

**WOMEN'S ADVENTURE HISTORY AND EDUCATION  
PROGRAMMING IN THE UNITED STATES FAVORS  
*FRILUFTSLIV***

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**Abstract**

Many women’s outdoor adventure education programs in the United States (US) have emphasized a respect for life and a deep relationship with nature, as well as emotional ties and identification with the landscape. Women’s adventure programming in the US has been based on an ethic of care and is in line with the Scandinavian social tradition of “friluftsliv”.

Conversely, mainstream outdoor adventure education in the US has its roots in a militaristic style of wilderness travel, stemming from the historic notion of conquering and taming the wilderness and the postmodern view that males have become weak and need toughening. These notions separate people from nature. This emphasis of adventure education on risk taking, conquering, and egocentric attitudes ought to be critiqued and challenged.

However, the leaders’ pedagogy and the leadership behavior during an adventure education program do not have to depend on gender. Women and men both have opportunities in adventure education to encourage or discourage a culture of friluftsliv.

**Keywords**

Women, adventure education, nature, leadership, feminist, friluftsliv

## Introduction

*Many women prefer to adventure with other women, and the trip styles that emerge are different from those of co-ed or mixed gender groups and from all-men's groups (Mitten 1985).*

What is it about all women outdoor adventure trips that draw women? In the limited research that has been done, three primary components of import for women participating in all-woman outdoor adventure programs were found 1) all-women participants, 2) being in and with nature, and 3) an inclusive environment (Hornibrook, et al., 1997). Yerkes and Miranda (1982) found that in addition to women feeling that they would have better opportunities to learn and practice skills, they also went on women's outdoor trips to feel empowered, to relax, to have fun, to gain a sense of renewal, to network, and to find spiritual healing in nature.

Women choose outdoor adventure trips because there are no distractions of telephones, cars, children, and other responsibilities. One woman indicated that the outdoors was a powerful place for her by stating, *I can't control, so I don't. And because I don't I have to take care of it or control it, I have time to focus on myself.* Another woman said, *(n)ature is so healing, I can't help but feel good and powerful out here (Mitten, 1992, p. 57).*

Laura Fredrickson (1996) explored the spiritual benefits of people's interactions with nature, and in her research with all-women's groups found that it was the mix of specific social and biophysical factors that contributed to spiritually beneficial aspects of the participants' trip experiences and to the inspirational qualities of each place setting. The environmental characteristics of the setting, including wildlife, being in a wilderness area, seeing geological

formations, and such, were significant in contributing to the more meaningful aspects of the participants' trips.

The purpose of this paper is to report what is written in the literature about all-women's outdoor adventure trips in both historical and contemporary contexts, and show how contemporary women's trips developed to have a culture of *friluftsliv* embedded in their programming. While the historical perspective includes women from both North America and Western Europe, and authors from Canada and Australia are noted throughout, the emphasis of this paper is to critique women's adventure education programming in the US and contrast that to mainstream adventure programming in the US.

Both authors have led women's trips and engaged in research about gender and the outdoors. Women's trips are not necessarily easier than mixed gender or men's trips, nor are they devoid of risk. A group of women climbing Annapurna encounters the same adventure and risk as a men's group climbing Annapurna. However, the culture of *friluftsliv* on women's trips is in contrast to most mainstream outdoor adventure trips, both mixed gender and all male, which developed from different pedagogy than women's trips, and do not typically have a culture of *friluftsliv* embedded in their programming.

Specific leadership practices and program pedagogy typical in all women's trips as described by the authors can, with intentionality, be used by both female and male leaders in mainstream adventure education to infuse a culture of *friluftsliv* in their mixed gender and all male trips.

There is no certain definition resulting from Ibsen's use of the word "friluftsliv" in his poem, *Paa viddene*, the term having evolved to describe a range of human and nature contact. Being Norwegian in heritage only, the authors do not feel qualified to settle on an exact definition of

friluftsliv. However, the authors believe that engaging in a respectful and mutual relationship with nature, receiving what nature offers, and seeing nature as part of one's daily life is an accurate representation of friluftsliv for this paper. In fact, in the context of women guiding outdoor adventure trips for women, Breivik's (1978) concept of two traditions of friluftsliv is used. The leaders or guides represent the rural tradition where friluftsliv is described as a way of life, and the participants represent city people coming to natural areas for adventure and pleasure, guided by the rural people.

### **Historical Perspective**

The unique ways in which women experience being in the outdoors are not new, and certain themes have been present in the narratives about women's outdoor traveling throughout the past two centuries. In one of the author's unpublished reviews of women travelers in the 1800s and early 1900s, both from North America and Western Europe, it was found that the women found nature to be healing, were prone to find a sense of place, and felt spiritually connected to the land. Their intent was not to conquer nature; they wanted to be **in** nature. They came to know that they felt good because they were in nature. In fact, many women said that being in nature was like coming home, very akin to the concept of "coming home to nature" in *friluftsliv*.

As an example, Mina Benson Hubbard, a Canadian, traveled in July of 1905 to finish her husband's work in Labrador. 'Laddie' Hubbard had died the year before while on an extended trip to map the George River. Mina primarily wanted to see where he had been, finish his work, and complete her grieving process. What she didn't expect was to fall in love with the tundra and be enlivened by her experiences with the Naskapi people. One passage in her book: *What do*

*I care of mosquitoes when I am free*, illustrates the incredible aliveness and joy she felt during her extended trip in Labrador (Hubbard, c1908). At Ungava Bay, the end of her journey in November, 1905, Mina was sad to be leaving the wilderness and the peace and freedom she found there. In contrast, Dillon Wallace, the second in command during the trip on which Laddie died of starvation, also mounted a trip to finish Laddie's work. In his book about that second trip the caption under one of the first pictures reads: *Our lonely perilous journey into the dismal wastes ... was begun*. In his book, he demonstrated no positive bond with the land and a deprecating attitude towards the people whom he labeled as *a Labrador type*. There are many of these sorts of contrasts in the books each wrote following their separate trips.

