Women’s Experience of Outdoor Education: Still trying to be ‘one of the boys’?
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This paper discusses outdoor education and feminist literature in relation to the perception that women working in the outdoors do so within a traditionally male oriented culture and are expected to participate in practices that reflect and perpetuate that culture. Notions of competence in the outdoors are explored and challenged and related pedagogical issues are addressed, particularly for tertiary level outdoor education. The paper draws upon gender issues raised in the findings of studies conducted in 1994 and 1996 with women students in an outdoor education degree course in Victoria, Australia. The paper argues that there is a need for tertiary outdoor educators to be more proactive in developing more gender inclusive forms of outdoor education practice.

Introduction
Despite increased female participation in outdoor education in the last decade, outdoor education practice is still embedded in a traditionally male oriented culture (Allin, 2000; Humberstone, 2000; Carter, 2000) and the majority of outdoor education leaders are men (Neill, 1997). Women who wish to work in the outdoor education field have to find ways to work within this culture, or try to change it to meet the needs and strengths of women as well as men. Tertiary outdoor education courses hold great potential for instigating change in the way outdoor education is thought about and practised, however the curriculum structure and pedagogical practice of such courses are themselves embedded in a patriarchal culture. How can tertiary outdoor educators work towards practice that is more gender inclusive?

Studies of Women’s Experience of a Tertiary Outdoor Education Course
The course with which the studies were concerned provides tertiary level training for people wishing to undertake a career in outdoor education, adventure guiding or related fields. It aims to provide students with the knowledge and skills to examine human relationships with nature and the “…implications of those relationships for the broader society” (LUB, 2001). Subjects are designed to integrate theory and practice to develop students’ understanding of ecological and human communities through journeying in outdoor environments via bushwalking, paddling, cross country skiing,
rock climbing and environmental interpretation as well as through reading, writing and discussion. Each year forty students are accepted into the course based on their academic scores from secondary school and their demonstrated interest in and understanding of outdoor environments and activities. Approximately half of the students enrolling in the course each year are female, a significant proportion are mature age students and a small number are international students.

A case study by Green (1994) explored the experiences of four female students undertaking this degree course. The study examined both the perceived constraints on the women’s learning in outdoor environments and the particular qualities that the women contributed to the educational experience. Green’s (1994) study highlighted difficulties and challenges for the women in learning and ‘performing’ in the outdoor activities, which are a compulsory and assessed component of the course and the problematic nature of the notion of competence in outdoor education with its normative emphasis on physical strength, speed and technical expertise. Findings revealed the demoralising effect on the women’s self efficacy of constantly comparing themselves to (and perceiving that they are being compared to) their male counterparts in performing particular physical outdoor skills such as climbing and paddling.

Interestingly Green (1994: 44) points out that although the women in her study “… spoke highly of their experiences in the outdoors, and of their male colleagues’ and lecturers’ support in their outdoor endeavours”, their stories clearly indicated a more subtle undermining of their achievements and performances in the outdoor setting. They also expressed the view that to be a skilled outdoor educator one must have effective interpersonal skills, an area in which they felt confident and competent, but which they perceived as undervalued in the course (Green, 1994: 28-29). This undervaluing of women’s experience in outdoor education is supported by several outdoor/adventure education studies on female leaders (Loeffler, 1997; Allin 2000; Carter 2000). It raises the significant educational question posed by Green (1994:44): “… how are female students able to make meaning from their outdoor education experiences, when the meaning has often already been determined for them?” This question is important for several reasons. The first relates to self confidence – if women involved in outdoor education do not feel that their skills, attributes and
knowledge are valued they are likely to eventually lose confidence in their abilities and may disassociate themselves from the outdoors altogether. Secondly, outdoor education is predominantly based on experiential learning methods in which the development of meaning through personal experience and reflection is paramount. If women repeatedly find that their experience is invalidated because it doesn’t fit the male oriented ‘norm’, the essence of experiential learning is lost. Thirdly, there is an inherent contradiction if outdoor education philosophy promotes the development of socially and environmentally sustainable practice, the actual practices enacted through outdoor experiences are socially or environmentally destructive.

