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Female, white, 'middle class', physically able, cisgender, wife, mother, child, educator, academic, kayaker...

1997 – 2003 PhD : Women's career identities in outdoor education

Progress and Ongoing Challenges 2003 - 2021

So what is the current inequality issue around women in outdoor leadership?

- Women are underrepresented in outdoor leadership qualifications and this becomes more pronounced the higher up the qualification ladder
- Women are underrepresented in outdoor leadership roles in organisations
- At every level of the ML pathway, fewer women get to assessment
- At the highest levels, percentage has changed little in 20 years
- 98%+ white
- Educated, able bodied, LGBTQ+?



Some male (and female) leaders in the outdoor industry may feel gender discrimination/ inequity does not exist

When habitus [embodied dispositions] encounters a social world of which itself is the product, it finds itself 'as a fish in water, it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 127)

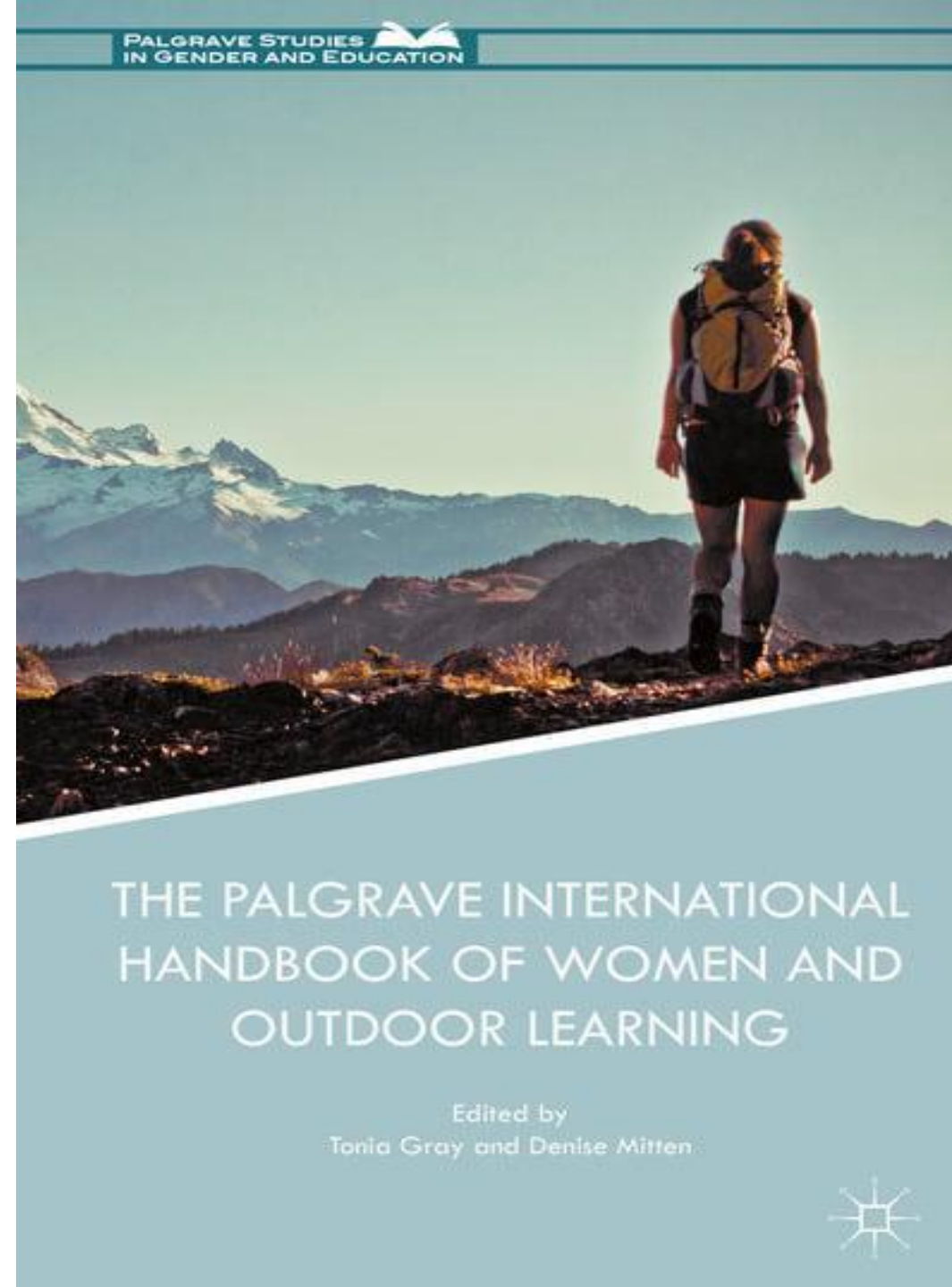
If we have grown up in families where we have been in the outdoors and are comfortable in it, we are physically confident, and always been in a male dominated outdoor environment and we 'fit', we don't necessarily notice...