Another woman who found solace adventuring in the wilderness was Georgie Clark White, born in 1914. In the mid 1940s while she was cycling in California on Route 1 with her 12 year old daughter, her daughter was struck by a car and killed. Despondent, Clark White traveled aimlessly for a few years. Near the Colorado River at the Grand Canyon she met Harry Allison and talked him into swimming the Grand Canyon part of the Colorado River. This swim had never been done and was extremely dangerous; even today people do not swim this stretch of the river. For their own personal reasons they took the plunge and amazingly they lived through the swim. Clark White said that she had found her "home" and had had a significant spiritual experience in the Grand Canyon. Clark White's "Georgie's River Rats" was the first rafting company offering trips down the Grand Canyon. She wanted to share the spiritual wonder of the Grand Canyon with women, men, and children. White not only felt that she had come home when she traveled in the Grand Canyon, she made it her home until her death in 1992.

In another example, in 1953, during the first recorded Western all-women's mountaineering trip in Nepal, Monica Jackson, Betty Stark, and Evelyn Camrass, against the norms of the time, worked hard not to interface with the press and gain notoriety for their endeavor. They traveled in an area that was not yet mapped because the more popular mountaineering areas were off-limits to them as women. Contrary to standard European procedures, they did not name any mountains or areas after themselves or white men. They did name places after the Sherpa people with them, including a 22000 foot peak they climbed, naming it Gyalgen Peak after their head Sherpa, and they reported that they splurged, naming one glacier the "Ladies' Glacier" (Jackson & Stark, 1956). These women concerned themselves with relationships among themselves, with their Sherpas, and with the land. They appreciated the land and did not engage in the conquering language and behavior typical of the male explorers of the time. These seemingly small differences in not wanting notoriety for their accomplishments and in fact understating them and not trying to conquer the land, come about from women "being" in the wilderness without having any notion of taming or controlling it.

Additionally, there are accounts of white women taken captive by Native Americans and choosing to live with them because of their life style; a notable example is Mary Jemison (1743 – 1833) (Seaver & Namias, 1992).

The attitude exhibited by the women, in the above examples, is in contrast to that of many Western European men including those who emigrated to the United States (US). Most came rooted in a puritanical Judeo-Christian theological tradition, wherein wilderness had been portrayed as a dangerous and desolate environment that needed taming. Nash (2001) points out

that a mark of man's achieving civilization is his clearing land and domesticating animals. Thomas (1984) makes a case for civilization being *virtually synonymous with the conquest of nature* (p. 25). Evidence of this embedded view of wilderness as needing to be tamed and controlled is manifested even more profoundly in the founding of the US on individual rights and freedom for rich white men. Power and control were not isolated to nature and wilderness, but also extended to women and slaves. After the US Revolution, the frontier experience continued to focus on personal rights for men including individualism, competition, and egalitarianism, as reflected in Frederick Jackson Turner's model of rugged individualism (Potter, 1962). As Briles (1987) noted, power typically begets more power and once begun, it is hard to break that cycle. Still today it is common in the US for power over nature to be a theme indicating progress. Reflecting on this historical reality, Nils Olof Vikander's (2007) observation seems particularly poignant: *It is a paradox that the waves of European immigrants escaping constrictive societies did not shape nations with freedoms extended into nature* (p. 18) and he might have added slaves and women.

### **Women and Nature**

Mainstream US culture has treated women and nature similarly, subjugating both to a lesser status than men. Susan Griffin in '*Women and Nature*' (1980) chronicled how this power in relationship towards women and nature by mainstream male Western European culture has been destructive and belittling to both women and the land. Often times nature is feminized and referred to with the pronoun "she" and sayings such as "rape the land" and "reap nature's bounty" can be linked to female oppression. There are superstitions about bad luck resulting

from women on boats or in tunnels and mining areas. Even in 1972 60 men walked off the job at the Eisenhower-Johnson Tunnel in the Rocky Mountains as Janet Bonnema, an engineer, who after a two year suit against the Colorado Highway Department finally was allowed to enter the tunnel (Scripps Interactive Newspapers Group, 2009).

While some change has occurred, Arlene Blum, leader of the 1979 all women's Annapurna expedition and other active women found that they were not invited on men's expeditions. The fear that women would distract men and the problem of where and how women would go to the toilet was cited. Elevating males over nature and women and ignoring, barring, or discouraging women from participating in outdoor adventure education also resulted from the pedagogy of mainstream adventure education as it was started in the US.

More evidence about how this culture teaches us to think negatively about women can be found in '*Language and the Sexes*', where Francine Frank and Frank Ashen (1983) write that we have in the English language over one thousand phrases and terms that denigrate women, including obscene terms. In contrast, few words describing men have negative connotations. This language issue remains in our culture today and often is quite insidious. For example, environmentalist Paul Hawken (2008), when speaking about the necessity to think critically about our energy use and production actually said that *in the future we are going to have to make a choice between wind turbines and Barbie dolls, no question; we can't have it both ways* (September 18, 2008). The question is: Why did he slam a product sold to young girls using societal stereotypes promoted by big business in order to make his point?

Later in the paper the authors will illustrate how women have provided alternative voices that begin to call into question practices and pedagogy that undermine both women and nature. These women's voices usher in a different understanding of what it means to be human in the natural world through their uniquely different history -- a history that is mostly buried or marginalized.