In a more recent study conducted in 1996, forty-nine women students were interviewed in relation to their experience of the same degree course. The researchers were interested in the nature of the educational experience, the factors affecting the quality of that experience and the women’s perceptions of their success and progress through the course. The intention was to use the research to inform subsequent changes to course content, structure and teaching practices. Since the emphasis was on the women’s perceptions of their experience of the course it was important to hear their voices thus a qualitative approach was adopted and semi-structured interviews were used to elicit student perspectives. The word voice is applied here to not only refer to a person’s ‘point of view’ but ‘… as a metaphor that can apply to their experience and development’ (Belenky, et. al. 1986: 18). Voice therefore represents the women’s worldviews and knowledge developed through lived experience.

This paper does not attempt to provide a detailed discussion of data since data interpretation is still in progress. Rather it draws upon findings from the 1996 study relating specifically to the women’s experience of the course from a gendered perspective. The intention is to consider the extent to which issues raised in gender based outdoor education research are reflected or challenged in this tertiary outdoor education course.

**Gender as social construction**

Gender, unlike sex, is a social construction that is dynamic, contextual and based on assumptions of difference between females and males. Like race, class, sexuality and anthropocentrism, gender can be seen as one of the ‘lenses’ through which we
experience the world. It shapes our interactions with and expectations of others, our self concept and the way we interact with non-human nature (Green, 1994; Plumwood, 1993; Humberstone, 1998). Western notions of masculinity and femininity have created dualistic relationships between men and women which are often so deeply embedded in our culture that they are considered ‘natural’ rather than cultural (Humberstone, 2000). Dualistic notions of gender typically align masculinity with culture, reason and mastery while femininity is associated with nature, intuition and nurture. The patriarchal system through which gender serves to generate a power hierarchy of men over women, assigns superior status to these ‘masculine’ characteristics and inferior status to those deemed to be feminine (Plumwood, 1993; Bell, 1997). This dominant mindset has been the source of gender based role stereotyping and conflict which serves to limit human growth and potential (Plumwood, 1993; Tavris, 1993; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). Despite the diversity of feminist discourse, a common goal of feminism is to redress this gender based power imbalance.

Historically studies of gender have focussed on the concept of ‘difference’, seeking to establish a ‘gender gap’ between women and men based on immutable biological or psychological distinctions. However current sociological theories challenge conventional notions of gender difference and dominant stereotypes, arguing that gendered identities are complex, dynamic and interchangeable (Tavris, 1993; Bell, 1997; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). In other words, they reject notions of fixed or stable forms of masculinity or femininity arguing that: “Most gender ‘differences’ are momentary and changeable, suggesting that they are rooted less in biology, personality and intrapsychic dynamics (which appear to be permanent) than in life experiences, contexts, resources and power (which change culturally and historically).” (Tavris, 1993: 163). This postmodern perspective on gender does not suggest that males and females are the same but that notions of masculinity and femininity are contested and evolving. It offers a way forward for gender discourse and relationships by suggesting “… a kind of ‘gender multiculturalism’ which would open up the possibilities of gender to all people” (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 37) or, as Tavris (1993: 163) contends, that there is “… no one right way to be.”
Outdoor education as a masculine construct

Outdoor and adventure education has traditionally been a male domain (Neill, 1997; Allin, 2000; Humberstone, 2000). In Britain outdoor education initially developed primarily to meet the needs of boys, for military training, physical health development and as an antidote to juvenile delinquency. The philosophies underpinning outdoor education: citizenship, leadership, ‘character building’ and endurance, were significantly influenced by men such as Baden Powell, founder of the scouting movement, and Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme (Cook, 2001). Although some alternative outdoor education programs such as the Woodcraft Movement, were open to girls and boys, outdoor education focussed mainly on boys, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Cook (2001:50), when girls were provided access to outdoor education in the 1960s, “…they were absorbed into courses designed for boys”.

A similar style of outdoor education has developed in Australia despite the markedly different landscape, climate and ecology. Although there is substantial variation in outdoor education ideologies and practices in Australia (McRae, 1993; Martin 1998) adventure pursuits such as bushwalking, rock climbing and paddling are central to many programs. Although many females are now involved in outdoor education and recreation (Neill, 1997), the male oriented ethos still persists in the adventure activities commonly offered in outdoor education programs (Green, 1994; Carter 2000).

