environment she is in has taken a toll on Lauren. "I think, at least for me, the whole effect that the intense climbing culture talk and stuff has had on me is, 'Well, I'll just never be good enough.' It's not motivating to me." Lauren has perceived it as such a dominant culture that it has become a real barrier to her career moving forward:

It just feels like this thing that will never end and I'll never meet it. I think, too, that reflects my own feelings about meeting expectations or wanting to be viewed in certain ways, but I do think there is something about the outdoor adventure culture that I'm just getting tired of.

Lauren has become so discouraged with this type of teaching that she strategically picks trainings to try to avoid it. For example, she purposefully selected her upcoming mountaineering training because she knew the instructors and their styles.

As soon as those courses came out, I looked to see who was teaching. If it had been other people, for example the team that taught it last year, I wouldn't have done it. I'm just at a point where I am done with putting myself in positions where someone puts me on the spot and is a jerk. I am tired of feeling bad about myself and embarrassed; I'm just not going to do it. I will not put myself in that situation no matter how much competence I have.

While it is clear Lauren has struggled with this type of learning environment, she believes that many men thrive in that environment. "I also think it's easier for men to just go out, try stuff and fail. I look at my brother...and when he climbs he just doesn't care about failing....I don't learn that well from failing." Lauren went on to point out that she thought other women felt the same way as she did. "I was just reading this leadership article that's about more feminine styles, and it said that the whole learn-by-failing thing doesn't really work for some people." It is clear from Lauren's experiences that she wished she could learn more effectively in that environment, but she can't. A learning culture aimed at a masculine learning style has been a real barrier for her.

*Benefits from same gender learning.* Not only has Lauren experienced significant challenges in a masculine leading and learning environment, but also she has reaped significant benefits from her few experiences learning with other women. Lauren has felt a unique sense of trust when learning from other women and she has been more comfortable learning with other women. She valued the opportunities she had in those environments, but pointed out that while she realized the benefits, there simply were not enough women in the field for her to enjoy many of those opportunities.

One outstanding experience Lauren enjoyed was working with an all women group on an introduction to rock climbing led by female instructors. In that group she built trust with both her peers and her instructors. In addition to the training in rock climbing techniques, she was able to get advice on being a woman in the field.

The original instructor was great. She climbs so hard and was super cool. I really learned a lot from her. She actually failed her instructor training when she started and she talked about that. It was very interesting and a lot of that was related to gender and how she presented herself. It was very cool to hear about her experience.

It can be reasoned that open and honest knowledge sharing is more comfortable in a group that has shared experience; in this case the group shared the experience of being a woman.

Lauren really valued the relationships she built with other women on the course. "As a whole, I loved the seminar. It was great. I loved the other women on the course and they are still some of my closest friends. I really bonded with them." The comfort Lauren felt in that all female environment also increased her ability to learn. One moment stood out for Lauren as very positive.

I was leading something that was a little hard for me....The next move seemed hard and I asked, "Can you take?"....She said, "No, I'm not going to. Either fall or go for it, but I'm not going to take it."

Interestingly, Lauren had often reacted very poorly in other situations when she was put on the spot, but in this situation Lauren had built a unique trust and comfort level in the all female environment and she flourished.



I thought, "Okay, fine" and I finished the route....I realized that was actually just about fear and doubt, and not about my ability to just focus and climb. It was an awesome moment, with an awesome group, and I trusted her.

For Lauren it was not something unique to that instructor that made the moment work, it was just the general comfort and trust she felt. "I didn't think she was the best instructor, but she was another woman at least, and I did trust her. I really needed that, and I can't imagine another scenario where that would have been a positive experience." Lauren reflected on why that training was ultimately so beneficial to her.

The whole women's seminar was really good for me and I think really helped me push my climbing to the next level. I do think that seminar is effective, because it is all women. I don't know exactly why, but it is. I think there was this social peace. It was just a little more comfortable for me.

Lauren continued to develop her climbing skills with one of the women from that seminar. She also took another all female climbing seminar later in her career, when she was becoming a climbing instructor. She had similar experiences in that all female groups as well. "That seminar was a total highlight in my whole OTS career and I still have a lot of good friends from it. I learned a lot and got a lot of good advice for working rock climbing courses."

Lauren has sought out and benefited from learning with other women. "It's like there's something about it that I appreciate, because it seems to be coming from this place of trying to help each other develop comfort." However, she has found that those opportunities are hard to come by, because there are not very many women in the field. "I

hardly ever get to work with other women in technical programs, because there aren't that many." Anticipating an upcoming mountaineering training in which Lauren knew she would be the only female student, she disclosed the main reason she was disappointed to have no other women on the course: "You develop these personal relationships, which is ultimately actually where that skill building comes from. I guess having those relationships with men is just not as motivating to me." It is noteworthy that Lauren said that skill building really stemmed from relationships.

With regard to all women climbing training, Lauren's skill development started on the course, but continued afterward when she began regularly climbing with women she met. Lauren stated that she was not sure she could find similar relationships in a group of men. "I do have some assumptions that folks will be coming into the seminar with more experience than me." It is likely, she assumes, that many of the participants will be men. She believed it would be easier for men in the group to find partners with whom to develop their skills. Even if there were men interested in a climbing partnership with Lauren, however, it is uncertain whether she could allow herself to partner with them because she might not feel the level of trust she would experience with women

*Jostling against a masculine culture.* In Lauren's profession she is immersed in a masculine culture. In that culture women are often marginalized and expected to prove themselves. Lauren has noticed that she changes her own behavior to fit into the larger power structure which she inhabits. By changing herself to fit into the masculine culture around her, Lauren feels she is not honest with herself (and others). She struggles because she does not express what she really believes. For Lauren it is hard to be authentic and be successful in her career.

In Lauren's experiences there are many examples that the culture in which she has found herself is defined by masculine stereotypes and expectations. Lauren is especially bothered by the competitive intensity of rock climbing, which is a cultural expectation in her profession. Recently Lauren chose to attend a music class during her free time, skipping the opportunity to rock climb, and she talked about the judgment she perceived for not climbing that weekend. "People kept asking us, 'Did you climb this weekend?' I feel like when my answer is, 'No,' people in this culture look back at you with disapproval. It is definitely something I am struggling with." Lauren went on to point out, "It's probably all in our own heads, but when there's this dominant culture of, 'Oh my God! That was so sick!' and just value placed in strength, then we feel like our actions are judged." Not only is Lauren surrounded by a masculine culture, but also some of her interests are at conflict with that culture and that has become a burden.

Similarly, Lauren experiences a disconnect between her values and the dominant culture in her current position as supervisor.

I like problem solving and the moving parts, and I think I'm good at that, which feels good. But then, the culture that I'm in day-to-day and the things that I think are rewarded don't really represent all of who I am and that has become increasingly sad and lonely.

Again, disconnection between herself and her surrounding environment is becoming a struggle for Lauren.

Lauren pointed out difficulties she has had trying to fit into the outdoor culture, and also stated her perception that other women experience the same struggles. "If I think about opportunities that some of the men I've worked with have had, to do things like

rock climb, they seem different than mine. I feel like my opportunities and available time have looked different.” Lauren related this difference in experience to not only the culture present in the outdoor community, but also the larger societal structure.

I think my male friends have been rewarded for going out and having like a crazy adventure and I was rewarded for being a good early childhood teacher. Whether that's what I wanted to do or not, it was like I found the reward band [over here] for me and the reward band was over [t]here for them. I think ultimately we all choose what we do, but I think broader society sets this string of rewards.

Lauren acknowledges the different expectations society in general places on men and women and she also pointed out the different pressures she experiences in her career directly.

I feel like women can feel this need to be technically competent and feel like they really need to prove themselves: going above and beyond to prove their skills, like the idea of you have to be twice as good to be seen as equal

Throughout Lauren's experiences she has changed her behavior to try to fit into the larger power structure she is a part of.

I think I am just hyperaware of that stuff. I am hyperaware of when I don't fit in, or I notice when someone says something off. It results in me altering my behavior all the time to fit into the situation.

An example of this behavior alteration occurred for Lauren during a recent meeting.

When I came into that meeting I actually wanted to make the opposite point of

what I ended up saying, and yet, because of the way the conversation was going, I kind of saw where I could add to that and maybe be seen as smart or as contributing, and so I did that. It was crazy!

Lauren actively saw and took an opportunity to be seen as part of the group, even though it was counter to what she actually believed.

I do think I am very motivated, for better or worse, by external expectations. In some ways that serves me amazingly well in my life.

Then I would say, in terms of me as a person and my own happiness and emotional health, it is a problem.

Trying to find success and fit into the dominant male culture has created a disconnect between who she authentically is and who she has become.

I think I've had this pattern of being disconnected from my sort-of essential self....Now I'm trying to call on some of that original emotion and wisdom, and it's very foreign. I think part of this, seriously, is gender stuff. I have, my whole life, kind of adapted to what I know gets results, wanting results and getting results.

By altering herself Lauren has found success in a male dominated field, success she believes is not naturally available to women. "I had this desire to be a powerful person and I knew that in our society women weren't powerful....The way I was wasn't going to get me to where I want to be. I wanted to unlock that privilege." While Lauren has found success in her field, altering her behavior to unlock that success has taken a toll. "I think I got really good at changing to be that way, but that's really kind of violence against yourself in the end." Lauren explained that recently she has developed that

awareness and has been actively trying to catch herself and analyze her own motives.

I have tried to be really intentional about that lately and aware of my motivations, because as long as you're seeking other people's approval, by design it will never be enough, because it's not part of you and what you're designing for yourself. It's some external thing that actually doesn't even really exist, other than all these little subtle messages.

While altering herself may afford Lauren rewards, she realized that what actually proves to be rewarding in the long run is more likely to be something she truly believes in.

***Polly.***

*Family influence on outdoor pursuits.* Growing up Polly learned to love the outdoors. Her parents shared this love with her, exposing her to slightly differing passions: her mother's focused on the environment, her father's on outdoor recreation.

When reflecting on her parents' influence on her passion for the outdoors, Polly placed significant weight on the interests and activities they shared with her. "My participation in outdoor activities goes way back....I was apparently conceived in a tent, and I feel like there's this lineage that set me up for an outdoor life.... I think my earliest memory is of me in the back of a baby carrier on Dad or Mom's back, watching a trail come up and down as they walked."

Interestingly, her parents' support wavered (if only briefly) later in life, when Polly decided to work in the outdoor industry. "They thought I was wasting my good degree. I think they wanted me to go into an intellectual-based job. My dad, especially, had a hard time with it. My parents eventually came around to it. "

While both her parents shared a love of the outdoors with her, it is notable that her

parents had differing passions within that realm. “My mom has this love for nature, and it's really beautiful, actually. My dad has this habit of getting out into the woods and camping, and that's been a big part of his life for a long time.” While Polly did not mention this, her parents do seem to fall into traditionally gendered values, when evaluating the benefits they reap from the outdoors: her mother’s contemplative focus contrasts with her father’s more active engagement.

Her parents also differed in their response to her participation in outdoor recreation. “Both my parents are really encouraging about this stuff. I think my love for nature and animals and things is something I get from my mom. However, my mom is a little more fearful of the adventure activities.” She went on to point out that her sister, too, was fearful of Polly’s participation in high adventure sports. Polly’s dad on the other hand, fully encouraged it. “My dad, however, loves the high adventure part of my participation. I think he gets to live vicariously through me, and his influence had a lot to do with why I took up things like climbing.” This difference, again, corresponds with what traditionally is considered to be masculine or feminine values.

*A gender pulse.* Beginning at a young age Polly developed a strong awareness of the expectations gender imposed on her, and she developed an equally strong desire to oppose those expectations.

Although Polly’s gender did not seem to play a significant role in the way she was raised within her family, from an early age she developed an awareness of gender expectations and was actively bothered by them. While recalling a memory from nature camp, Polly stated, “I was a total tomboy and all I wanted to do was run around and to be outside.” Another outstanding example of this was when some of her peers began joining

the Girl Scouts. “As a child I thought about joining the Girl Scouts, until I realized they wore skirts....I saw that was the uniform and I was like, 'No way! I'm not wearing a skirt!’” Not only did Polly not want to dress in a feminine way, but also she perceived the Girl Scouts as doing traditionally feminine activities in which she was not interested.