### **Outdoor Adventure Education Programming in the United States**

Women's and men's outdoor adventure education programming have been asymmetrical in development. For males, outdoor adventure education in the US grew out of the model of rugged individualism and in reaction to urbanization. In 1861, Frederick and Abigail Gunn ran a home school for boys in Washington, Connecticut. Frederick, worried that the boys had become weak and needed to get in better physical shape, decided as part of the curriculum to take the boys on a two-week trip in which they marched 40 miles (64 km) to the beach at Milford, Connecticut. As an individualist and outdoorsman, Gunn's focus was to make boys into men through physical outdoor activities. Other boys' camps followed. Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock founded the North Mountain School of Physical Culture in 1876, devoted to "weakly boys" whose parents paid up to \$200 for a four-month stay. The pedagogy of recapturing a rugged individualism was prevalent.

This theme of recapturing physical and mental strength was reinforced when Outward Bound was introduced in the US in 1961. Founded by Kurt Hahn, Outward Bound started as a way to train young British men during World War II to survive the physical and mental hardships

encountered on the seas, and has evolved into an adventure-based experiential training company focused on leadership in outdoor settings.

In a specialized segment of adventure education, wilderness therapy, some groups have taken this stress and survival paradigm to an extreme in what are labeled wilderness boot camps which include both state-owned and private camps. These camps subject participants to severe adversity, often intentionally or unwittingly pitting them against nature as the enemy, out of a belief that surviving adversity creates stronger personal resolve when under future pressures.

Male based paradigms including “Survival against nature builds stronger men,” “War (against nature) builds stronger men,” or “Dunk ’em and dry ’em” have shaped mainstream adventure education and programming in the US. Many of the early models for outdoor and wilderness leadership were created out of this primarily male-based value system and perspective. This also included practicality, utility, seeking rational truth, power and influence, objective rationalization, and competition (Henderson, 1996).

Currently, Outward Bound offers expeditions designed to utilize unfamiliar settings to *impel students into mentally, emotionally and physically demanding experiences* (Outward Bound, 2009). According to Thomas James (2008), in Outward Bound the adventurer must still *break down and learn to serve his companions* (p. 114). The use of hardship to encourage people to bond or coerce people to help each other continues to be used today.

Today, both females and males participate in Outward Bound. Many organizations became mixed; however, most of these organizations did not critically examine their philosophies and

pedagogies; they just opened enrollment to females and offered the same programs. Helen Lenskyj (1995; 1998) from the Department of Physical and Health Education at the University of Toronto writing about the US, Canada and Australia describes this problem for outdoor programming as well as sports. Without considering the attributes that women bring to adventure journeys in designing the trips and their philosophy, damage to women can be done. Karla Henderson (1996) talks about the *add women and stir* phenomenon as people recognized that women were participating in outdoor activities, but merely as additions to the current practices.

A problem with the “add women and stir” approach can be illustrated in a common practice of using outdoor trips as a metaphoric as well as a real journey. In the heroic quest, a common metaphor in adventure education borrowed from literature, is people using adventure trips to test their strength and worth, culminating in victory over adversity and their own self imposed limitations. Oftentimes, suffering for a greater purpose is part of the deal. The heroic myth is so deeply ingrained that we often still view physical strength, independence, and discipline as the ultimate desirable attributes. In this myth, leadership is embodied in the glorified leader who can command attention either in a militaristic or *pied piper* manner (Warren, 1996). A constraint that has kept some women from engaging in adventure education is a subtle or not so subtle message that this archetype presents; namely that women “should” act like men, both in having heroic quests and in leadership.

As Warren (1996) reminds us, women’s sensibilities do not often resonate with this quest. Although women can be and do all of these things, these often are not women's primary attributes or proclivities. When a woman returns home, she is not usually praised for the

attributes supposedly gained during the hero's quest. Even if a woman chooses to complete a heroic quest many people at home would not like her to return brave and ready to fight. From the authors' experiences, women are more often either looking for spiritual nourishment or growth, or this is where they gravitate towards in the course of the trip. Beale (1988), a Canadian Outward Bound instructor, also has offered a critique on the heroic journey metaphor and wonders if this metaphor commonly promoted actually might limit women's experiences. The literary references for the heroic journey are mostly about men while women have supportive roles. She too offers the idea of the heroine's quest being primarily an inner journey. These inner journeys happen in the context of physical experiences. For example, prior to a week-long horse-packing trip, women shared their fears about the trip. One woman was scared she might fall off the horse, another woman was scared that she would miss her partner too much, and so on. As it turned out the woman scared to fall off her horse did fall though she was unhurt while the other woman missed her partner but still very much enjoyed the trip. These instances can be construed as heroic, having conquered a fear, but the women do not express their growth in heroic or conquering terms. They express their growth more often in spiritual terms; that a greater inner peace resulted from their experience and through the support of nature and trip comrades.

In contrast to male values: (Henderson, 1996, pp. 109-110)

*-female values, not traditionally linked with [mainstream] leadership were associated with a priority on form and harmony; concern for people, unity, spirituality, a desire to help and care for others, and a concern for beauty and creative expression.*

Female values were part of the female leadership influencing women's adventure education programs and other female organizations. These female values have been described by a number of authors, including Lenskyj (1995, 1998), and Gilligan (1982) writing about differences between female and male ethics. Miranda and Yerkes (1996) note that gender themes in the camping movement emerged in the late 1800s. Girls' camps focused on relationships and community values while boys' camps focused on competition, challenge, and conquering the wilderness. In contrast, girls' and women's programs were framed as providing a time for networking, relaxation, skills acquisition, and civic engagement. Woman camp leaders wanted their programs to emphasize *the aesthetic and spiritual kinship of girls to nature and to one another*. The pedagogy was for women to have tools to thrive in the changes caused by urbanization, therefore women leaders made the girls' camps *into excellent social incubators for what would become a new type of woman and the politically active citizen* (Miranda & Yerkes, 1996). The first YWCA camp in the Philadelphia chapter of the YWCA, called the "vacation project," was designed to provide a relaxing environment for young women who worked at tedious factory jobs with little free time (Young Women's Christian Association, 2009).