Gendered experience in outdoor education

Studies of gender in physical education have identified “gender differentiated constraints” on women’s physical movements and occupation of space, which limit women’s opportunities for physical development and self expression (Diller & Houston in Diller et. al. 1996). These constraints can be self-imposed through pressure to conform to accepted notions of femininity but can also, according to Diller and Houston, be directly related to male domination of playing spaces and to physical intimidation. Like physical education, the emphasis on physical performance in outdoor education makes gender a particularly significant issue since physical activity in outdoor settings is not, as is often claimed, a value free physical experience but a culturally constructed embodiment of that experience:
… embodiment is subjective and social at the same time. It is therefore a site for the lived sense of self and gender and cultural expectations of self and gender. Participants cannot experience learning experientially without actually embodying their own coming to consciousness.

(Bell, 1997:147)

Bell asserts that the influence of gender on embodiment in experiential learning is often overlooked in outdoor education contexts.

For women, who are often socialised as passive observers rather than active participants, the very physical nature of involvement in outdoor activities often challenges dominant cultural constructions of femininity (Humberstone, 1998) making women in the outdoors “… difficult to position” since they “… both resist and conform to gender stereotypes at different times” (Allin, 2000: 25). In comparison traditional approaches to adventure pursuits, having been constructed by and for males, tend to reinforce rather than challenge traditional concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Humberstone, 2000). Different forms of outdoor education practice however could also challenge this hegemony thus also expanding the boundaries of meaning of masculinity. Humberstone (2000: 27) argues that outdoor education “… can be seen as a significant cultural form which not only reflects the dominant values and ideologies but importantly may also be sites of struggle over meaning and practice”. Tertiary level outdoor education can, and should, lead the field in challenging oppressive forms of practice and instigating change for more equitable outdoor education practice.

**Women’s sense of competence in outdoor education**

The notion of physical performance in the outdoors as a gendered rather than a neutral physical experience is significant in that many studies of women’s experience in outdoor education highlight the problematic nature of women’s perceptions of their own performance in relation to how it is valued by others. Studies by Green (1994), Allin (2000) and Carter (2000) reveal that although women who work in the outdoors often enjoy physical activity and develop high levels of skill, they lack confidence in their competence due to a perception that their physical abilities are not valued as highly as those of their male counterparts. This lack of confidence in practical skills is referred to by Loeffler (1997: 120) as sense of competence which she describes as:
“… the active perception a woman holds of herself acting within her environment”. A
person’s sense of competence is largely formed through the socialisation process and
Loeffler suggests that consequently women tend to underestimate their abilities:

Women tend to view their personal competence through a filter composed
of society’s perceptions and responses, which in turn, influence their
self perceptions of competence. Consequently, women’s sense of competence
and actual competence may not be congruent resulting in an individual woman
perceiving that she is less competent than she is in reality.

(Loeffler, 1997: 120)

The contention that women often have a low sense of competence in relation to
practical outdoor skills is supported by much of the data from the 1996 study.
Although some women described themselves as confident and competent, the
majority recognised their own and/or other women’s lack of confidence in performing
many of the skills required in the course:

I think generally females find it a lot harder to be really confident, that
they’re good at what they do and I think we underrate ourselves way too
much most of the time.    (Graduate student)

Significantly almost all the women said that they felt confident about their academic
abilities and their academic achievement in the course. In accordance with Green’s
(1994) findings, the low sense of competence expressed by many women in the study
relates specifically to judgements about performance in physical and technical skills
in comparison to their male counterparts. These feelings are related mostly to the
activities of navigation, climbing and kayaking, all of which have an emphasis on
technical skills and, in some instances, physical performance.

For some women their relative lack of physical strength is an issue in practical
activities:

I don’t know whether males just find it easier … they are just such
strong people that a walk that may be incredibly difficult for me is a cinch
for them, so I’ll come back feeling all beaten and might take a week to
recover and they can just get on with things…    (3rd year student)

While comments such as this highlight how basic physiological differences can affect
women’s experiences in the outdoors, this perspective may also reflect stereotypical
views about male and female physicality. As Green (1994: 45) points out even the concept of physical strength is problematic since it is associated with traditional notions of femininity and masculinity that may inhibit women’s physical development. The student’s observation do however alert us to the possibility that, as suggested by Green (1994), Allin (2000) and Cook 2001, outdoor education activities may be constructed in ways that are generally more suited to men than women.