I think, too, I had this idea that the Girl Scouts sold cookies, went to museums, and did community service. The Boy Scouts were out camping and doing adventure stuff, and that's what I wanted to do, and so I didn't want to be in the Girl Scouts.”

Her perception of the Girl Scout’s activities was her own, but even if her perception did not match the actual activities the Girl Scouts were doing, Polly pointed out that she did not, in fact, want to be involved with either gendered organization. “Actually, I don't think I even wanted to be in the Boy Scouts, I just wanted to be camping and outside and running around.”

Similarly, Polly played soccer growing up and her town offered a girls league, a boy’s league and a co-ed league. “No other girls chose mixed league and no boys chose it either. I was the only person, and so they put me in boys league and I played boys soccer for a long time.”

While it seems Polly’s parents did not hinder her liberation as a girl, Polly did allude to experiences outside of her family that perpetuated her awareness of being marginalized as a female.

I had felt this sense of injustice my entire life that the things I wanted to do weren't as accessible to me as men, or people didn't believe I could do them. I felt like I had had more hurdles to overcome those sorts of things than boys. That



always pissed me off from a very young age and really upset me. I felt like I had been growing up in a world where the things I wanted to do didn't fit with the stereotypical women's path, and I was really resentful of that.

When looking at Polly's story it is clear that these perceptions of injustice strongly influenced her path moving forward. While those experiences affected her and presented hurdles, they also provided motivation for Polly, who developed a strong ambition to defy them. An example of this can be seen in her enjoyment of, not only playing on a boy's soccer team, but also performing well on it. When referring to her motivation to perform at a high level she stated, "I took such joy in proving them wrong."

*Overcoming gender expectations.* From a young age Polly was aware of gender expectations, upset by them, and anxious to overcome them. At some points in Polly's experiences she purposefully placed herself in male-dominated environments, and worked hard to prove gender expectations wrong. While Polly has been motivated to overcome gender expectations and, as a result, has achieved much, it is also apparent that those expectations have had a negative effect. Her self-perception is affected at times and she has discovered that actively pushing against gender expectations becomes taxing. "So, for me, my reactions to marginalization have manifested in empowering ways and also manifested in underhanded, exhausting, shitty ways."

In her youth, Polly enjoyed success in a male-dominated environment when she found herself in an all boys soccer league. "I loved it! I was really tough, really aggressive, and I played super physical. They'd put me up against not very good players and I'd cream them." The opposing teams made assumptions about her ability based on her gender, expecting her to be a relatively weak player, but Polly responded with play

that actively highlighted a traditionally masculine approach to the game. While we cannot know how Polly would have behaved on a female or co-ed league, she did allude to her hyper-aggressive play being a conscious choice.

Not only did she enjoy playing with the boys, but also she took great pride in proving her skills to them. “When I outperformed boys on the opposing team they would get made fun of ruthlessly by their teammates, and their coach would be like, “Crap! She's not just out there, but she is good.” I took such joy in proving them wrong.” It is notable that the peers and coaches of the other players were not just judging the boys for being outperformed, but amplifying their judgment because a girl was outperforming them. Later in Polly’s story she reflected on her personality and pointed out her disposition for breaking expectations, which is clearly visible in her attitude towards soccer:

I think I have built up this little fury and fire in me from my experiences. In my life, I really like to prove wrong people who stereotype me. You know I’ve always had the personality where, if I feel cornered into something, I rebound way in the other direction. So, I think for me, people telling me I couldn’t be a certain thing just made me want to be it more: prove them wrong.

Polly pointed out one other effect of her gender when looking at her own team. “I guess I earned my place, but I'm sure I had to work harder to earn it than the other players.” While she was eventually accepted, she felt that she faced heightened scrutiny.

Polly again put herself in an environment that was male-dominated when she became a wild-land firefighter. “Wild-land firefighting is white male dominated, to the max, and a very masculine culture.” Similar to her experience playing soccer, other fire

crews did not always take her crew seriously because it included women. Reacting to this attitude, Polly worked extra hard in workouts and trainings to prove herself.

Unlike soccer, however, Polly did perceive herself to be less able in some regards because she was petite. “I was doing the extra workouts because I liked it, but also because I knew that I had to work hard to stay strong, because not only am I a woman, but I'm short and pretty small.” It is noticeable that Polly did not perceive her gender as a physical barrier, but her size was. “I couldn't reach everything, and I couldn't carry as much as even other women on my crew who were bigger than me.” She went on to point out, “I could do whatever needed to be done for the job, but it was obvious to everyone that I was a small woman.” It can be reasoned that Polly was not only judged because of her small stature, but that her small stature also highlighted her gender.

While she was capable of all duties, and found ways to modify things so her size would matter less, men still perceived her as incapable. “Other male firefighters would just take over what I was doing, which I hated so much, or they would make comments and laugh. It was really obvious within that culture.” It is clear that this reaction motivated Polly to continue to improve her physical ability, but only to a point. Eventually she did leave the career, in part because of the masculine culture. In a later conversation Polly pointed out that while people doubting her ability motivated her, it also was something she could not help but internalize after experiencing it over and over again, “Another way I think feeling marginalized has really manifested is in this awful, insidious, underhanded way, where I have a lot of second-guessing and self-doubt.”

When looking over Polly's story, her ambition to overcome gender expectations often appeared in rock climbing experiences. In rock climbing not only did Polly build

her skill set to a level that was equal with men, defeating gender expectations among the men she climbed with, but also she achieved a skill level where she was often the more skilled climber in her group of male peers or co-workers. As a result, she often climbed with men who were less proficient than her; however, outsiders still assumed her to be the less competent person. “In the general climbing community I come across it all the time, although I think less as I get older and as the times change; but I don’t know, maybe not.” She experienced it often when climbing with her husband:

People will walk up to us, and instead of addressing both of us, they look at my husband and ask him, “How was the climb? How did you put it up?” In fact, I would have been the one who put up the damn climb. I’m the stronger in our couple. I am actually the climbing expert when we go out together, but it happens over and over, and over and over again.

It was often small things, but while small, for Polly they still carried large gendered expectations. “It sucks! ... words, eye contact, and who the questions are addressed to. It’s really small, subtle social cues that show who they expect to have the experience... They affect me for sure.” It is notable that the effect of these subtle actions was heightened for Polly because she was so aware of them and noticed them on a regular basis. Polly acknowledged in a later conversation that she had become hyper-aware of people’s expectations.

I think I’m pretty over-sensitive to those kinds of dynamics and I look out for them, because I’ve experienced that my whole life; but I think those more traditional ideas about roles are still really pervasive in the climbing community. Although, I do think, I would have to say, less and less.

Still, Polly continued to find consolation in proving expectations wrong. Often she would point out that she, in fact, put up the climb, or in other cases actually got to show her physical ability to doubters. One notable example occurred as a man was belaying her and was actively assisting her by pulling the rope as she climbed. “Finally, I just looked down at him and I was, like, ‘You do not need to haul me up this.’...A lot of my satisfaction came from thinking this person thought I couldn’t do it, and now I’m just doing it.”

Polly was not unaware about this aspect of her personality. She even evaluated its value at one point in her story. “I don’t know if that’s a great thing, but that’s part of how I came to be.” She also evaluated how people react to her reactions. “People’s reaction to that part of my personality is all over the place. It has caused some pretty stressful relationships, but then, also, some people really celebrate that about me, too.” While Polly did not point this out directly, it can be reasoned that the negative reactions she has received from her desire to prove herself also stem from others’ gendered expectations of her. She did point out that the positive reactions she received might very well be colored by her gender. “I think a lot of people enjoy seeing a woman kind-of be, like, “Oh, f\*\*\* that shit...I can do it!”

Polly described a marked evolution in her reactions to and thoughts about gender expectations.

Sometimes I’m forced to let go of my ego, of what I want to be able to do, and let somebody who’s stronger and bigger do that thing....I would go to the biggest extreme intentionally, and not always so other people saw me, but also for me and my brain. I wanted to know that I could do it and that I should be able to do it. I’m

letting go of that need now, which I think is good.

However, this evolution had taken a negative direction with regard to her energy and motivation. With the cumulative effect of a lifetime's worth of being doubted, Polly admitted she struggled to transform her fury over gender expectations into motivation. "Over and over again, society's, like, 'Are you sure that you're the best at this?' and that has affected me....Now, later in life, I'm almost just, like, more exhausted and saddened by it. I don't know if I just, like, lost my energy for it or what."

*The retaining power of media portrayals.* Polly discussed the impact of media presentations of outdoor recreation and adventure activities (outdoor media) and acknowledged her sensitivity to the ways in which women were depicted. While she pointed out that, for her, one effect of outdoor media was inspiring, she also made it clear that she perceived it as highly gendered, and that its gendered nature had negative effects. She experienced gendering in the media in several ways: its terminology, its limited depiction of women, and (when women were depicted) its depiction of them as whiney, weak, or sexualized. Polly pointed out that she had seen some change in media representations recently, both in general and in outdoor specific media. However, she perceived that representations of women were still very limited.

"I like outdoor media, because in a huge way it's inspiring; but, too, I do feel really aware of the gender imbalance and how that's portrayed." A striking example was an experience she had at a film festival. Not only was she upset by the limited representation of women, but also the only woman included in the film was portrayed as "whiney and bitchy." She reacted to the portrayal, saying, "I was freaking pissed, because the only woman in the movie was this badass climber who I love, but they portrayed her

in this awful way.” It seemed that knowing before hand that this particular woman was, in fact, very talented and strong amplified Polly’s reaction. “I mean she’s one of the strongest climbers in the world and she kicks ass in real life. Her story in the film was the only one where awesome climbing ability was not highlighted.” Polly reacted strongly to this portrayal and found she was not alone in her reaction, other women had noticed, too. “...it was just really upsetting. I was like, ‘What the F\*\*\*?’ At the end of the movie, I went to the women’s bathroom and (like no big surprise) three of the women in the bathroom were also talking about how much bull that was.” Polly had acknowledged her hyper-sensitivity to gender issues, so to have Polly be unsurprised by the other women’s shared perception adds salience to her reaction to the film’s portrayal: she knew all women were likely to be disappointed.

Polly’s largest concern stemmed from realizing that, in fact, someone chose to promote that image of a woman.

You can’t just be unaware of how portraying that in your films affects the community. How you choose to bring the story is really powerful. I am still very affected by those contents, and I feel like I’ve become even more aware of how gender is portrayed in the climbing community and where the imbalances lie. Sometimes media is perceived as an impersonal product. Polly’s perception that the person behind that portrayal was responsible for it and deserved blame is noteworthy.

Polly’s perception moved her to activism when she wrote a letter to *Rock and Ice* magazine. “They had done a special and it was called ‘Everyman’s Issue.’” Polly admitted that the real problem with this issue was the gendered title. She mentioned that the issue portrayed women and even had a woman on the cover, so it is remarkable that

Polly had thought about how that magazine could have encouraged female climbers even more with a neutral word choice. “The semantics of what they were saying, over and over again, I couldn’t get over it and it really affected me.” This led to her writing a letter to the editor.

I told them that I think, coming from the female side of the community, you have been marginalized over and over again in these small and insidious ways and it just builds up. I just wanted them to be aware of that and the power that has. I also wanted to recognize them for having a lot of women in the issue, but let them know the power of their word-choice.

It is clear Polly had noticed and thought about gender in the media repeatedly. She had additionally noticed a shift in the portrayal of women. “I do think there’s a movement now to get more women in these more ‘adventurer’ roles, and so I think I notice it coming up a little less.” She pointed to popular media, like Disney movies, noting that “I feel like there is this movement within popular media to portray women less as these, like, silly sexual objects, and less in stereotypical roles and more powerful roles.” While that was encouraging for Polly she went on to point out that the alternative options are limited. “I have noticed those roles have become, like, the hard-core violent women: like, *Hunger Games* and *Brave*.” Interestingly Polly identifies strongly with the “super-adventure” character, but realizes that only offering two extreme roles for women in the media is limiting. “I think it’s still not super-multidimensional or promoting the range of what women are. The message is not ‘be whatever you want to be,’ it’s ‘be a pretty princess’ or ‘be a warrior.’”