A cultural indicator today of the continuing difference between male and female values can be seen in two large youth organizations both of which have outdoor adventure education components, the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of the USA, each of which has a very different underlying pedagogy. The underlying values cause the organizations to manifest in very different ways. The Girl Scouts embraces pluralism and continues to focus on civic engagement and relationships. From their website, Girl Scouts of America (2009):

*Girl Scouts of the USA is ... dedicated solely to girls—all girls—where, in an accepting and nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world.*

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was incorporated to “*provide a program for community organizations that offers effective character, citizenship, and personal fitness training for youth,* as summed up in the last line of the BSA oath or promise, *To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight* (Boy Scouts of America, 2009). In contrast to the Girl Scouts’ pluralism and acceptance of differences, BSA focuses on teaching boys their version of moral straightness, including being overtly anti-atheist and anti-homosexual. These values were exemplified in the 2000 US Supreme Court case of BSA versus Dale where the Boy Scouts prevailed, affirming that they could discriminate against homosexual boys and leaders and not allow them to be members; overturning a lower court ruling. In the aftermath, after three years of failed negotiation during which the city of Philadelphia requested the BSA to change its discriminatory policy toward gay people, the city evicted the BSA from a municipal building where they were housed, in effect, rent-free since 1928.

Again in contrast, the National Girl Scout Office gave a special recognition to a 17 year old member as one of the top 13 Gold Award recipients for 2007 (the Girl Scout Gold Award is equivalent to the Boy Scout Eagle Scout Award), who, with the support of her local church community completed a community service project that included creating a book aimed at overcoming gay and lesbian stereotypes and, at the same time, sharing the similarities of communication among family units (Girl Scouts of America, 2007).

## **Women and Men can Promote Friluftsliv**

This paper shows the long history and the context of women in adventure programming extending the ethic of care to nature. While the authors of this paper agree with Bob Henderson (2007, p. 4) as he makes the case that:

*-nature in North American outdoor education and recreation is all-too-easily lost in the mania of skill development, personal growth and technological conveniences [and that] nature becomes a backdrop, perhaps even a sparring partner to test one's skill and resources*

-they see this as true for the mainstream, not for women's programs, which encourage women participants to live *friluftsliv*.

At the same time, the authors would be remiss not to note that in recent years mainstream adventure education programming that ignores or worse yet, vilifies nature, has also received criticism from men for not protecting and appreciating the environment and for lacking a framework that encourages a connection to nature, not through science, but rather through a sense of wonder and the use of stories (Horwood & Henderson, 1995 cited in Ryan, 1999).

These men, primarily environmental educators from the US, Canada, and Australia, emphasize the importance of outdoor leaders understanding their professional responsibilities toward the

natural environment and the delinquency of outdoor leaders at camps and those involved in adventure education, adventure therapy, and general outdoor pursuits leadership in promoting environmental education and environmental responsibility (Wattchow, 2001; Knapp, 1999). Ryan (1999) relates the split of the person from nature that Western science makes, to a continued anthropocentric view of the outdoors and environmental education. Environmental education and responsibility are not quite the same as the way *friluftsliv* is defined and used in this paper, but they show movement in the direction of oneness with nature. Concurrently, the recent movement for place-based education being embraced by environmental educators contributes positively to a culture of *friluftsliv*, but that is a topic for a different paper.

Therefore, the authors believe that men leaders have the same opportunities as women in outdoor adventure education to encourage or discourage a culture of *friluftsliv*. Data from Robert Greenway (1996) support that, generally speaking, women and men in the US have different aims for being in nature. However, these data also show that some men have the same aims as what we are describing as feminine aims, and some women have aims more aligned with the Western male perspective. In data collected for 30 years from college students in his classes that went on outdoor trips, he found that 57% of the women and 27% of the men stated a major goal was to come “home to nature” and he found that 60% of the men and 20% of the women stated that a major goal of the trip was to conquer fear, challenge themselves, and expand limits. This seeming gender difference reinforces for some women why they prefer women-only trips. This coming home to nature goal exemplifies an essence of *friluftsliv*. Interestingly enough, 90% of both women and men returning from their trips described an increased sense of aliveness,

well-being, and energy, supporting the notion that all outdoor leaders have incredible opportunities to help people become aware of *friluftsliv*.

### **Women's Outdoor Adventure Trip Programming**

Women's programming in the US, often marginalized by mainstream outdoor adventure education, has a different history and a different pedagogy than predominately male programs. This section describes how the pedagogy and perspectives of women leaders in outdoor adventure programming in the US have supported *friluftsliv*. It appears that for many women who wanted to be on trips that reflected their values of a) coming home to nature, b) being in a trip environment that feels emotionally, spiritually, and physically nurturing, c) traveling the wilderness for its own sake and not using it as a means to an end or to create situations to take risks, or prove competency, and d) generally seeing women's strengths as assets to trips; chose to lead all-women's trips or join all-women's trips—hence a number of women's outdoor tripping organizations formed and women's programming developed from these initiators in the 1970s in the US (Mitten, 1985). Women's programs placed high value on inclusivity and acceptance and tended to operate using an ethic of care. By the 1980s there were over 50 tour companies in over a dozen states that according to "The New World of Travel", by Arthur Frommer (1988), were "openly feminist in their orientation, and limit their clients and leadership to women only" (p. 56). He reported that these outdoor trips were for women who genuinely enjoyed the attractions of nature, and that the companies were initiated by women who believed that women could better

enjoy a holiday change of pace that was stress-free and relaxing when they traveled with other women.