Other students attributed their lack of confidence to internal factors such as their own attitude and their hesitancy to try new skills:

I think it’s to do with myself, the barriers, probably my attitude. I have a lack of confidence in going forward in my own skills. The only thing stopping me is I am hesitant to try. (2nd year student)

Like this student, many others talked about their perception that females were much less willing to ‘get in and have a go’ than males in practical learning situations. They saw this as a significant inhibiting factor in their skill development and many, like this student, blame themselves or the individual for being too timid or fearful to be assertive. This tendency for females to ‘hang back’ in outdoor activities and to perceive this as their own ‘problem’ has been noted by Loeffler (1997), Morse (1997), Allin (2000), who, rather than looking for psychological explanations for this behaviour, discuss the social and cultural influences on women in these situations. They attribute much of this hesitancy to women’s socialisation in relation to physical activity and technically oriented skills, and to a reluctance to behave more aggressively or participate in a ‘macho’ environment. Morse (1997) also suggests that females are more concerned with processes than outcomes and may be more inclined than males to put others first rather than pushing themselves forward.

This reluctance to participate in a competitive environment is prevalent in the comments of many women in the 1996 study, in some cases to the extent that they consider non-participation:

I’ve never really climbed before I came here… I did some trips in the holidays and really, really liked it, but it’s really competitive and I don’t know if I want to do it next year because I’m not that good. (1st year student)
It is clear that this woman’s initial experiences of climbing in the holidays were positive however her perception that the learning atmosphere in climbing within the course is ‘competitive’ creates self-doubt about her climbing ability. Climbing as an activity is framed in a traditionally male oriented culture (Green, 1994; Kiewa, 2001; Preston, 2001), which inevitably shapes the way in which it is enacted, talked about and valued in the course. Despite deliberate efforts by lecturers to adopt an inclusive educational approach to climbing, the underpinning values of the recreational ‘climbing culture’ that lauds climbing ‘hard and fast’ (Kiewa, 2001) are often manifested in the course. Thus a ‘good climber’ is generally one who leads difficult climbs and, according to these established ‘norms’, men often tend to be seen as better climbers than the women who sometimes struggle to meet the ‘standards’ expected. Given this educational milieu, it not surprisi ng that a first year female student might feel intimidated and anxious about taking up climbing as an elective in the course.

The data from the 1996 study clearly indicates that sense of competence is an issue in the training of young women as outdoor education leaders in this course. It is an issue because a poor sense of competence may diminish a woman’s ability to approach situations or tasks in outdoor/adventure education thus creating a ‘Catch 22’ situation which potentially inhibits further skill development. It also raises questions around who or what defines competence in outdoor education and in whose interests the ‘standards’ are established. If outdoor education practice is based on dominant masculine constructs, how do women make sense of it in a “male gendered space” (Allin, 2000)? What are the implications for students' personal and professional development and the ways in which they will teach/lead others in the outdoors?

The 'mismeasure' of women in outdoor education

As Loeffler (1997: 119) asserts, competence is a multidimensional and complex construct which may refer to a person’s ability to complete a task, or to complete the task in a certain way or to particular attitudes, behaviours or personality traits. Recent attempts in Australia to establish national standards for leadership of outdoor recreation activities reveal that notions of competence are problematic and changeable, depending on who sets the criteria, the purpose of the activity and the prevailing ideology (Martin, 1998). Nevertheless particular historical influences and dominant cultural values clearly shape judgements about what constitutes competence
in the outdoors. Notions of success and achievement in traditional outdoor education activities have been predominantly based on physical and technical prowess relating to ‘conquering’ or ‘surviving’ natural elements (Green, 1994; Humberstone, 1998; Carter, 2000). This emphasis on mastery often promotes competition and individualistic performance in outdoor settings (Green, 1994; Morse, 1997; Carter, 2000). Similarly, judgements about competence in outdoor education and recreation are typically based on physical performance of an activity. ‘Good’ physical performance (and therefore competence) often involves strength, speed and risk taking, which tends to advantage male participants (Green, 1994; Allin, 2000; Carter, 2000).