*“Leg up” as female in male industry.* In Polly’s story, the few instances where her



gender actually gave her an advantage should be noted. In both soccer and firefighting Polly identified how being treated differently as a woman may have, in some ways, given her a "leg up." Interestingly, it seems Polly appeared to benefit, not just because she was a woman, but also because she was a woman actively engaging in masculine behavior.

When reflecting on her experience in soccer Polly stated,

Honestly, I don't know how I feel about this now, but at the time I could get away with almost anything on the field. Referees would never call anything on me. I'm not a dirty player, but I could slide tackle or do anything and I almost never got fouls called on me. I could just check people all day, because I was the only girl out there.

Polly made it clear that she played soccer aggressively, "I loved proving that I could kick their asses, and so I did. I played real physical and real aggressive." She understood that it was her gender that allowed her to play extra-aggressively without penalty from the referees.

As an adult Polly noticed advantages again when looking for careers. "During that time in my life I was getting offered a lot of jobs. I think that was because I had recently gotten my EMT, I was a woman, and I had a degree in environmental studies." Polly listed being a woman among the desirable personal attributes and experience an employer might be seeking. Later she pointed out she thinks there is a push to diversify some of these male-dominated outdoor fields. She specifically mentioned that she believes being a female stood out on her wild land firefighting application. "I'm sure (as an applicant coming in) they don't get many women applying, so immediately my application went in the 'special' pile." Polly made it clear that she believed she was

qualified, but she thought her gender did make her stand out as an applicant.

It is also notable that when Polly reflected on her own personality, she mentioned its role in getting hired, “I think a lot of people enjoy seeing a woman kind-of be, like, ‘Oh, f\*\*\* that shit...I can do it!’ That’s helped me, I think, land some jobs, like firefighting.” She demonstrated a confident and assertive behavior style and noticed rewards for those traditionally masculine characteristics.

While she experienced an advantage because her gender potentially assisted her in getting hired, Polly pointed out the down side of these advantages: once hired, it was one more reason for men to judge her negatively. “I’m sure there are some men in there who really hate that direction and resent that....I experienced some of that resentment from other firefighters.” Even as a child, Polly did not experience unqualified acceptance. “I became really close with my (soccer) team. There were always people on it that didn’t like the idea....I’m sure when I first walked on that field, they were all like, “What the...! Who is this girl?”

*Repose from gender expectations.* Polly has experienced environments where she felt free from gender expectations and benefited from the open-mindedness and support she found there. It is also notable that in these instances she benefited from having ownership of the experience.

One example of a supportive environment, free from gender expectations, was the rock wall at Polly’s college:

The scene at the climbing wall was really cool....The rock wall became this really accepting place....There was no ‘you can’t do what I can do, because you’re a girl’ attitudes or anything like that....So, it was a little socially different than the

stereotypical climbing gym scene.

When reflecting on why her gym had the culture it did, Polly attributed it to both the viewpoint of the college as a whole and also the fact that she and her peers had really created the gym and had control over shaping its culture. Polly described her college as “a liberal and open-minded environment.” It was “full of feminists and half the campus was gay.” She went on to point out that she was involved in the group that got approval for the rock wall to be built. “It was teeny-tiny, and I think it was a unique situation, because it was our baby....There was a real sense of ownership and community there that was really cool....We built the vibe we wanted.”

Being involved in these open environments had an effect on Polly. “It was a real supportive and welcoming community, actually. It was pretty cool and special.” In a later conversation it became clear how different this experience was from others she had had, and also how being in that environment motivated her to create that for others. “I had been told I couldn't do stuff, treated differently, patronized or whatever, over and over. It was really important for me to be involved in activities or create opportunities for people where these things were celebrated and made accessible.”

This motivation led to Polly organizing an all female climbing trip for an independent study. Polly wanted not only to reap the benefits for herself of an environment free from gender expectations, but also to share that with other women.

I think it is so cool for women to just take control of their own programs, activities, athleticism, or whatever, and have that be a supportive environment with other women. Even in high school, I really loved that. I didn't want any men on the trip, because I wanted it to be a totally female-led and successful female-

led expedition. That's what I wanted.

The trip became a really motivating factor in Polly's progression. "We killed it and I loved it....After that trip I was sure I wanted to go climbing, everywhere all over the United States. I wanted to do Outdoor Ed and I wanted to go climbing all the time."

Polly had found a similar freedom from gender expectations in her relationship with her husband and it was clear she highly valued that dynamic. However, she acknowledged that while within the relationship gender was not a factor, outsiders' expectations of them were still gendered.

He's attracted to me because he thinks I'm a bad ass, and I think that's why I love him so much. I was attracted to him because I felt like, in this man, those normal expectations or gender roles aren't super-applicable. I feel great about that within our relationship, but with the outside world, I feel like it's just going to be there for the rest of our lifetime, at least.

*Experiencing sexual objectification.* Polly has experienced sexual objectification from men in her field and is aware of the sexual attention she draws as a woman in her field. Additionally, Polly has experimented with her own appearance and at times has actively de-gendered herself. In these moments she found not only personal liberation from body image, but also developed an awareness of being treated differently based on her exterior.

Polly has worked in some very male-dominated cultures and men in those spaces have reacted to her gender in many ways. Polly pointed out that often she is expected to be weak or unskilled based on her gender, but in some instances her gender produced more than merely gender expectations and went to a level of objectification. This was

particularly noticeable in Polly's experiences as a river guide and as a wild land firefighter.

Polly explained her experiences as a river guide, pointing out some masculine aspects of her company. "The atmosphere at my guiding company was very "party bro" style. I felt like it was frat boys, plucked out of a college party, and dumped in the middle of the desert. They were just gross and sexist." Notably, at this organization she was not perceived as less physically able than her male peers, but instead she was seen as a sexual object. "I didn't feel physically belittled because of my gender.... but we were sexualized for sure, and especially coming in with a girlfriend. We were hyper-sexualized by the males in the community and that sucked." Polly felt her experience of being sexualized was heightened because she was dating a girl who was also a river guide. "They loved thinking about Jessica and I making out and always wanted us to do it in front of them. They would just do gross stuff like that." While she did think that their relationship intensified the sexual objectification they were experiencing, Polly pointed out that other women had experienced similar atmospheres. "I've heard that a lot actually, other women saying they had similar experiences at rafting companies."

Being seen in this sexual way affected Polly's experience negatively. "I fell in love with the desert, and it was a really special place for me physically, but socially, I kind of hated it." Again Polly was seen as a sexual object when she was a wild land firefighter. "I would walk through fire camp and all the eyes would be following me walking down, because not only was I a woman firefighter walking through camp, but also I was a *woman* walking through camp." Polly understood that she was being judged as a woman in a male field, but also, as she walked past these men, they were viewing her

as a sex object.

Polly demonstrated awareness not only of how men saw her, but also how she saw herself. After being inspired by a female instructor at an outdoor school she attended, who did not ascribe to body image expectations, Polly went home and changed her own image. She found this enormously liberating.

I remember going back home and not shaving my armpits....I realized that I didn't have to look this certain way and I didn't have to fit the *Teen Vogue* pictures. I could be strong and have muscles, be successful, and have hair on my legs and armpits, if I wanted to.

Polly did notice others people's reactions to her new look, and evaluated people in her life based on how they reacted. "I started judging my friendships based on who could handle it and who couldn't."

Polly tried a similar de-gendering at another point in her experiences. "I cut my hair all the way off, right before I went on the course. I got a real short pixie cut and I felt almost asexual." Again this change had a freeing effect for Polly. "There wasn't any attraction between anyone, and so it was a whole new dynamic for me to explore. It was really freeing, for three months to not even have to worry about that." Again, however, Polly did notice people's reactions to her appearance. "I got a lot less male attention. I also perceived people as being not quite as nice to me when I had short hair. They were a little more suspicious. It was really interesting. I actually really loved people's reactions." While other people's reactions were not entirely positive, it is notable that Polly enjoyed them. The experience does reflect her ongoing desire to break stereotypes based on her gender.

*Mentorship.* Female role models and mentors were powerful instruments in Polly's development. From a young age Polly looked at other women who were succeeding in non-traditionally gendered ways and found inspiration. Polly also benefited from female mentors who coached her progression and helped her enter the field of outdoor recreation. Ultimately Polly developed a desire to be a mentor and role model for others, particularly for other women.

During Polly's progression she was strongly impacted by simply seeing other women excelling as outdoor professionals. One example of this occurred as a child on a rafting trip. "I remember the girl very, very distinctly. I wasn't in her boat, but I remember seeing her on the back of her boat, and I was like, 'Heck, yeah!' .... Just seeing her out there was enough to inspire me."

A similar inspiration came years later on a different river trip. Again Polly had very limited interaction with the woman, but her presence stood out very powerfully for Polly. "I remember having this moment one day where she got in the river, put her oars in and took a stroke.... She had hairy armpits and hair on her legs. She was beautiful and she didn't give a shit." It is clear from Polly's account that this woman had multiple impacts on her. She was excelling in a career Polly knew she wanted to be part of, and was also actively presenting a body image that went against popular cultural expectations.

She didn't have to try to be pretty, and it counteracted all the body image stuff that my little freshman brain was getting bombarded with every single day in high school.... She really became kind of the model of the woman I wanted to be: strong, capable, independent, didn't subscribe to societal expectations.

It was such a powerful experience that, Polly still uses that woman as an example when she is mentoring girls now.

Mentorship from women benefited Polly as she was entering the profession. One example of this was a former instructor. “She was this amazing Australian woman that I really looked up to....Her approval meant a lot to me....She even supported me after our course and ended up writing a lot of my letters of recommendation for the next few years.” Another female helped direct Polly in her career when she entered wild land firefighting. She had met a girl on a wilderness first aid course who was a firefighter: “When I heard what she did, I asked her, 'Oh, can I do that?' She was like, 'Totally!'....She showed me how to apply and that winter I did.”

It is clear that Polly wants to pass on the benefit she got from mentorship to other women.

I realized that I had potential to have a lot of significance, because those people really helped shape who I was, who I am, and who I’ve become....The chance to be a part of that and just have the ability to be an example for others has motivated me.

Specifically, Polly wants to inspire other women to break societal expectations, in the same way that her role models have done for her. “I was especially attracted to the idea of showing young women that there is another path. That it doesn’t have to be this straight path that falls in the normal, socially acceptable lines of what it means to be a woman.” It is notable that not only did mentors inspire Polly, but also the desire to be a mentor has continued to inspire her own progression and development. “I wanted to be able to have the potential to have as much influence as some of the leaders had...on my life.”



*Awareness of own expectations.* Polly was aware of other people's gender expectations and she also developed expectations for herself. Polly realized that she had expectations of her own about women, and that her expectations were not always accurate or useful for everyone. Additionally, Polly demonstrated an awareness of the expectations men face as outdoor leaders, and in society, and how these can also be detrimental.

One example of Polly's realization of her own expectations of women occurred when she was leading an all girls group. When she took the job, she was excited by the opportunity to act on her vision of what such a program should be and by the chance to counter some of the gendered expectations her male bosses had. While she was largely successful in those goals, she also learned that her participants did not necessarily fit the image of women she herself held.

There were these gender differences between the groups that I think I have not related to a lot, for most of my life. I thought, once we got into this wilderness environment, all that would wash away, and it didn't. I had to really come to terms with that on a personal level, that my experience as a woman was unique and my own. Just because I have a vision of being empowered and independent and things like that, it doesn't mean that's every girl's vision.

When reflecting on some of the differences she noticed Polly stated, "There was more resistance and antagonism on the girls' part, especially socially. There was a very different kind of bullying and power dynamic....With the girls, it was just so apparent and intense.