In general, the trip programming, which is historically different for all women's trips and mixed gender or men's trips, is where a culture of *friluftsliv* can be cultivated.

The following sections describe these values of many women's trips and the various leadership practices frequently employed by women. For the leadership practices and concepts described below to work, participants have to be appropriately matched with a trip. Trips vary in length, activities, difficulty, and goals. For example, even if the goal of the trip is to climb Denali, it can be done with a culture of *friluftsliv*; however, if a participant is unprepared for the trip, it is less likely that the trip will be successful in any arena, including the participant feeling nurtured through being in nature, safe, or appropriately powerful. A concept paramount to the feminist ideology in this paper is that the participants are able to choose, or get the help they need in choosing a trip appropriate for their skills and needs. Many of the leadership practices frequently employed by women have greatly influenced mainstream adventure programming, and are now even being adopted as common practices.

### ***Connection to Nature / Coming Home to Nature***

For women leaders in outdoor adventure education, there exists both a desire to be in nature and to lead within the natural environment in a manner that is congruent with our values. When in the natural environment, seeing and experiencing ourselves as working with nature and in community with nature serves as an action metaphor for human relationships. Being in the outdoors and feeling connected to nature helps promote community in a larger sense. In other

words, being in nature imparts an understanding of community that reaches beyond the group members in the program and human communities as such; it promotes the land ethic which is the understanding that community consists of interdependent parts including soils, waters, plants, animals, and humans (Leopold, 1949) or as Leopold said: *The land. Friluftsliv* reflects this land ethic. Extending the ethic of care to the land includes a sense of this larger community as well as using state of the art low trace traveling and camping techniques. When leaders act ethically and with sensitivity to the biosphere, they help participants to understand, thrive in, and enhance our world community and the natural environment.

Whether women recognize that their treatment by Western society mimics the treatment of nature by mainstream Western culture, or whether there is some other consciousness developing, women tend to lead trips in a respectful manner towards the environment. In general, women's influence on the field of adventure programming in the US has brought greater congruency between ethical conduct towards women and towards the environment, as well as recognition of a spiritual connection to nature.

As an example, the women leaders at Woodswomen, Inc., a women's adventure travel organization (1975 – 1998), were chosen in large part on their comfort in the outdoors. Said another way, using a phrase to describe friluftsliv, nature had seeped into their bones and was part of them (Butala, 1994 as cited in Henderson, 1997). When traveling with these outdoor leaders or "guides," as they were called at Woodswomen, they truly seemed to "belong" in the outdoors. Nature had become a way of life for these women. Many participants came on trips with the perception that traveling in the outdoors was the idealized world and that when the trip

ended they had to return to the “real” world. Gently, guides reinforced that the outdoor world **is** the real world and that this reality can stay with them when they return to the city. Being with nature is a lifestyle that can be adopted and lived wherever one is. This acknowledging nature as our true home is similar to Nils Faarlund’s depiction by Reed & Rothenberg (1993) as seeing the tradition of *friluftsliv* as a way of rediscovering this true home. *Friluftsliv*, though not by name in the 1970s and 80s, was part of the culture of many women’s outdoor organizations, including Woodswomen, Inc.

Three major historical shifts have occurred in humanity’s perceptions of nature. The first two described by Öhman (2001) occurred when we moved from a primarily nomadic hunting and gathering society to an agricultural one where nature’s primary purpose was seen as to be conquered and cultivated, and the second occurred in the transition from an agricultural to an industrialized society, namely that nature’s primary purpose was as the source of raw materials for a growing production of goods instead of as something to be cultivated and subdued. The third shift has occurred in a relatively short period of time from the industrial revolution to a technological revolution where many humans are able to live entire lifetimes without having to encounter nature. Exceptions to this isolation often occur only in the midst of natural disasters: earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding, mudslides, and tidal waves. To consider the impact such encounters imprint on those who experience them, it is not surprising that for many the reaction is pervasive fear and mistrust of the natural world. As women adventure leaders we consider the cultural and societal relationship to nature and provide tangible tools to our

participants in order to provide an experience that offers a renewed and integrated relationship to the natural world.

While it is true that many women have started out uncertain or even afraid of being outdoors, like Mina Hubbard, many found after camping and traveling outdoors that they truly feel at home there. During a Grand Canyon rafting trip, one participant stated (Mitten, 1992, p. 59):

*It was so amazing. "My friend convinced me to go on the Grand Canyon rafting trip; I didn't really want to go. I hadn't slept through the night in years. On this trip I slept through the night every night.*

Henderson (2009, p. 105) has found that before engaging on a solo night in the outdoors, women tend to feel anxious and lack confidence in contrast to men who feel excited and confident:

*Each of the women described a turning point early in their time alone when they calmed down, relaxed, or stopped worrying about things and began to enjoy the experience. This should be noted as a significant difference between the male and female solo experience, as none of the men reported going through this same process.*

What is unknown is if men feel social pressures to such a degree that they did not to admit feelings of anxiety in Henderson's study. However, other researchers have found women reporting more fear at the onset of the programming than men report (Ward & Hobbs, 2006;

Russell & Sibthorpe, 2004; Young & Ewert, 1992; Humberstone, 1990). While women tend to balance their fears as the trip progresses, the structural and attitudinal norms in the developing trip environment described below, help address fears and welcome women home.