Some participants in the 1996 study directly or inadvertently raise this question of what constitutes competence in outdoor education:

It depends what you define as competent because there have been some females I have gone through the course with who are just amazing at working with people’s relationships between each other and the social make up of the group in the outdoors. But what seems more obvious and what gets noticed and discussed, is like confidence at rolls, who is a great kayaker or something like that… 

(3rd year student)

This concern with the emphasis on the physical and technical performance rather than interpersonal communication in these activities, is common among those interviewed. Several expressed the view that men are better at the ‘hard’ (physical and technical) skills and women are better at the ‘soft’ (interpersonal) skills and that in the course, and often in the outdoors generally, ‘hard’ skills are valued more highly: They do not however, deny the importance of learning technical skills for safety reasons, but rather question the emphasis placed on those skills:

I think females are much more people oriented … hard skills aren’t so important to them … I realise that you have to get to a certain skill level to be able to operate safely… but at the same time we act like we (women) are really more interested in how people interact in groups than the guys are … it’s disheartening when it’s this big guy thing that it didn’t matter how the group operated as long as we’re doing a good job paddling and going high and that sort of thing. 

(Graduate student)
This perception that the people oriented skills (in which the women generally felt more competent) are undervalued, is consistent with the findings of Green (1994), Allin (2000) and Carter (2000) who assert that the types of knowledge and skills that women may be able to more readily contribute in the outdoor education context, are often undervalued. Therefore to be accepted as competent in the outdoors, women have to adopt male oriented behaviours and attitudes which may feel quite alien to them thus often making it difficult for women to feel successful.

Essentially this issue relates to what Tavris (1993) refers to as the ‘mismeasure of woman’, where men establish the expected behaviours, standards and attitudes as the ‘norm’ and expect women to ‘measure up’. This situation is clearly recognised by one of the women in this study who says:

‘One of the unspoken rules is for women to act like one of the boys.’

(1st year student)

Although this ‘mismeasure’ is common to most forms of education (Morgan in Diller et. al. 1996), researchers such as Green (1994), Allin (2000) and Carter (2000) consider it a particularly significant issue in outdoor education, which must be addressed by the outdoor industry. An interesting paradox here arises from research based evidence (Neill, 1997; Carter, 2000) that outdoor industry employers now acknowledge that it is at least as important for staff to have high level interpersonal skills as technical skills for working with people in the outdoors. It would seem therefore, most important for courses that train outdoor educators to emphasise and value the development of interpersonal skills as well as technical skills. Such a shift in thinking about competence in outdoor education training would have the potential to be more gender inclusive and educationally beneficial to men and women.

**The Hidden Curriculum in Outdoor Education**

Apart from the more obvious requirements for strength and technical skills, there are more subtle behaviours that often go unrecognised, which can contribute to the undervaluing of women in outdoor education (Green, 1994; Allin, 2000; Carter, 2000). The *hidden curriculum* refers to culturally embedded learning which is unplanned and often unnoticed but which conveys implicit messages to learners. These messages may be conveyed via verbal and non-verbal communication or choice of curriculum content and teaching materials, and often serve to reinforce
stereotypical and oppressive values and behaviours (Morgan in Diller et. al. 1996). One student in our study describes an outdoor education example in which the hidden curriculum appears to be based on students’ gendered assumptions:

Yes, I’ve come across some situations where, because I am female, I am treated differently, but to someone else it might be subtle but to me it’s frustrating. I never see a guy giving advice to another guy on how to climb unless the advice was asked for and yet I’ve had guys telling me or other girls how to climb which is quite frustrating.

(3rd year student)

This student alludes to the underlying assumption that the male students must be superior or self-sufficient climbers and that the women students need help. Although in the instances described, the male students are likely to be trying to be helpful, they are inadvertently undermining the woman’s sense of competence.