While Polly had very easily taken on traditionally masculine traits herself to fit

into traditionally masculine activities, she realized that not all girls felt comfortable adopting a similar image. Polly realized that having any expectations on the way someone should act is detrimental. “I had to really step out of my own idea of my gender and my identity and look at a group, too, and accept that there are differences on larger scale.” Polly realized that she needed to amend how she acted, because not all women saw things the same way she did. She also altered some of the focus of her program.

I was never reducing their miles or taking them out of the physical challenges that the boys had....There was no reason to change that and the girls really excelled....We also worked on social dynamics and communication, and we discussed how to deal with body image issues and those kinds of things. That's not to say that the boys' groups wouldn't also need that kind of programming in different ways.

Polly developed a similar awareness of the gender expectations men face. It is clear that Polly believed everyone should be free from gender expectations.

I'm optimistic about women having more freedom to pursue things that were traditionally male-dominated, but I worry that it's still going to be this move towards ascribing to this macho culture....I worry that it will turn into girls just playing into that, as opposed to creating a better system for everyone.

Polly pointed out that for women to simply ascribe to the masculine norm does not actually open up the field to diverse people and that supporting masculine stereotypes can be particularly detrimental to boys who do not fit into that traditional masculinity.

What I don't see as much of is a movement for men to be able to, also, really look at what expectations are placed on them, and what barriers they face to go do

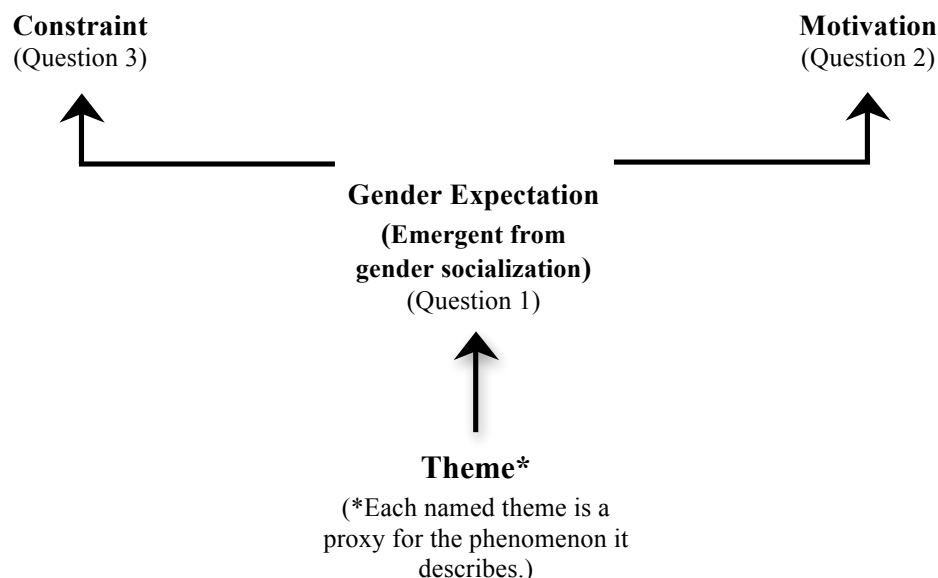
things that are more traditionally feminine; and that that is just going to get forgotten about in the empowering, because the powerful structure is this patriarchy.

It is clear that Polly has an awareness surrounding the impact that both external and internal gender expectations have had on her experiences. While she can feel the impact those expectations have had on her directly, it is clear that, for her, true freedom from expectations cannot occur until both genders are freed from societal norms.

**Phase III- Themes between all stories (metathemes).** In phase three of analysis, eight metathemes emerged from the stories and phase two analyses of the four participants. In most cases these themes fit into one of the two global themes, motivations or constraints, with gender socialization presenting as a moderating variable for either motivation or constraint. This categorization of themes reflects the secondary research questions of this study:

1. What role has gender socialization played in the experience of becoming a female leader in outdoor recreation?
2. What motivations do women have for participating in outdoor recreation and becoming leaders in outdoor recreation?
3. What perceived constraints do women experience while participating in outdoor recreation and in becoming leaders in outdoor recreation?

Below is a representational model of this categorization.



**Figure 1. Categorization model.**

Three of the identified metathemes present as motivation for the study participants: mentorship, personal qualities (including ambition, and a connection to the outdoors), and the development of idealism. Three of the identified metathemes present as constraints for the study participants: role expectations, nature of the industry, and media. Two of the identified metathemes serve as both motivations and constraints: family support and self-perception.

### ***Motivations.***

*Mentorship.* All the participants benefited from positive mentorship experiences in various ways and mentorship served as motivation for continued participation in the outdoor recreation field and professional development. Allison stated, “Having positive mentors and peers around me has been so valuable to me. Having people who told me I was good at this, and that I could do it, was really helpful.” Her sentiment was shared by the other participants. Participants experienced mentorship which facilitated breaking into

the field, as well as mentorship which promoted continued success in the field. While positive mentorship provided by both men and women was motivating, it is clear that gender had an effect. In many instances participants felt more comfortable in mentorship relationships with other women as opposed to men. Participants also perceived that men had greater access to informal mentorship. Ultimately, gender resulted in a type of mentorship unique to women, knowledge sharing on how to be successful in a male-dominated field.

For three of the participants simply observing female role models had a significant impact. Both Polly and Allison witnessed successful women in the outdoor industry at a young age and drew particular inspiration from the image of the women they saw. In a powerful statement Polly explained the impact that a woman she simply saw, but did not interact with, had on her. “I never really talked to her or anything: she was just this flash...That image of her has stayed with me for the rest of my life and really, really shaped a lot, also, of who I became.” Similarly, when describing a rare occasion when many women in the profession had congregated, Chris described the positive motivational effect merely being with other successful women in the field had on her. “The outdoor industry is traditionally not a women’s profession, so to have all of these incredibly strong and technically capable women in one spot was amazing.”

All participants experienced both formalized mentorship relationships and informal mentorship. Formal mentorship provided significant motivation, because participants felt supported in a structural sense by their organizations. Two participants experienced formal mentorship created specifically for women, which provided powerful motivation for both of them. Furthermore, formal mentorship often engendered informal

mentorship. Allison captured this when she said, “The seminar had many aspects that were amazing; but just meeting a climbing partner, who I felt comfortable with, was such a gift.”

All participants benefited from informal mentorship relationships, as well. Lauren captured the pervasive impact that informal mentorship can have on development when she stated, “You develop these personal relationships, which is ultimately where that skill building comes from.” While informal mentorship among women was a clear motivating factor to continued participation and development for the participants, they noticed a striking difference between their network of informal mentorship and the network to which men had access. Because there are more men in the field, the participants saw male mentorship networks forming more easily and more often. Allison described this phenomenon when she stated, “I would often see men, sitting in the hallways at OTS, talking about their last climbing trip, or the one they want to go on. I thought to myself...How do I get invited?” She later directly stated the advantage provided by the men’s informal networks, “I believe there's a stronger culture of mentorship among men at the school. That's an advantage that's not formalized, but very real.”

All participants realized a difference between the mentorship relationships they had with men versus women and valued the unique quality their experiences with female mentors had on them. Participants attributed the ease of female mentorship to shared experiences as women, as well as shared values. This is evident in Chris’s statement, “I have noticed that climbing with some men can be really patronizing and not supportive and I am incredibly particular about who my climbing partners are now.”

Additionally, participants experienced a type of mentorship unique to females in

the industry: mentorship aimed at negotiating success in a male-dominated industry.

Participants also demonstrated a desire to become mentors for other women in this regard. Allison captured the unique mentorship women can provide for each other in her field when she stated,

Having been a woman going through the channels of, and working my way up through, the organization, I have a unique perspective on what it is to be a woman doing that. It is a perspective my male co-workers can't offer.

While having positive mentors was a motivating force for these women as they continued their journeys as outdoor leaders, a desire to be mentors to others has added gravity to the motivational force of mentorship. Polly highlighted this multiplying effect by stating, "I realized that I had the potential to have a lot of significance, because those people really shaped who I was, who I am, and who I've become."

*Personal qualities as enablers on the path to outdoor leadership.* All the participants possessed personal qualities that were contributing factors to their continued participation and eventual career in outdoor recreation. These qualities and characteristics include the following: a desire to be physically active that went against traditional gender expectations, a strong connection to the outdoors, and ambition and determination which fueled their ability to continue participating, even when faced with gendered constraints.

All the participants demonstrated a disposition towards being physically active. It manifested through childhood engagement in active outdoor play or, in youth, as competitive involvement in high school and college sports. This quality possibly fueled consistent active involvement in the outdoors and all the accumulated experiences during those engagements potentially influenced some participants' decision to pursue a career in

outdoor leadership. Lauren described the motivating effect physical challenges gave her when she discussed how she had developed the feeling that she could do anything. “That definitely has come from being around this community and also from having actual physical challenges that I really didn't think I could do and then I did. There's something about that that's pretty powerful.” Sometimes, that physical ability went beyond traditional gender expectations. Chris and Polly, for example, both aggressively developed physical strength and were excited when their strength surprised people or exceeded a male peer's abilities. Chris described this when recalling an experience bouldering with a man who she admired for his strength. “At one point during our workout he looked at me and said “Holy shit...you are strong!” I don't think I even said anything back to him, but it just felt so good to have one of these hard men tell me I was strong and surprise him in that.”

Similarly, all participants demonstrated a connection to the outdoors that was noteworthy. Some participants compared its intensity to that felt by other women in their lives, highlighting the uniqueness they believed their connection had. Polly explained, “Since my course, I just have this comfort in the wilderness; it's like second nature. It feels good to be in the woods; I feel in my element. It was probably the happiest time of my life.” Chris and Lauren both noticed differences between their love for the outdoors and their sisters' interests, alluding to the fact that a strong sense of attachment to the outdoors is not a characteristic unconditionally present in all women. Consequently, it can be looked at as a personal disposition. Sometimes, a strong connection with the outdoors is intentionally drawn as a contrast with other descriptors construed as or suggested as feminine; for instance, Chris described her non-outdoorsy sister as “a



glamour girl."

Ultimately, one of the most motivating personal qualities all of the participants possessed was ambition. They all were determined not only to be successful, but also to push past constraints; all the participants were motivated by overcoming challenges. Allison described the power she believed this trait provided for achieving success in the outdoor industry. "I think there is a type of woman who is more likely to be successful in this field: a woman who is outwardly confident, driven, and someone who is able to see a goal and actively pursue it."

The participants were particularly motivated when they felt challenged regarding their abilities as women in the field. For example, Allison stated, "I like the challenge that comes with breaking stereotypes. Working in a male-dominated field fuels that in me." While all participants shared this sentiment, they also demonstrated negative effects from this quality. For example, Lauren stated, "In some ways that serves me amazingly well in my life. Then I would say, in terms of me as a person and my own happiness and emotional health, it is a problem." While continued determination to be successful in a male-dominated field was not necessarily comfortable, for all participants it presented as a critical quality to finding success in the outdoor field.

*Development of idealism.* A developing desire to be an agent of change occurred for all participants during their experiences. While the participants had started their participation and careers noticing the extra challenge they faced as women in the field, over time each developed a desire to become an agent of change who will play a role in transforming that characteristic of the industry. This goal emerged in multiple ways.

All participants developed a strong desire to become mentors and role models for

other women, attempting not only to make a career in outdoor recreation more accessible, but also to change gender expectations. Polly captured the power she believed simply being seen as a strong woman who found success in this male-dominated field could have on other women:

I was especially attracted to the idea of showing young women that there is another path. That it doesn't have to be this straight path that falls in the normal, socially acceptable lines of what it means to be a woman.

All participants shared this idea, and like Polly were motivated to continue their work with hopes of this realized outcome.

Beyond simply breaking stereotypes by operating actively as non-males in a male dominated-field, as their careers progressed participants resolved to actively inform both other women and men about the gender issues that they had experienced in the industry. They forged ambitions about changing the ways leadership development occurred in the outdoor industry, and aspired to try to make it a more equally accessible domain. Strategies for these goals developed on multiple levels.