***Trip Environment: Emotionally, Spiritually, and Physically Nurturing.***

For women, outdoor leadership connotes a deep and abiding commitment to a physically, emotionally, and spiritually nurturing environment. While leaders or guides cannot guarantee safety in the outdoors 100 percent of the time, by using the ethic of care to set a tone of inclusivity, acceptance, and reflection, safety is increased. These ethical values are fundamental because they provide participants a culture of openness and awareness to both the individual and the collective whole within the context of a wilderness experience. Inherent in traveling outdoors there is always the risk of unplanned hardship, difficulty, and even pain. This means that in the face of challenging situations, leaders or guides should have the ability to remain optimistic and realistic, and respond with patience and resourcefulness. In addition, these ethical values shape the pedagogical framework through thoughtful and intentional awareness of some of the assumed practices within outdoor leadership which have manifested out of a predominately male-oriented field.

*Physically nurturing.* Physicality is an important component of the feminist approach to wilderness. For many women the physical requirements of wilderness travel can seem daunting

and the common media have portrayed physicality as an important element to success in the outdoors. An important operational premise is that trips are clearly advertised and represented accurately in the pre-trip literature. That way, participants can more accurately choose trips that fit their physical abilities and interests. Even if on a physically appropriate trip the authors have experienced most women wondering if they can keep up or will be the slowest person; therefore it is important to establish norms that reflect a physically nurturing environment while not diminishing the baseline physical requirements of the trip.

A physically nurturing environment allows enough time and space for relaxation in nature as well as for the objectives of the trip, such as climbing a mountain, surfing, canoeing, and the like. The trip pace is a crucial component in providing a physically nurturing environment and when desiring a trip atmosphere supportive of *friluftsliv*. A trip pace that allows for periodic rest or free days is useful in setting a tone of exploring nature in different ways that resonate with individuals. Another practical approach that considers differences in physicality needs is to have a route that all participants can hike, bicycle, or climb, and then to offer additional options for those who want more activity, such as an additional loop to cycle.

Physicality also is an appropriate subject through which to address some of the glaring assumptions found in mainstream outdoor adventure education. One such assumption is that of “equal weight,” meaning that each individual must be able to walk equal distance with equal ease while carrying equal weight. The feminist approach shifts the concept of equality to acknowledge that noticing the way the light plays on the canyon may be as important as building a fire. Or that being able to carry 50 lbs may be as important as singing the group through a

down-pour of biblical proportions. Typically, when offered support and space, participants equalize the necessary tasks including community building actions. A result often is that with resourcefulness and cooperation many tasks can be done without requiring brute strength or singling out the physically strongest people as heroes.

Finally, an important aspect of a physically nurturing space is being able to be clean. We have found that helping women understand that being clean in the wilderness is not only possible but desirable, and showing them that how to clean up, including proper environmental considerations, adds to the enjoyment of and respect for nature.

*Emotionally nurturing.* The social environment in an emotionally nurturing trip is non-threatening in a social sense and participants feel **included**, but don't necessarily feel like they have to **belong** to the group. Cohesion is based on healthy relationships, shared goals, and shared experiences, rather than reactive relationships or bonding based on a common dislike. Humor is laughing with, not at others, and problems are solved without blaming or fault finding. Emotionally nurturing trips create spaces where people can try new relationship skills or new behaviors (and maybe not choose to keep them), and can practice skills or behaviors even if they feel or are awkward, and still get support for their efforts. While the leaders help provide an emotionally nurturing environment, women define their own level of emotional safety.

Vocabulary is an important component of emotional safety within feminist outdoor leadership. Avoiding using "survival mode" conversation, which can imply a win/lose or conflict situation, as well as words that connote domination, such as "attack the trail," "conquer the summit," "assault the mountain," or "hit the water" encourages healthy bonding and

friluftsliv. Using adapting or coping language complements friluftsliv and an atmosphere of leading in and with; not over.

A prevalent assumption within mainstream adventure education is that of a success/failure binary that is usually related to accomplishing a task. This creates a culture where participants feel they are being evaluated or tested by members of the group or group leaders. The result is that participants may either knowingly or unknowingly relinquish power to other people. This “one-up-one-down” structure creates a dynamic in which one person is superior while another is inferior. This structure, mimicking the greater society, can exist in any relationship: between leaders or participants, the group and the leader, or the group and the environment. Without a culture of success and failure, but rather an attitudinal norm where group members help and support each other during their outdoor time, participants are freer to internalize their own experiences based on their personal goals, needs, and desires while creating a culture of on-going regard, community, and cooperation with other group members and the environment.

In contrast to a masculine prevalence for competition which creates a “winners” and “losers” dynamic, the feminine approach to leadership tends to be inclusive and shared. In a sense, many people, if not everyone, perform leadership functions at some time. The more this shared leadership is recognized, the more likely that all of the trip participants will share in the power and responsibility for the trip. If leaders or guides are explicit about leadership functions as well as trip details, then engaging in leadership is more accessible. For example, all participants can help in the psychological functions of leadership such as morale-building using encouragement, recognition and support, conflict resolution, and helping people express their feelings.

Participants can share in effective leadership realms including giving information and opinions, asking for information and opinions, initiating action (such as starting a meal or loading the canoes), and problem solving.

*Spiritually nurturing.* Creating a space for the possibility of spiritual safety means creating an atmosphere where spiritual development and growth is welcome and can occur. Fundamentally, an awareness of and delight in the diversity of a group's participants and recognition and acceptance of those differences is paramount in order to create a spiritually nurturing space.

