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**Women's Experiences in the Gendered
Environment of Outdoor Education in Aotearoa
New Zealand – *"I felt a need to prove my right to
be there"*.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Education in Adult Education

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Abstract

This study researches women's experiences working in the gendered environment of Outdoor Education within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Outdoor Education in Aotearoa New Zealand has been strongly influenced by both British and American interpretations and has evolved as a traditionally male gendered environment with normative measures of competence based on physical strength, speed and technical ability. Most women choosing to work in this environment have internalised the gender neutral discourse of outdoor education, accepting the measures of competence and entering as 'conceptual males'. This approach has costs, not only for the women but also for their families and students. Insights gained from listening to the voices of women sharing their lived experiences highlight costs and issues that must be addressed to create change for the future.

This research was undertaken using a feminist narrative perspective. Purposive sampling was used to identify women who had worked in outdoor education for a significant length of time. Semi-structured interviews were held with each woman to gather their experiences told through their own voices. The author's own voice narrating her own lived experiences working in outdoor education is woven through the study. The experiences of the four respondents are presented in the form of mini case studies and interpreted through narrative enquiry.

The respondent's stories suggest that they had entered outdoor education as conceptual males and had proven their right to be there against the male gendered measures of competence. Impacts resulting from doing this included doubting their competence, lack of confidence and constant feelings of pressure to improve and achieve more. All respondents followed an age related 'career' path showing a shift with focus on self being displaced by increased relational influences as they aged. Crossing the watershed to motherhood caused the women to address the competing discourses of good mothering and ideal worker and reassess their priorities.

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