All participants realized the positive impact they could have by personally supporting other women. Allison summed up this idea when she said, "I think that we need female role models sharing their experiences with other women and sharing tips about working with mostly men, etc. That informal mentorship network is a way to increase participation in male-dominated activities."

While helping other women to find personal, individual success in the field has served as motivation for the participants, the latter have also articulated interest in organizing women and spreading awareness of the challenges women face in hopes of

larger scale change. Allison, for instance, was motivated to raise awareness and stimulate conversations about gender in the outdoor culture. Chris perceptively described the power she believed such a conversational shift could have in the following statement:

If we, as female outdoor leaders, stop and have a conversation about why those men assumed I could not be a leader, because I am a female, we can actually make people conscious of it. I think about those conversations spreading and the power they could have.

While the larger goal of coming together to increase access was motivating, participants did experience negative repercussions from their attempts to raise awareness, particularly, resentment from men who were struggling with the changing culture. An interaction Allison had captured in this repudiative sentiment. "I was talking about the diversity inclusion initiative at OTS with a very good friend of mine and he said, 'I feel, like, it's like beating a dead horse.'" Reflecting on that utterance, Allison added this: "At the time, as is usually the case with me, I did not respond immediately....But, looking back, I wish I had said, 'You know, I bet it doesn't feel like a dead horse to somebody who's not feeling included every day.'"

For many participants, the desire to change the exclusive nature of the industry went beyond women's issues. They had noticed men struggling, who did not portray traditional hegemonic masculinity, and realizing this, participants came to see the need to open the industry for all people. As Allison expressed it:

I think true success will mean, not only, can I thrive in this field, but also that anybody who wants to be part of this field can. We will succeed as an industry when gender doesn't have to be a barrier.

### ***Constraints.***

*Media.* All participants noticed and had opinions about the way outdoor adventure sports media (outdoor media) portrayals depicted women. Ultimately, the participants understood the media as a powerful force in creating and maintaining societal expectations. It is clear they believed media had the power to change the traditional images of gender associated with the outdoors, however, they perceived media instead as perpetuating them.

Allison pointed out the socializing power that the media has on the body expectations young girls encounter. Stemming from this, three of the participants were especially frustrated with the outdoor adventure media's portrayals of women. They pointed out that women in outdoor media are often sexualized. Chris expressed this frustration directly when she said, "I feel like the strong female climbers that are getting media attention are being subjected to objectification and sexualized. I just wish that women could go be awesome climbers and also put some damn clothes on."

It was noted by two participants that, when not objectified, the abilities of female athletes were downplayed in outdoor media, or the women were portrayed as hyper-masculine to justify their athleticism. After witnessing an extremely talented female climber portrayed as annoying and un-athletic in a film otherwise including only men, Polly stated, "I mean she's one of the strongest climbers in the world and she kicks ass in real life [but her] story in the film was the only one where awesome climbing ability was not highlighted."

Increasing the frustration created by media's portrayal of women was an

awareness of the power the media wields over society. Polly expressed this frustration directed to the editor of the film she had witnessed. “You can’t just be unaware of how portraying that in your films affects the community. How you choose to bring the story is really powerful.” Allison and Chris both echoed the power media possesses. Allison pointed out examples of encountering men subscribing to the values embedded in media messages. Chris, however, pointed out that if the media depicted different values, ones more supportive of multidimensional attributes of women, those too would be adopted by society. “If the media would portray these amazing women climbers as strong and powerful women that are not in bikinis, we could really impact the profession.”

Not only have media portrayals caused frustration for the participants personally, but also because of media’s socializing ability, the women have encountered stereotypes and prejudices from those who have internalized the messages of media.

*Role expectations.* All four participants experienced tremendous constraints stemming from gender role expectations. Because the nature of their career is perceived to be a masculine one, the participants frequently confronted the gender role expectations of people who did not work in the field and who consistently expected men to be in charge. They also encountered role expectations within the industry when negotiating relationships with male co-workers. They experienced pervasive assumptions that as women they would necessarily be less skilled and capable, which resulted in the constant need to prove their abilities. All the participants realized that to be successful in the industry they needed to meet the expectation of masculinity and found success by acting in ways associated with masculine behavior. Ultimately, the multitude of expectations they continuously faced affected them outside their careers, as well. Because gender role

expectations seemed inescapable and endless, some became weary and began to feel discouraged. For others, trying to balance differing expectations between work and personal life became difficult.

All the participants experienced expectations held by people outside of the industry. Often this exhibited as people assuming that the women were not leaders in the field and instead that their male counterparts must be the experts. One participant frequently encountered students who expected a man to be their instructor for a course. When outsiders encountered participants and their male co-workers, the outsiders assumed that the women must be students. Polly explained the effect these societal assumptions of what an outdoor professional looks like have had on her. “It sucks! Words, eye contact, and who the questions are addressed to. It’s really small, subtle social cues that show who they expect to have the experience... They affect me for sure.”

The participants also felt the effect of role expectations when interacting with people in their field. They encountered doubt others had about their (i.e. participants') abilities because they were women. They were assumed to be unskilled, resulting in a constant need to prove themselves, and some developed fear of bungling things and being judged more critically because they were women. Lauren stated the effect this difference in the expectations for men and women had on her when she stated, “To feel like I’m on the same plain, I often have to go above and beyond. There's this never-ending pressure to kind of catch up.” All of the participants echoed this feeling in different ways. Because they were women it was assumed they were less competent and thus consistently one step behind their male peers: a position that again and again forced them to prove themselves. For Allison this expectation of inferior ability manifested as a desire to feel overqualified

before assuming readiness for new professional roles. “My sense is that people tend to second-guess women more than men, and maybe that's what drives this lack of confidence for me.”

Chris and Allison both experienced challenges in personal relationships related to the gender role expectations of their careers. For Chris, being in a field that valued masculine behavior and skills that were typically perceived as masculine, contrasted with the expectations her partners had for her, making it difficult to maintain heteronormative relationships. Similarly, Allison struggled with learning from men and any implications that might result from these interactions. “They had gone out of their way to help me out, and then I felt, like, ‘Oh, what do I owe them?’ I think that dynamic can feel a little sticky sometimes.”

Ultimately, the constant need to negotiate role expectations was a constant struggle for participants. For some that struggle resulted in exhaustion. Polly captured this well when she said, “Over and over again, society’s, like, ‘Are you sure that you’re the best at this?’ and that has affected me....Now, later in life, I’m almost just, like, more exhausted and saddened by it.”

*Membership within a patriarchal culture/industry.* All participants perceived the outdoor industry as being male-dominated. Accompanying this dominance, participants were surrounded by a masculine culture. Although some organizations were actively trying to increase female participation, male dominance in numbers and in culture persisted. All participants experienced being outsiders in the field and some participants perceived that men were possessive of the industry and seemed to exercise ownership of the career. This often presented as male resistance to increased female participation.

Similarly, the participants described a culture that valued masculine physical ability, as well as masculine styles of leadership and communication.

All of the participants experienced being in mostly male groups. Lauren captured the strain this puts on her in her profession when she said, “Well, I'm always going to be bossed around by men. That is what it sort-of is starting to feel like.” She opined that “I will probably not get to work as a supervisor in an office where there is another woman able to mentor me.” While being the only female in a group of men presented as a constraint for the participants, three participants noted how, conversely, it might benefit men entering the field. Allison observed that “I think the difference is that they can look at people in positions of power...and see more people who look like them....I think there are more obvious pathways to get to where they want to go.”

Some participants experienced being perceived as an outsider to the industry because they were not members of the dominant gender. This happened particularly intensely to Polly when she worked as a wild land firefighter. While some of the organizations may have been actively trying to increase female representation, there were repercussions: participants noticed men in the field becoming resentful. Allison witnessed this very directly: “I had a co-worker, who didn't get the contract he wanted, say, ‘It sucks being a white guy at OTS.’”

All of the participants noticed that value was attached to a masculine leadership style in outdoor recreation, and three of them noticed a similar value attached to masculine physical ability. For example, in rock climbing Chris pointed out that male abilities, like upper body strength, are valued over more delicate or balance based approaches, which operated as a constraint for women trying to be seen as successful in



those skill sets.

To fit in and gain value as leaders in outdoor recreation, all four women utilized leadership styles that were masculine. The value placed on hegemonic masculinity presented as a barrier for women, and presumably it operated against men who did not fit into the traditional image of masculinity, as well. Addressing this narrow scope Lauren, who, at times, found positive results from using a masculine leadership style, stated, “It's interesting because I've seen other quieter people, who are way more competent than me, way more experienced than me, way more in tune with lots of other things than me, totally bypassed; and I've been rewarded.” Participants worried that, unless transformation occurs, as more women enter the field, the dominant masculine nature of the industry will remain intact and women will simply continue to assume masculine traits, as opposed to the industry transforming into a more accessible and open place for all people.

***Multi-valent meta-themes.*** Two of the identified metathemes serve as both motivations and constraints: family support and self-perception.

*Family support.* All participants were influenced and supported by their families to some extent. Sometimes they experienced their family's influence as positive motivation, but sometimes family influence operated to constrain participation in the outdoor industry. While all participants experienced the support and nurturing that is hoped for in a parent-child relationship, some experienced support that more directly influenced their career choice. Three participants experienced a momentary ebbing of parental support when choosing to pursue outdoor recreation as a career.

All participants experienced the support that is hoped for in any parent who is

raising and nurturing a child. Allison reflected an optimum level of this support when describing her parents: “They would make sure I knew that I was no different and that I had the same potentials and opportunities as any man.” Such support implied that a parent has chosen to support a child, whatever (or whoever) that child became.

Three participants experienced more direct support or encouragement from their families. This often manifested in financial support to participate in outdoor activities, and, for most of them, it also manifested in active family participation in outdoor activities. The financial support their families provided demonstrated a level of support beyond just acceptance of their choices, and instead represented an active placement of resources towards their trajectories. Chris captured this elevated support when she explained her parent’s financial contribution. “An OTS semester is not cheap....My parents had not been planning on that expense, but my parents realized how important the course was to me and they chipped in as much as they could.”

While for the most part participants did not experience active family opposition, sometimes parents gently showed discomfort with their daughter’s choices. Three participants experienced questioning of their decisions, once they began pursuing the outdoor industry as a career. Allison and Polly both perceived that their parents wished their daughters were using their educations for a more conventional career. Polly stated, “They thought I was wasting my good degree. I think they wanted me to go into an intellectual-based job.” Lauren recognized similar uncertainty in her parents' support. Additionally, she noticed a difference in the support she felt that she received for her career choice versus her brother: perceiving her parents as more understanding of her brother’s choice to pursue a career in outdoor recreation than of her own.

Ultimately, all of the participants' parents maintained the original, "I will support you whoever you are," type of support. However, the pressure associated with familial expectations, while not actively constraining, did not always operate consistently at every moment in time as motivation for participants in their career decisions.

*Self-perception.* All participants experienced differing feelings about themselves when in the outdoors and in the field. Sometimes these self-perceptions were freeing and positive, creating motivation for participants to continue on their outdoor recreation trajectories; however, sometimes self-perception became constraining, particularly when it conflicted with the masculine culture surrounding the industry.

One participant observed the power being outdoors had on her and her ability to be her authentic self. The perception that being in the wilderness freed them from the gender expectations that permeate greater society was shared by two of the participants. However, another participant pointed out that while she felt comfortable in the wilderness, the masculine culture that surrounds the industry pushed her further away from who she truly was. The participants also noticed that the judgment they received from the outdoor industry's masculine culture forced them to alter their authentic selves, creating a personal disconnect.

Three participants shared the idea that leaving traditional society behind and going out into the wilderness with a group allowed a person to be who they truly were. Lauren spoke to the power of creating your own culture and tribe on a trip and Allison clearly pointed out the person she feels free to be in those moments, when she said, "On those trips I felt like I could be who I was – authentically, me."