Another student recognises the broader social influences on the behaviour of men and women in the course and provides an example of how they are enacted:

Lots of people think that in outdoor education women are supposed to be strong, courageous and strong minded and be able to do what the guys are able to do … Yet our society is structured as such that we are influenced in a way in which many girls would find it difficult to carry out those kinds of characteristics … there was one incident where I went canoeing and there were four canoes available for people to go solo but six people wanted to so we had to have a discussion about it. It was really interesting because the two guys said “Yep I’m going” and the four girls accepted that and were left to discuss who was going to go but it was accepted that the guys would go.

(1st year student)

This example exemplifies some of the ‘unspoken rules’ that allow men in the outdoors to maximise their learning opportunities at the expense of their female counterparts. Importantly this woman recognises the women students’ unconscious complicity in reinforcing male dominated behaviour. These examples illustrate the hidden curriculum in outdoor education, revealing that the outdoor education setting is not necessarily a ‘level playing field’ for women and men. If all students are to be given equal opportunity to develop their potentials, more ‘gender sensitive’ (Diller & Houston in Diller et. al. 1996) teaching and learning practices need to be adopted.
Gender Sensitive Pedagogy

Gender sensitive pedagogy differs from gender free pedagogy in that it acknowledges gender differences but does not promote gender segregated approaches which may serve to perpetuate gendered stereotypes (Diller and Houston 1996:185). Gender sensitive approaches to teaching and learning are concerned with what is learned by men and women and how it affects people of both sexes. In discussing gender sensitive perspectives in physical education, Diller and Houston (1996: 192) argue that the teacher must become aware of the hidden curriculum which often covertly perpetuates sexist beliefs and practices. Only when the teacher is aware of sexism inherent in the curriculum, teaching methods or student and teacher interactions, can s/he raise student awareness to facilitate change. Furthermore they argue that it is the teacher’s responsibility to be proactive in addressing sexism in the hidden curriculum.

Similarly Green (1994), Morse (1997) and Preston (2001) assert that the responsibility to address sexist practice and to instigate change lies with the outdoor educator, whether that be in a tertiary institution, a school or another setting. Critical reflection, discussion and analysis are seen as an essential processes in learning to recognise sexist or inequitable attitudes and behaviours. In scrutinising the hidden curriculum in her own outdoor education teaching, Preston (2001) identifies ways in which she has unconsciously reinforced sexist attitudes and behaviours in students. She suggests a conscious process of deconstruction of experience in the outdoors by both teachers/leaders and students in order to teach students how to recognise and challenge “dominant (oppressive) versions of femininity and masculinity” as well as other forms of domination (Preston, 2001: 17). She recognises this process as problematic, especially coming from her perspective as a white, middle class, well educated female but, like Green (1994), Diller and Houston (1997) and Bell (1997), she argues that educators have a moral responsibility to actively address these issues.

As a way of moving towards more inclusive constructs of outdoor education, a range of alternative teaching and learning methods have been proposed. Provision of opportunities for women only trips is advocated by Warren and Rheingold (1993), Green (1994), Mitten (1994), Loeffler (1997) and Carter (2000). Some such trips have been conducted in the course in question and several women in the 1996 study
talked about their outdoor experiences in women only groups. Most recognised significant differences in the learning processes and structure, than they experienced within mixed groups while some also identified issues related to the conduct of single sex trips within the course. Some women in this study advocate women only outdoor experiences as a 'stepping stone' or a way of initially developing practical skills in a 'comfortable' environment before participating in mixed groups. Therefore, although they suggest a need for different teaching methods for women in the initial stages, this is still seen as a means by which women can be taught to fit into the dominant masculine model of practice:

It is really good to provide an environment where they can learn from another woman and they can learn at their own rate and then go back to a male strategy. (2nd year student)

However the comments of another LUB student about her experience of a women's only trip, hints at practical ways in which outdoor education activities could be framed and structured in a more gender inclusive manner:

We went on an all women’s walk last year and it was a really cruisy time, but we were looking at the weather and at navigation and at different things. It was more of a learning thing, things I wanted to learn about rather than pushing yourself. It wasn’t like we’re going to be up here at 7, here for lunch at 12 and by 5 o’clock at this spot. We stayed in one spot for a day and watched the clouds go by … it put the theory that we did last year into practice … there wasn’t that competition to see who’s better, boys or girls, like can we walk faster, carry bigger packs or whatever. (2nd year student)

For this student the contrast between this experience and others with mixed groups is associated with a sense of relief and freedom to learn and express herself in a way that appears to be more meaningful for her and which made more sense of the theory they had been studying. This in itself is significant and suggests a different reason for modifying some of the practical components of the course.