A "spiritual" experience can and will look different for each person. As leaders, the assumption that we can somehow **provide** a spiritual experience is short sighted. A spiritually nurturing environment is one that opens the way for individuals to find space and time within their own experiences to be attentive to their spiritual needs. It means having time and the conscience to be in awe of nature and relax in its beauty. It may mean offering open time for individuals to meditate, pray, journal, practice yoga, or simply be silent. It may also mean having a variety of spiritual practices available for people if they want them. As leaders we have initiated sunrise, sunset, and northern light watches, and predawn canoeing as the mist rises; drawn labyrinths in the sand, offered scripture passages or poems, and readings for women to interpret, shared our own yoga practice, and led meditative practices. Just as often, if not more frequently, participants have offered to share their practices with others and to enter into the spiritual space at the invitation of another. Openness and acceptance are paramount and by

setting a stage where the spiritual realm is openly honored offers permission for others to enter into that space at their own level of experience and comfort. Nature often offers an opening.

Each woman brings her own particular unique gifts, fears, needs, and offerings. Although at first glance this may seem obvious, feminist leadership brings to light some of the assumptions that can exist without awareness of the impact those assumptions have. For example, community organizers and ecologists share an understanding that diversity can strengthen communities and is often a sign of healthy communities. Embracing diversity helps communities be sustainable. Leaders modeling diversity awareness and pluralism help participants to learn from differences and to understand the importance of protecting biodiversity, as well as to accept many expressions of spirituality.

The historical masculine view of wilderness which is deeply influenced by early nineteenth century Judeo-Christianity as something to be conquered, attacked, tamed, subdued, etc., is evidence less of a faulty spiritual view of nature than of a distorted view of one's relationship with that spiritual context. Again, a feminist approach to wilderness brings one's attention back to spiritual intention. In contrast, when leaders attempt to push, pull, or in any way coerce a participant into character building, empowerment, awakening, or growth, by insinuating an inherent value in risk-taking, and challenge, the leader risks asserting a perceived agenda instead of providing a nurturing space for the experience. In "How to Know God", Deepak Chopra (2001) describes the perils of risk-taking with a lack of spiritual intention. This lack of spiritual intention is a wakening call to every facet of leadership. Chopra refers to the feeling of power one feels when successful in a risk situation as the cheapest way to feed the ego. He believes

that the concept of *I want to prove myself by taking risks* doesn't add to one's spiritual growth. It can lead to a seemingly stronger ego; however, the ego will not be satisfied, and so the original problem will not be solved. Instead, the desire to have more power often arises, leading to taking more risks, and so on. Other research has noted that risk taking can promote egocentric behavior, impulsiveness, and lack of impulse control; all risk factors in a number of psychological disorders from excessive gambling and use of alcohol to petty theft (Whittingham, 2005 as cited in Mitten & Whittingham, 2009).

As women, we value relationships and connections which shape the way we view nature, instill in us a spiritual “way of being” within the natural world, and impact the ways in which we lead. Like in friluftsliv, the purpose is not to teach or even impose a certain set of beliefs or preordained responses and reactions to or about nature but to allow nature to be the space in which spiritual connections are discovered.

### ***Wilderness for its Own Sake: The Temptations of Risk and Stress***

In women's programming it has been important not to use the wilderness as a means to an end, but rather to be in the wilderness or outdoors for its own sake. Some mainstream adventure education groups use the outdoors as a proving ground and a way to reach accomplishments. As mentioned above, this is often done through taking risks and completing challenges. Taking risks can help one feel powerful and also can help one feel superior. In the case of outdoor adventure education, risk-taking without intention can occur at the expense of the environment and others. That is why our intention as leaders is so crucial—Have we thoroughly looked at

how participants might interpret their experiences? For example, a person may see running whitewater rapids as a spar between the rapids and her or him. When that person successfully runs the rapids, does he or she feel as if the rapids have been “beaten” and that the self is better than others who chose not to run the rapids or participate on the trip? Some people climb a mountain and talk about having conquered the mountain or having conquered their fears rather than having worked with their fears (knowing that some fear is appropriate). This does not necessarily have to be the outcome, but in our experiences, the language and behaviors of leaders can reinforce these sometimes subtle but very real contrasting outcomes of being in the wilderness for its own sake or using it as a testing ground.

Along with avoiding indiscriminate risk taking, adding stress to trips to help participants challenge themselves can have harmful consequences and can cause participants to see their experiences as tests. Examples of added stress include instructors withholding pertinent information (perhaps not telling students that they are taking an incorrect trail); a course structure in which the final destination, not the process, is the focus; instructors surprising participants with changes in timing or logistics; limiting food, water or rest; and participants not receiving adequate pre-trip information in order to feel prepared.

These kinds of stresses can cause people to feel alienated from each other, the group, the leaders, and/or the environment. With too much stress, people’s judgment can be impaired which may lead to unsafe situations or injury. In addition, if people bond under stress it is often bonding together against something, possibly the environment, or another person, leading to scapegoating or groups fracturing. For some people, bonding under stress can feel familiar and

even comfortable. However, bonding under stress or duress usually does not lead to sustainable community building and receptivity to friluftsliv, nor does it in the long run increase self-esteem.

Additional stress can be caused when individuals feel they have a lack of choice within adventure experiences. Long before the concept of choice was offered in mainstream adventure programming, feminist leaders were creating a programmatic environment that offered their participants choice; choice that encouraged and empowered women to claim their own voice and power within their outdoor adventure experiences (Mitten, 1985; Tyson and Asmus, 2008). In the past 10 years, the terminology “challenge by choice” has become widely accepted in mainstream adventure education as a concept that provides participants with the option to choose their level of challenge.

However, challenge by choice operates under an assumption that some level of challenge is required. In contrast, choice, as practiced from a feminist perspective allows individual participants the opportunity to determine their level of participation from the outset without the assumption that genuine participation is necessarily synonymous with experiencing challenge. Such an approach to choice-making within the context of a wilderness experience is vital when considering the impact of leadership behavior on group norms and groups interactions with nature. Authentic choice within the adventure experience provides participants with opportunities to claim their own unique experiences, offers participants space to encounter the natural environment in a non-threatening way, and encourages a spiritual bond with nature.