While all participants felt connected to nature and comfortable in that

environment, the ability to maintain a self-perception that was positive was hindered by conflicting values between their true selves and the masculine culture in which they were immersed. For two participants this was particularly felt. Ironically, when entering the outdoor industry the participants felt freedom from some of the gender constraints of general society, but within the industry they discovered instead that a new set of masculine gender expectations were the norm. Lauren captured the kind of struggle it generated when she said, “I think I got really good at changing to be that way, but that's really kind of violence against yourself in the end.”

For some participants taking on a masculine style still did comport with their own authentic perception of self; however, two participants struggled with perceptions of self not matching expectations others had for them. Chris and Lauren experienced colleagues telling them their skill sets needed improvement, in spite of the fact that they believed themselves to be fully capable. Lauren highlighted this feeling when she said, “I just am getting tired of having people judging me and telling me what I should be doing.” The constant struggle between self-perception and others’ judgments was constraining and has potential to create a skewed perception of self.

**Phase IV- Theoretical literature analysis.** The goal of this section is to integrate the current study into the larger body of research. This study examined women’s experiences on their path to leadership in outdoor adventure recreation. The study contributes to previous research examining women and their participation in outdoor recreation. The study identifies motivations for and benefits derived from participation in outdoor recreation or adventure activities, but it also identifies constraints to participation and offers insight into the negotiation of those constraints. The participants’ narratives

shed light on the phenomena described above. In the process, however, an additional discursive theme emerged: Agency and empowerment in transforming society.

***Gender socialization.*** Gender socialization affected the experiences of the female participants on their path to outdoor leadership. This is consistent with previous understanding of the effects of gender socialization. Gender socialization has been defined by Andersen and Taylor (2007) as the socialization process in which people learn the societal expectations associated with their sex. The authors noted that gender socialization is an influential force with the potential to direct the behavior of people in gender-typical ways. Additionally, gender scholars have argued that one explanation for the difference in outdoor recreation participation levels between men and women is the effect of gender socialization (McNeil et al., 2012). The participants in the current study chose to pursue careers that were atypical for their gender, and in their experiences it was clear to them and others that they were acting against societal expectations.

The participants' exceptional decision to participate went against societal expectations, and as expected gender socialization affected their day-to-day interactions and self-perceptions. One identified disadvantage to female outdoor participation created by gender is the outdoor leadership style currently practiced. The traditional leadership style in outdoor recreation tends to be based on competition and is hierarchical in nature. Traditionally, men have been raised to perform well within those systems, creating a comfort level for them when encountered in outdoor recreation (Jordan, 1992). The current study reinforces that analysis. All the participants spoke to the masculine leadership culture in which they found themselves and their own toil to fit into it.

Henderson (1996a) argued that females are discriminated against in the outdoors

by being judged on male standards. This is confirmed by the findings of the current study. While the participants were able to function in the outdoor recreation culture, they did report feelings of discrimination based on their gender: feelings that reinforce the findings of prior studies. The participants reported being treated as less capable and competent in outdoor technical ability; they experienced the necessity to prove themselves in this male-dominated field (Henderson et al., 1996; Teal, 1994; Warren, 1996; Wright & Gray, 2013).

Denny (2011) noted that children are exposed to gender socialization from a diverse range of sources, including institutions such as family and school, as well as cultural artifacts like television and books. Similarly, the participants in the current study experienced gender-socializing messages from a wide range of sources, including their family, social groups, and the media. Additionally, Scott and Derry (2005) argued that the dominant messages of traditional gender socialization include valuing female bodies for their form and not their ability. They went on to point out that children continue to be taught that there is an “essential contradiction” between physicality and femininity. This was a message that the participants of the current study noticed being heavily supported by outdoor media, reinforcing the findings of Frohlick (2005) and McNeill et al. (2012), which found the persistence of hegemonic masculinity existing within outdoor recreation and adventure sports media.

Shaw (1994) pointed out that, playing a major role in the creation of barriers to women in outdoor recreation, was socialization. It is clear in the current study that participants experienced many barriers to participation. However, they were also able to use a variety of negotiating strategies to continue participating. This is similar to the

observation by Kleiber et al. (2011), pointing out that research has begun to focus on the ways in which people resist social forces and are able to have some self-determination in their leisure outcomes.

***Motivation and benefits.*** The participants in this study derived benefits from participation in outdoor activities which arguably served as motivations towards continued participation and pursuance or maintenance of a career in outdoor leadership. These findings fit into current models in which scholars in outdoor recreation have linked involvement in outdoor activities with positive aspects of health, including mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits (Arnold, 1994; Henderson, 1996b; Korpela et al., 2014; McNeil et al., 2012; Whittington, 2006).

One motivating force for many participants in outdoor recreation is the interpersonal relationships developed during adventure participation. Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) found that during an all female wilderness expedition, a deep group bond was formed. The participants in the current study had similar experiences in the outdoors. While some built strong relationships with both men and women on wilderness expeditions, all of the women in the study mentioned especially the value and support they found in their relationships with other female outdoor participants. Additionally, some of the participants in the current study noted that the relationships they built stood out above other aspects of their outdoor experiences. For example, Chris stated, “I think it is the people I am with that truly make an experience.” This reflects a similar emotion expressed by the women studied by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999).

Lloyd and Little (2005) found that women who participated in an all female outdoor program experienced increased quality of life. The women reported a sense of

balance, access to new opportunities, a sense of belonging, and improved self-perception. Similar benefits occurred for the participants of the current study, and served as motivating factors for continued participation. One participant from the current study captured the sense of belonging she felt when she stated, “I feel like a part of a tribe in all these different ways....I have a feeling of belonging and purpose. I also have personal challenge and growth (Lauren).”

Some studies have found meaningful change in self-perception and self-concept can take place within a person when participating in outdoor recreation activities (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1987; Kaplan, 1989; Young & Crandall, 1984). The results of the current study reinforce these findings. Personal growth and enhanced self-confidence were demonstrated in the women’s accounts of their experiences. Similar to the findings of Henderson and Bialeschki (1987), where the strength and confidence gained by outdoor participation gave way to the potential to experience strength and confidence in other aspects of life, participants in this study experienced an overall increase in self-confidence. This phenomena was most vividly captured by Lauren when she stated, “I think about, sometimes, where I was before I came to OTS, and where I am now, and it seems corny; but I seriously have this sense right now that anything I want to do I can do it and I 100% believe it.” (Lauren)

**Constraints.** Other prominent themes in the current study were the women’s experiences of constraints and the negotiations of those constraints. The constraints experienced by the women in the current study corroborate a large body of work that has investigated the constraints to leisure participation that people experience (Godbey et al., 2010; Jackson, 2005; Little, 2002b; Shores et al., 2007).



Previous research has found that while leisure constraints affect all people, there are particular constraints faced by women in outdoors recreation (Little, 2002b; Shores et al., 2007). An extension of that claim is that previous studies have found that women's constraints differ from those of men in terms of quantity and nature (Shores et al., 2007). While the current study did not investigate male experiences in outdoor recreation, it was clear that the women in the current study perceived themselves as having experienced amplified constraints in relation to their male peers.

Little (2002b) conducted a study examining constraints experienced by women in adventure recreation, as well as their ability to negotiate those constraints. Expanding on the hierarchical leisure constraint model introduced by Crawford and Godbey (1987), Little (2002b) divided the constraints experienced by the women in her study into four categories: socio-cultural, the family and other commitments, self, and technical. The constraints experienced by the women in the current study reflect the framework presented by Little (2002b).

Particularly prevalent for the participants of the current study were constraints fitting into the "self" category and the "technical" category. Little's (2002b) *self* category encompassed personal constraints noted by the women due to the cultural notions they were exposed to about gender and adventure. Similar to the participants in Little's study, the women in the current study experienced a pre-established masculine culture in outdoor recreation--based on a traditional narrative of male domination--forcing them to confront others' conceptualization of them as outsiders and leading to an adjustment of self-concept. In addition, they had to reassess how they fit into the current culture in order to effect continued participation. Regarding Little's *technical* category, the

participants in the current study noticed different constraints between their ability and their male peers' ability to access technical skills.

Leisure research has moved away from the early assumption that encountering barriers results in non-participation and now recognizes ways in which constraints can be negotiated (Jackson et al., 1993; Kay & Jackson, 1991; Scott, 1991; White, 2008). Some studies have even posited that negotiation of constraints changes the leisure experience with the potential to enhance it (Jackson et al., 1993; Wilson & Little, 2005). These findings are reflected in the experiences of the women in the current study. All constraints changed the leisure experience that the women might have experienced had they not encountered them at all. Thriving upon the challenges associated with breaking stereotypes, as well as gaining motivation through attempting to transform the way women are perceived in the outdoors, are ways in which constraints they faced instrumentally modified the experiences of these women.

***The power of the individual and collective in feminist social justice.*** An unanticipated, but striking, modulation that emerged in the current study was an episodically-evolved desire among *all* participants for social justice in outdoor recreation. The women in the current study all developed (evolved) a desire to be agents of social change and demonstrated actions to these ends. The desire for and action towards social justice demonstrated by these women reflect previous research on the power women have demonstrated to transform their experiences into tools for reshaping social structures. Particularly, the experiences of the women in the current study reflect a growing body of research that investigates the combination of feminism and social justice. Kalsem and Williams (2008) explained social justice as referring, in a broad way, to equality and an

effort towards fairness. They additionally pointed out that it signifies a struggle for human rights on a global scale, ultimately pointing out that social justice and feminism can be harmonious and that social justice is an applicable goal for feminism.

It is apparent that the women in the current study engaged in feminist social justice on a local level and in some cases on a larger level. Participants sought to open up access to the outdoor industry to all people, particularly women. They sought to raise awareness about their experiences among other women in the field, and challenged the notions of female ability held by men in their field. Reid (2004) explained the power of social justice feminism when stating that the framework it provides gives increased understanding of “the factors that perpetuate social injustices while providing strategies for responding to such injustices through advocating collective action towards social change” (p. 10). This occurred on a local level for the women in the current study. They shared their experiences with other women, discussed how and when they experienced marginalization, and created support groups and shared techniques for negotiating these experiences.

Perry (2014) argued that social justice feminism ultimately can serve as a framework for women to build confidence “so that they can speak up, be heard, and create change. In this way, social justice feminism is focused on sharing and caring about one another” (p. 352). This is ultimately how the participants of the current study engaged in their efforts for change. “I engage, almost at every turn, in conversations about how women fit into OTS and how we can make our organization different from the dominant culture; which, in my opinion, could do a better job of supporting both men and women (Allison).” Similarly another participant in the current study pointed out “[I]f we,

as female outdoor leaders, stop and have a conversation about why those men assumed I could not be a leader, because I am a female, we can actually make people conscious of it. I think about those conversations spreading and the power they could have.”

This desire to spread awareness and spark change, starting on a small scale, and then blooming, reflects a similar feeling discussed by Perry (2014) when reflecting on her power as a researcher. While she credits some very successful progress that large scale, macro-level feminist activism has had, she reflects on her ability to make micro-level impact and the power that might have in the long run. “Social justice can be about one person, working with one community at a time, to enact change at the local level” (p. 360). This, too, is the technique utilized by the women in the current study. They recognized the individual power they have for creating change. While small scale at inception, they witnessed growth in their efforts, and they are driven by hope for continued growth and change on a larger scale. “[M]y work as an outdoor educator is on the ground level,” said Chris, “and, for me, it’s on that ground level that I can use leverage in the outdoor industry. I feel like I can facilitate a change through role-modeling and having conversations about gender within our industry.”

In the current study, previous research findings and efforts documenting female motivations for participating in outdoor recreation, as well as the benefits derived from participation, have been reinforced. The current study also supplements existing research on the effects of gender socialization on female participation in outdoor recreation and pursuit of leadership. Additionally, the findings of this study contribute to examination of the constraints experienced by women in outdoor adventure pursuits. As the narratives unfolded, empowerment through individual agency and collective action emerged as a

consistent theme. That linked the current study unequivocally to discourses surrounding feminist activism and social justice.