'Privilege''

Women's career identities in outdoor education

- 21 Women working in the outdoor industry across the UK
- Almost all degree educated
- Almost all 'White'
- Different family circumstances
- Topical life history interviews on their careers
- Late 1990s/2000

HAVE WE MADE PROGRESS?





Accessing the Outdoor Industry

Outdoor Leadership Qualifications

Negotiating the Outdoor Industry



Influences on accessing the outdoor industry

I thought they were burly, super-strong people who were nothing like me

I always played out in the field with the local guys and got my physical strength from that...I was a bit of a tomboy

I was scared I wouldn't be good enough [to go on the OE course] for the pursuits, or whatever

I don't climb hard, I climb adequately, but not hard, I have this view of everyone as being hard, which is probably completely false...



Image taken from <https://www.bghuk.com/>

The careers advice service said I would be good in a factory or shop...

There was pressure from school to do a degree, not play at an outdoorsy job

I'm sure they said it wasn't a suitable career for a girl

There was a teacher very keen on climbing, and I went with him

Challenges on becoming an outdoor leader

I have been put off assessment cause I've thought I might be put with some, not necessarily men, but those who were much fitter

I'm the sort of person who wouldn't put themselves forward for assessment until I was really at the level...

And he would whizz down and burn the group off..

I think just about every course I've done, I've been in the minority

All the women at the centre were silfs, lightweight, fit young things, good climbers, mountaineers, been here done that – and I just feel like a Teletubbie



Image taken from <https://pinnacleclub.co.uk/>

People were critical of me being all soft and nurturing whereas I should have been more authoritative – it just seemed my ways of working weren't accepted, so I left [n.b *double bind*]

..the lads saying, what are you doing, get out of the way - it like characterised it all, this silly, young female who hasn't a clue about anything

I definitely felt occasionally I was given the hairy eyeball – this is 'X', your instructor, and like, what, a woman? They never said it, no-one ever said anything

Career, motherhood

Your career and you're pregnant *again*, it's going to protract everything

I thought I need to get some of these pieces of paper now because it's going to be so hard afterwards [having children]

I couldn't keep doing that [working weekends], as well as pressure from my family saying, you are always leaving the kids



[Dis] embodied organisations

He said 'why have you got to go all the way home?' – and I said 'because I'm feeding him' and it was 'oh' and it obviously hadn't clicked at all

I mean they don't understand it when you say my period started on camp..

it's a work hard profession, people give up a lot of their personal life

I also felt I had something to prove – if I wanted to work part time I had to show them I could do my job

Have we made progress?

- More visible role models at all levels
- More mentoring programmes
- More women leaders
- More diverse women outdoor leaders?
- Changed organisational cultures and structures?
- Individually challenged gender inequality?

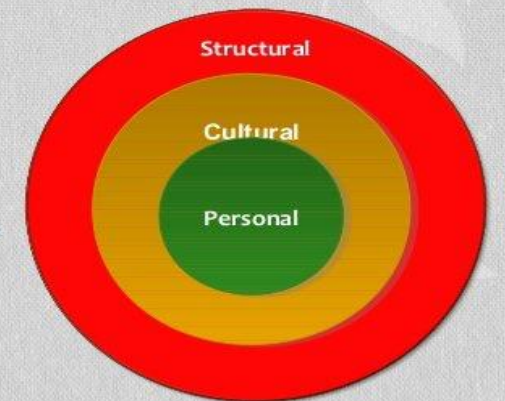
Women specific courses



Taken from <https://www.thebmc.co.uk/equity-steering-group>

PCS Analysis (Thompson, 2003)

- Discrimination and oppression operate at different levels
- These levels are interrelated
- Some elements are overt and visible – other features of oppression can be more invisible or covert
- Effective action to promote equality and diversity relies on thinking and action at all levels





Myth: Women who challenge gender inequality are anti-men (we are not!) – we need male allies



Break out groups