Women’s programming typically avoids contrived stress, and leaders help participants learn to manage stress. This stress management helps people be receptive to a culture of friluftsliv and includes quiet time in nature, again reinforcing friluftsliv. Participants also have useful stress

management skills when they return home. Some leader or guide actions that help participants manage stress and be receptive to friluftsliv include:

- Modeling and teaching participants how to feel comfortable in the outdoors, helping students get out of a survival mode; and prioritizing being dry and comfortable, carrying manageable loads, and being well rested,
- Having participants talk about their expectations at the beginning of a trip,
- Having a trip itinerary that allows time for spontaneous group initiated endeavors and leaves time for participants to process experiences, relax and enjoy alone time,
- Modeling and encouraging appreciation, awe and acceptance of nature,
- Creating an environment that encourages and promotes experience and outdoor competency instead of risk and challenge,
- Modeling and teaching participants to be realistic about what they can do,
- Teaching that safety depends on caring for one's personal needs and including reducing stress or being aware of stress when it occurs managing it,
- Letting group members "bond" at their own pace—not having instructors initiate artificial situations or games. (If group members are put into artificial situations and there has not been enough time for a solid base of trust among them, then these encounters become stressful and the trust that seems to be formed at the end of games is primarily an expression of relief that the encounter is over. As well, the process may be viewed as placating the leaders' wishes, and is often accompanied by feelings of loss, guilt and embarrassment.),

- Making fun a priority.

### *Generally Seeing Women's Strengths as Assets to Trips*

Leaders having an attitude that participants do not need to be changed or “taught” in order to be good enough to be in the outdoors creates an inclusive and welcoming trip atmosphere (Mitten, 1985). This includes the belief that women and women’s strengths are assets to outdoor trips. Because of our collective experience as women, as well as our experience in this culture as mothers, daughters, and sisters, women generally come on trips understanding the importance of nurturing, compassion, and connections. The **way** women are is not something that should be diminished; these traits are our strengths and assets, not our weaknesses. These attributes for some indicate a gendered morality present through the ages and named as an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984).

While women generally do not intentionally use the outdoors as a testing or proving ground, there most likely will be challenges and maybe even hardships during outdoor trips. During challenges or hardships women typically show caring and nurturing behavior toward each other or a person having a hard time. This behavior has been described as “tend and befriend” and is in contrast to the more publicized “fight or flight” reaction to hardship, challenge, and stress (Taylor, 2002). During hardships, women tend to build alliances and work as a group to conserve and share resources or develop solutions. This attachment to other group members and women’s tendency to nurture and care in the face of hardship is a positive attribute.

Honoring the ways in which women's unique attributes are assets to programs is just as important as helping women realize when they have compromised themselves as a result of these same attributes. One way we have seen this play out in the wilderness setting is in women's propensity to say "yes". We are not saying that yes is by any means a dirty word but in our experience, often women will say yes to an activity or a request at the expense of their own needs in order to prevent hurting another's feelings or letting someone down. In this way we have come to see that it is often important to celebrate when women are able to say "no" as readily as when they say yes.

An epic struggle for many women has been in response to many of the deeply held views of women depicted in both current literature and in ancient and mythological references as the princess (maiden), the witch, the temptress, and the all-sacrificing mother and wife archetypes. Our experience has been that during outdoor trips women compare their collective thoughts about society's categories for them. In part, because of the nurturing natural environment and the strength that comes from being in the wilderness, women can find their own identities including the caring and responsible mother, the wise and strong crone, the fierce mother protector (mother lion or mother bear), the loving life-giving spirit, and others. And women can don different identities every day.

By honoring the feminine in each of us we can, by extension, offer women the opportunity to understand their own needs and to value those needs. Time in nature with a culture of friluftsliv reinforces women's strengths.

## **Summary**

Historically, Western women have interacted with nature in markedly different ways than their male counterparts, as chronicled by women adventurers through the ages. When Mitten (1985) traveled throughout the Western US visiting a number of women's outdoor programs, she found in them the same congruency of values, namely a respect for and an embracing of the natural world, a desire for the participants to know the place in which they traveled, a rejection of the natural world as an arena for testing physicality, and a genuine openness and embracement of diversity. The authors have shown that women join trips with a combination of care and a sense of responsibility, concern for others, and the ability to make connections with other people.

The authors of this paper argue that while there may be a socially constructed gender difference that has helped fuel this gender difference in programming, the leaders' pedagogy and the leadership behavior during an adventure education program does not have to depend on gender. Women and men both have many opportunities in adventure education to encourage or discourage a culture of *friluftsliv*.

Women have offered leadership in outdoor programs in the US that helps women embrace *friluftsliv*. In general, women outdoor leaders embody *friluftsliv* and consider nature their home. The leaders' behaviors have a significant impact on the group norms, including the group members' interactions with nature. Structural norms, as well as program components chosen by the organization's staff or the leaders, impact how easily a culture of *friluftsliv* can occur. Everything from pre-trip information, participant introductions, trip pace, decision-making structures, language used by the leaders, challenge and stress components of the trip, and closure, goes into the mix of helping create a trip atmosphere conducive to *friluftsliv*. Practical examples

of these attributes and leadership actions that help engage trip participants in sustainable relationships with nature have been named and discussed in this paper.

While women's programming has developed asymmetrically from mainstream adventure education programming, women's underpinning work in women's organizations has contributed to some of the recent changes in mainstream adventure education programming. Women practitioners' contributions have consistently introduced and encouraged the continuation of growth in our partnership with nature through adventure education programming. Through constructive criticism from women and men and modeling by women's organizations, change will continue to occur in mainstream outdoor adventure education practice.

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