### **Researcher's Role**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) pointed out that narrative inquiry is complex. Storytellers are engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories simultaneously, and, as the researcher engages with the storyteller, the researcher becomes part of the story. Thus, narrative inquiry turns collaborative, including mutual storytelling and restorying. As a female outdoor leader engaging in narrative research about female outdoor leaders, I knew that I would be engaging in mutual storytelling and restorying. In narrative research the researcher becomes the research instrument, immersed in the process, encouraging a relationship between researcher and participant, collaboration during the process, and ongoing reflection (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). I knew that I would play a role in the research findings and in my participants' current and future experiences. I also knew, however not to the extent I experienced, that engaging in this research would have an effect on my own perceptions, as a woman, as an outdoor leader, and as a researcher.

Before beginning data collection I took some time to think about the female leaders I knew in the outdoor adventure field. I thought about who would be willing to participate in my interview process and I also considered who I knew that might be able to recommend female outdoor leaders willing to participate. It was not difficult to find participants who were willing (and in many cases excited) to participate. Looking back, I think I had anticipated the opposite occurring. I believe the majority of my participants looked forward to sharing their stories and investigating their experiences on a deep level.

This result was not something I had anticipated, but now it seems obvious.

During the interview process, collaborative storytelling occurred and shared stories emerged. In some cases I shared a story that I was reminded of in response to a story a participant shared with me. In other instances, participants would ask me if I had experienced something similar to them or if I could relate to their story. Often, I could relate and did share my experience. Additionally, as our relationships developed during the interview process, and it became clear that we had many shared experiences, the participants' storytelling took on more intensity. Shared meaning between my participants and myself resulted in participants' eagerness to share more stories and our mutual understanding created a comfortable space for the exploration of the meaning of their experiences. This collaboration is reflected in the footnotes included in each participant's *phase one* analysis.

During the interview process, as well as in conversations following the initial interview process, participants revealed, to differing levels, the impact participation in the study had on them. This impact included continuing to reflect on the meaning of their experiences, as well as a desire to continue taking action to contribute to social change. For some, it was powerful to simply discuss their experiences with me and (particularly powerful) to see the organized version of their experiences in writing.

While I have only a small window into the effects the study had on my participants, I continue to develop an awareness of the impact this research has had on me. Reflecting on this research experience, I am experiencing evolution in my thoughts and the meanings I attach to my own experiences. While I was aware of my own experience of gender in outdoor recreation prior to embarking on this research, hearing

and relating to the stories of my participants, as well sharing my own stories, has enhanced my perception of my own experiences. Similarly, I have experienced an increased volume of voices in my mind surrounding gender in outdoor recreation and in general life experiences. This process has raised my sensitivity to when and how I experience gendered interactions.

This heightened thoughtfulness has made my experiences of gender as a female outdoor leader more real for me and has engendered a sense that continued attention to gender matters in outdoor recreation is imperative for me. Through this process I have developed new goals for myself, including renewed commitment to social change, both as a scholar and an outdoor leader. While my participants demonstrated a developing desire to be agents of change in their field, I, too, felt the impact of their experiences. From this research experience I have developed the desire to continue to mentor young women in the field of outdoor recreation, as well as to engage in continued research on methods to increase diversity in outdoor recreation.

My role as researcher began with the conceptualization of the study and continued through the selection of initial participants. During the interview process, mutual storytelling and shared experiences enhanced the intensity of the stories being told and facilitated continued reflection on the meaning of those experiences, both by my participants and myself. My role as a researcher impacted not only the research through co-storying, but also my participants' and my own awareness and understanding of gender and outdoor recreation.

### **Validation Processes- Building Authenticity: *Performing Validation Strategically***

Polkinghorne (2007) pointed out that for narrative research validity is concerned with how well the storied text expresses the actual meaning experienced by the participants. Polkinghorne (2007) went on to identify four sources that contribute to the disconnection of storied text and a person's experienced meaning: the limits of language to convey meaning, experienced meanings that are out of one's awareness, resistance of participants to reveal the full meanings of their experiences, and complexity caused by the co-production of texts between the participant and the researcher. In order to gain as much insight into the experienced meanings of the research participants as possible, I attempted to address each of these sources of disconnect throughout the interview process.

Being conscious of the *limits of language to convey meaning*, I encouraged the use of abstract expression by participants. The interviews offered space for participants to reflect on and explain their thoughts and feelings, and our shared experiences as outdoor leaders facilitated intersubjectivity and ease of communication. The three-interview process was used in an attempt to let more of the participants' *experienced meaning that are out of one's awareness* be realized. It was clear during the three phases of the interview process that participants were thoughtful about their experiences and that their realization of meaning increased throughout. Similarly, participants used the time in between interviews for deep reflection and would come to subsequent interviews eager to share new thoughts and stories, as well as to revisit previous conversations.

The three-step interview process was also used to *help minimize resistance of participants to reveal the full meaning of their experiences*. Throughout the interview



process relationships developed between the participants and myself. Trust between the participants and myself felt natural due to our shared experiences, as well as the mutual storytelling that occurred.

To further improve the validity of my narrative text, I continually sought clarification from the participants during the research interview and analysis processes. During interviews I asked clarifying questions and had participants expound on their experiences. In the analysis phase I sent participants my analyses for member checking. Phase one and phase two of the narrative texts were sent to participants for their review in an effort to make sure participants felt accurately represented. Participants confirmed that they felt their experienced meaning was well represented by the texts.

Ultimately, the evaluation criteria for this study included authenticity, reflexivity, and reciprocity. Authenticity was attended to by providing time and space for participants to share, reflect upon, and examine their experiences, and by checking back with participants to make sure the text of the resulting narratives matched their meaning. Reflexivity was attended to through awareness and the use of a reflexive journal. I was conscious of my own experiences in outdoor recreation and was careful to consider how they might influence my interpretation of the participants' narratives. Finally, reciprocity was attended to through the research method of in-depth, face-to-face interviews, which facilitated a mutualistic dynamic between the participant and myself. Participants communicated to me how powerful participation was for them and I, too, benefited from the experience of sharing stories. This comfortable exchange contributed to the richness of the resulting narratives.

## CHAPTER V

### SEQUEL DISCUSSION

#### Theorizations Emergent from the Data

Data provided by this study and their analyses have enabled the extraction (or construction) of some formal statements that reflect the experiences and goals of women in the study (and potentially some other women as well). I present these *theorizations* below.

Proposition #1: *Gender has a moderating impact (or effect) on "becoming an outdoor leader."*

The role of gender in experience is ubiquitous. It is clear from the data that gender has had an impact on the participants' involvement in outdoor recreation and subsequent entrance into the field as a career.

Proposition #2 (a corollary of #1): *In terms of the phenomenon of women "becoming outdoor leaders," gender socialization is often seen to play a more negative (constraint) than positive role (motivational).*

The stories revealed that, to a greater degree, gender socialization is seen to globally increase challenges these women faced in their pursuit of success in becoming an outdoor leader. The data consistently showed that the participants frequently encountered structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal challenges or constraints as an influence of gender socialization. While the effects of gender were often negative, however, participants did encounter some motivational factors which helped them to

counteract negative effects of gender expectations.

Proposition #3: *There is a value-laden interaction between temporality (short-term versus long-term) and strategy among constraint negotiation strategies women employ as a female outdoor leader.*

While all negotiation strategies seen in the data were used to harness results, some could be seen as having temporally (and culturally)-delimited impact while others appeared to carry longer-term (and broader) implications. The strategies with immediate results might have been effective at an individualized level; however, in the long run it appeared as if these would perpetuate the current one-dimensional culture by having limited global effect. Such strategies included *acquiescence* and *avoidance*. Other strategies seemed poised to promote future cultural change (in addition to potential benefits in the short term). These included *support*, *contesting*, and *education*.

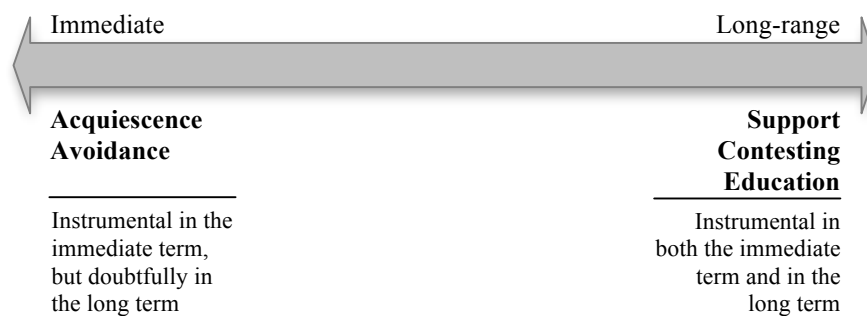
Proposition #4: *Personal experiences engendered by current cultural practices of gender socialization tends to channel women outdoor leaders towards aspiring to become transformational figures (or aspiring to play transformational roles).*

In the first instance, all the women in the current study indicated, at some point, that they would like to play a transformational role in counteracting the negative effects of gender socialization. In the second instance, it has been seen from these data that the aspiration either seemed to emerge as a result of an accumulation of personal experiences resulting from gender socialization or the aspiration seemed to increase in imperativeness as a result of those experiences.

### **Negotiation Strategies for Women Leaders**

While many constraints to outdoor adventure participation and career success

were identified as part of the participants' experiences, the participants were able to use a variety of strategies to negotiate them. These negotiation strategies were identified through thematic analysis of the women's experiences and encompassed both long-range negotiation strategies, as well as strategies producing more immediate personal results. They can be divided into five categories: *acquiescence*, *avoidance*, *support*, *contesting* and *education*, with varying degrees of long-range impact.



**Figure 2. Negotiation strategies.**

**Acquiescence.** At some point in all the women's stories they acquiesced to the dominant culture as a form of negotiation. While all participants pointed out that this technique had mixed benefits, participants did make choices to try to fit in, or "go with the flow," in an attempt to avoid discomfort in the moment. This exhibited as not speaking up in situations where they perceived injustice, conforming to ideas to which they may have been opposed, and utilizing personal leadership styles that matched dominant values. Generally, in these instances, the response was palliative. As a *countering* strategy, it was relatively passive. Participants would see the constraint and become aware of the problem, but in an attempt to avoid personal discomfort in the moment, act in ways that maintained others' comfort with them.

I remember I was angry and a little hurt by the way they were talking about these women and my male co-instructor was participating in this discussion. I felt like I wanted to say something, but I didn't, because I felt like I was alone and saying something would have been pointless. I just didn't feel up to fighting that alone...

(Allison)

It is clear this particular technique only serves to avoid exacerbating the constraint in the moment. However, by not addressing it, it may ultimately perpetuate the problem, both personally for participants, since they internalize their frustration, and externally, since it tends to permit others' repetition of problematic behavior.

As noted above, sometimes participants would not only do nothing, but also would acquire the dominant views and values of the culture in which they found themselves, in order to access respect or success. This is particularly apparent in the masculine leadership styles (loud, assertive, directive) all participants adopted at some point in their experiences. For instance, Lauren offered the following insight while comparing the outcome of her circumstantial adoption of the masculine style against the outcome for those who did not adopt the style:

It's interesting because I've seen other quieter people, who are way more competent than me, way more experienced than me, way more in tune with lots of other things than me, totally bypassed; and I've been rewarded. (Lauren)

It is worth arguing once more, however, that while this situational response might have been effective at an individualized, unique level (and sometimes for the moment), in the long run it seems to perpetuate a one-dimensional culture, as opposed to promoting future cultural change.

**Avoidance.** While avoidance can be seen in the previous strategy where participants chose not to escalate a situation, avoidance as a negotiation strategy here is viewed differently. All participants negotiated constraints by developing an awareness of them and making preemptive choices to minimize occurrences in the first place. Participants became selective about the people they participated in activities with. They chose the people they decided to learn from, because they recognized it was easier to maintain motivation in certain settings and from certain kinds of relationships. They also exhibited care over organizational career choices in an attempt to avoid constraints.