While single sex outdoor education experiences may provide women with a ‘space’ in which to learn in a supportive, less constrained, more meaningful way, they may not ultimately change outdoor education programs based on dominant masculine models. As Preston (2001: 16) points out: “… Such programs can only be effective if
strategies are used to challenge dominant discourses on masculinities as well as femininities and I am not convinced this can be done effectively in single sex programs.” Outdoor education pedagogy, particularly in tertiary institutions, must therefore raise both men’s and women’s awareness of sexist practice and strategically address relevant issues in order to bring about long term change.

Many other practical ways of addressing gender issues in outdoor education have been proposed. Bell (1997) argues for more research and debate on gendered experience and pedagogy in experiential learning. Preston (2001) advocates the development of debriefing processes which teach critical analysis of language and non-verbal communication. Loeffler (1997) asserts that solo time in the outdoors is important for women to develop independence and a sense of their own competence. Carter (2000) alerts us to the importance of ensuring that women have access to female role models as leaders in the outdoors and proposes specific training courses to help women develop their practical skills in a ‘safe’ environment. Green (1994) advocates curriculum changes which consider ways of overtly valuing interpersonal communication skills and more personalised forms of knowledge such as the tacit or intuitive as well as the rational and technical. These strategies for gender sensitive teaching and learning may not be new but have only been articulated publicly in recent years. The next important step is for tertiary outdoor education courses to adopt these ideas and put them into practice as integral to the courses rather than additional or optional components which may be trivialised as 'women's issues'. It should be noted here that several staff members who teach the practical components of this degree course have made significant efforts to address some of these issues by altering their teaching methods and assessment structures in recent years.

**Conclusion**

Women in outdoor education should not have to ‘act like one of the boys’ in order to gain acceptance and recognition for their achievements. They must be able to learn and educate in ways that are empowering and meaningful for them. All the above suggestions for alternative pedagogical practices have merit in working towards empowering women in their experiences as participants and leaders in the outdoors. However in order to affect real change outdoor educators must learn to recognise inequities in the teaching and learning process if outdoor education is to successfully
become a significant site of social change. Achievement of such change, as Humberstone (2000) and Preston (2001) point out, can only be reached through a paradigm shift which requires a willingness on the part of men and women to critically analyse their own behaviour and to address issues of gendered outdoor education practice. Such a process can be painful and slow and men, as well as women, need to want to instigate that change (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998). Women who recognise the problems have a vested interest in instigating change in outdoor education practice. What will encourage men to want this change?

One of the roles of a tertiary institution is to challenge dominant discourses, to develop new knowledge and practices which may inform and improve the broader field or profession. Studies such as those described suggest a need for rethinking the nature of outdoor education experience that may challenge the ‘norms’ of the adventure education paradigm. Theoretical concepts such as Connell’s notion of “gender multiculturalism” (in Gilbert & Gilbert 1998: 37) may demonstrate new ways of being for men as well as women. Perhaps also ecofeminist understandings of the interconnections between human domination of ‘nature’ and men’s domination of women can provide an impetus for change. However these ideas need to be translated into practice and this requires not only lateral thinking but honest introspection and careful listening to the stories of students who are living the experience. Future research may focus on the perspectives of current students, the practical curriculum content and, ideally, would involve teaching staff in action research to develop strategies for more inclusive forms of pedagogy. If we, as tertiary outdoor educators, can develop outdoor education practices that acknowledge and value gender and other differences, everyone can ultimately benefit:

I know that females see things differently to males and that will always affect how we operate on outdoor trips … when males and females work well together on it, then it's perfect, like you have both sides of the coin … you can do anything a whole lot of different ways and it's to everyone's advantage because we can help to broaden the ways people think.

(Graduate student, LUB, 1996)
References


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