While no one can always avoid working with co-workers that present challenges, participants did become selective about training and working situations they had control over: "I avoid what can be a really patronizing learning experience with men. I really try to find people who I can learn from and feel supported by, without a doubting of my ability attached to it" (Chris). Similarly, participants became selective about the organizations for which they worked: "The location where I work now, I actually feel like I've gotten a lot more support for my values than other locations at OTS...and that's why I stayed here" (Polly).

Avoidance is a strategy participants developed, as they became more aware of the constraints they faced and also as their own skills and networks developed. When they first began their participation in outdoor adventure pursuits avoidance was not always an option: "If I wanted to climb, I had to work hard at some relationships with men, and they weren't, necessarily, people I would have picked to hang out with (Allison)."

**Support.** All of the women discussed the positive benefits they gained from supportive engagement with others who had shared experiences of constraint. Through

conversations participants accessed validation for their feelings, minimizing the negative impact of a situation on their attitude. Similarly, engaging with other women provided access to skill development in a supportive environment. Ultimately, the women were motivated to construct their own supportive environments for participation and skill development, creating not only empowering opportunities for themselves, but also opening negotiation opportunities for other women.

I felt like I had been growing up in a world where the things I wanted to do didn't fit with the stereotypical women's path, and I was really resentful of that. It was really important for me to be involved in activities or create opportunities for people where these things were celebrated and made accessible. That's still really important to me. (Polly)

Seeking support from and providing support to women with shared experiences is a negotiation strategy that provides immediate benefit, as well as potential for longer-range impact.

Throughout my career I have been able to negotiate through some tough experiences, in part because I gain strength from my conversations with [people] who, in my opinion, are clearly thinking and have a vision for how to better support all people at our school. (Allison)

Being able to converse with someone in the moment, or problem-solve with someone through a situation, can be immediately beneficial to the participant's mental attitude. Additionally, creating awareness of constraints, as well as creating opportunities to develop in supportive environments, has potential long-range impact, making negotiation of future constraints less stressful for the participant and others.

**Contesting.** A negotiation strategy used by all participants at some point was confrontation. At times, when they experienced a constraint, participants would actively confront it. Additionally, many of the participants experienced a motivational effect when anticipating the confrontation of a challenge. This strategy was exhibited by participants being excited to prove people wrong who doubted their ability, actively letting people who questioned their skill level know that they were competent, and also confronting people about how their gendered attitudes and actions can affect others.

Many participants demonstrated motivation when anticipating challenge. "I like the challenge that comes with breaking stereotypes. Working in a male-dominated field fuels that in me" (Allison). Other times participants would inform people of the latter's mistake, if they had made incorrect assumptions about them. "I tell them, I put up that climb and here's the crux and all that. I make it very clear that it's my climb. I'm not good at just standing around" (Polly).

This type of negotiation can help a participant feel better in that moment, as well as immediately altering another's perception of them. Confrontation also serves a long range outcome. Challenging perceptions may change individually-held stereotypes in such a way as to transform future behavior.

For some participants, contesting was aimed a wider market. For example, Polly wrote a letter to the editor of a magazine that was using gendered terminology. "I couldn't get over it and it really affected me. So I wrote a letter to the editor about the power of their words and how it could alienate a certain part of their community" (Polly). While in that moment, writing the letter was a way for her to deal with her emotional response, the letter was published and thus had the potential to effect wide-reaching



change.

**Education.** A certain level of indirect education was present when participants used contesting as a negotiation strategy. Education as its own negotiation strategy, however, encompasses the intentional education of others that participants provided. Participants employed intentional education of both men and women to build value and respect for female ability in outdoor adventure pursuits. Similarly, participants used teaching as a tool to empower female colleagues and women, in general.

Ultimately, some participants developed an overall educational awareness, being able to identify constraints and evaluate how education could help alleviate those constraints for others in the future. Chris noted this when she reflected on her experience leading a group of high school girls doing trail work. “I have this sense that girls grow up dreaming of being nurses, models and dancers, because that is what the storybooks tell us. I think exposing them to women in masculine fields could counteract some of that and that trail crew was a great setting to do it.” She went on to reveal, “I do think there are some things that could have been done to make the experience even more powerful. I realize now that a group can experience a more impactful outcome, depending on how curriculum is structured.” Teaching others about the value diversity adds to the outdoor adventure field helped participants find motivation and empowerment themselves. However, it appears that participants’ engagement in this strategy mostly stemmed from the belief that education has the power to spread awareness and change the general understanding of and nature of the industry.

As an educator, I think my obligation is, in most cases (unless it's blatantly derogatory), to talk about their experience and what led them to believe what they

do and help educate them about the impact of their words and where we are trying to move to." (Allison)

Throughout their experiences, the participants developed and used a variety of negotiation strategies when encountering constraints. The negotiation strategies they employed had the potential for long-range outcomes, as well as producing more immediate personal results. While *acquiescence* and *avoidance* were instrumental in negotiating constraints in the immediate term, they did not offer much long-range impact. *Support, contesting and education*, however, served as strategies that offered both immediate term and long term potential. While all the strategies are noteworthy in the participants' experiences of negotiating constraints, the strategies with long-range impact afforded participants not only negotiation potential, but also fueled continued motivation to participate in participants. This is captured well by Allison when she explains what true success will mean:

I think true success will mean, not only, can I thrive in this field, but also that anybody who wants to be part of this field can. We will succeed as an industry when gender doesn't have to be a barrier.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Summarization of Study**

While growth has occurred in the number of women entering outdoor recreation vocations, white men are still the dominant face in outdoor recreation and wilderness adventure pursuits. One explanation is the effect of gender socialization. Socializing forces such as media, family, youth organizations and school potentially contribute to the gender discrepancy in outdoor recreation. Researchers have found that participation in outdoor recreation provides physical, emotional, mental and spiritual benefits (Hanlon et al., 2013). With fewer women involved in outdoor recreation, everyone is not accessing these benefits equally. The purpose of this study was to examine how women experience gender while becoming outdoor leaders.

This study assessed the primary research question: How do female leaders experience gender as an outdoor leader and during their path to leadership? Secondary research questions included the following: What role has gender socialization played in the experience of becoming a female leader in outdoor recreation? What motivations do women have for participating in outdoor recreation and becoming leaders in outdoor recreation? What perceived constraints do women experience while participating in outdoor recreation and in becoming leaders in outdoor recreation?

To answer these questions this study employed in-depth narrative inquiry, an approach useful for rich investigation of personal experience (Polkinghorne, 1995). The sample consisted of four female outdoor leaders. Three semi-structured, in-depth personal

interviews were conducted with each participant. These interviews provided a holistic account of their stories, incorporating details of critical experiences and insights into their perceived meanings. Data analysis consisted of a modified categorical content analysis (George and O'Neil, 2011; Lieblich et al., 1998) and was done in four phases: a holistic account of the individual stories, patterns across individual stories, a meta-analysis of all the participant stories, and theoretical framing.

Eight metathemes emerged from the stories and phase two analyses of the four participants. Three of the identified metathemes presented as motivation for the study participants: mentorship, personal qualities (including ambition, and a connection to the outdoors), and the development of idealism. Three of the identified metathemes presented as constraints for the study participants: role expectations, nature of the industry, and media. Two of the identified metathemes served as both motivations and constraints: family support and self-perception. It was clear from the data that in terms of the phenomenon of women "becoming outdoor leaders," gender socialization is often seen to play a more negative (constraint) than positive (motivational) role.

In response to the constraints faced by participants in becoming an outdoor leader, a variety of negotiation strategies were developed and employed. These encompassed both long-range strategies, as well as strategies producing more immediate personal results. Acquiescence and avoidance were situational strategies that produced immediate results; however, while these situational responses may have been effective at an individualized level, in the long run both seemed likely to perpetuate a one-dimensional culture, as opposed to promoting future cultural change. Conversely, the negotiation strategies of support, contesting, and education resulted in varying degrees of both

immediate and long-range impacts.

Additionally, an unanticipated, but striking, indication that emerged in the current study was an episodically-evolved desire among all participants for social justice in outdoor recreation. The women in the current study all developed a desire to be agents of social change and demonstrated actions toward these ends.

The implications of this study include contribution to the body of literature on gendered experiences in outdoor recreation leadership, as well as an expansion of awareness about the gendered experiences female outdoor leaders continue to face. This study also has the potential to enable future female outdoor recreation leaders to recognize barriers to participation, develop effective strategies to diffuse or counter those barriers and, as an extended counter-strategy, optimize recognized motivations for participation.

### **Implications of Study**

This study holds implications for multiple groups and audiences. It has implications for women and females because gender continues to play a role in their personal daily interactions. It has implications for the outdoor leadership profession and the potential to narrow the gender gap that exists there. Finally, this study has implications for larger society, highlighting the continued effects of gender socialization.

Through the in-depth examination of female experiences, motivations for leadership in outdoor recreation, as well as barriers to leadership in outdoor recreation were revealed. Because of this, the current study has implications for females participating in outdoor recreation and other male dominated activities. Examination of the participants' stories presents an educational tool for prospective female outdoor

recreation leaders. By presenting in-depth female experiences, this study affords a reference for other women encountering their own barriers to participation. Additionally, a discussion of negotiation strategies offers the potential to facilitate, and possibly increase, participation by offering resistance strategies against those barriers.

Women and female readers of this research may experience benefits from understanding the experiences of other women. Understanding and relating to the experiences of the women in this study can contribute to improving the self-image and self-efficacy of other women. Ultimately, this shared experience has the potential to engender the same agency and empowerment in transforming society that the participants experienced and aspired to.

The current study also has implications for increasing diversity within the outdoor recreation industry. By raising awareness about female experiences, more women may be empowered to participate--thus modifying the level of diversification within the industry--and organizations may develop better insight into the effects of gender on their organizations. Organizations in the outdoor industry have an opportunity to blunt the edge or counter the effect of gender socialization by deliberately examining the experiences of women working in their own programs in an effort to better articulate and understand the operation and effect of gender within the organization. As strategic follow-up, organizations could set up seminars, or start conversations, about the effect that gender socialization has on their staff, participants, and the outdoor industry as a whole.

The current study contributes to the existing body of literature that provides insight into gendered experiences in outdoor recreation leadership. Building on past

research focused on female leaders in outdoor recreation, this narrative study focuses on the experiences of women during their path to leadership in outdoor recreation. While past studies focused on careership and experiences during employment, as well as on factors contributing to longevity in the profession, the current study explores in-depth experiences, presenting the stories and meanings of women's experiences leading up to and pursuing careers in outdoor recreation. Continuation of the discourse, as presented in this study, expands the understanding of the role of gender in outdoor recreation and highlights gendered experiences faced by female leaders in the field, making it more imperative that continued and further attention be paid to these issues.

### **Directions for Future Study**

Directions for future study include further investigation of the role gender socialization holds in creating motivations and constraints encountered by women embarking on outdoor leadership careers and further investigation into the empowering benefits that the negotiation of constraints can offer to women becoming outdoor leaders. Additionally, the desire for and action aimed at social justice, demonstrated by the women in this study, reflects previous research on the power women have to transform their experiences into tools for reshaping social structures. An area for further work can be found in the pursuit or accumulation of more stories of a (potential) synergistic relationship--as observed in this study--between experience, empowerment and the shaping of intention to play an active role in transforming the outdoor recreation community, specifically. More such stories might generate its kind of purposiveness among an even greater number of women. Lastly, further research can examine the impact of other variables in conjunction with gender on becoming an outdoor leader.

Variables such as race, socio-economic class and sexuality offer opportunities for further study.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study has a particular form of intrinsic quality engendered by the way the participants shared their stories, ideas, and goals in a uniquely intimate and thoughtful way. Examination of their stories provides an important window into the effects of gender socialization on becoming an outdoor leader. My conviction about the consequential place their stories, offered selflessly, hold arises from my own connection to the outdoor industry and our shared experiences and perspectives. As a researcher I have been personally affected by this process. I come away from this work not only with enhanced awareness of gender socialization issues and intensified interest in gender research, but also with refueled inspiration to be an agent of social change in the outdoor industry.



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