The hidden turmoil: Females achieving longevity in the outdoor learning profession

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Abstract

Being a woman in the outdoor learning profession can bring distinctive challenges and roadblocks. Even more difficult is sustaining a life-long career, flourishing into a woman's 50s or 60s. Based on this premise, career longevity seems elusive for some women who aspire to work in the outdoors. This paper analyses the autobiographies of three experienced Australian female outdoor educators who have successfully navigated careers in the outdoor profession. Four key emergent themes were identified in the women's life histories that included: orientation towards the outdoors; decisions and motivations for entering the field; career opportunities; and challenges. Their narratives exemplify the accomplishments of women with distinguished careers in the outdoor profession and highlight various manifestations of burnout. Finally, the findings shed light upon factors that allow women to achieve career longevity.

Keywords: Females, Outdoor Learning Profession, Outdoor Education, Career Longevity, Burnout

Introduction

Historically, adventure education, wilderness programs and outdoor activities have been portrayed as masculine and 'testosterone driven', involving strength, risk and unknown outcomes (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989; Humberstone, 2000; Loeffler, 1997; Warren, 1985 & 1996b). Both authors have experienced firsthand the ways that women in outdoor fields face stigmas – that we are necessarily masculine or overly 'butch' – or that we must unflinchingly face any challenge, with fearless determination and a cup of 'toughen-up'. Erroneously, any failure is taken to indicate that women do not belong in the outdoor learning field. This conundrum is the double bind of prejudice: on the one hand, treated as inadequate or even odd for wanting to be in the field, but also subjected to unrelenting scrutiny and judgment, and held to a higher standard.

Adventure magazines traditionally have been located in the 'men's interest' section of print media aisles, implicitly endorsing the idea that the great outdoors as a 'male domain' (Henderson, 1992; Kiewa, 2001; Mitten & Ross, 1990). Despite these stereotypical roadblocks, women have accomplished remarkable feats in the outdoors (Bialeschki, 1992; Humberstone, Brown & Richards, 2003; Warren, 1996b). For instance, they have climbed the world's highest peaks, cycled across vast lands, explored and surveyed unmapped regions, sailed solo around the globe and paddled some of our most treacherous rivers. Stories of legendary outdoor women have long inspired many young women; from childhood fairytales such as Goldilocks or Little Red Riding Hood, to more recent women of courage in the twentieth century, including aviator Amelia Earhart, Karen Blixen in Africa or Jane Goodall and her ground-breaking work with chimpanzees. These stories push against socially imposed limits and redefine the outdoors as a universal playground and learning environment for all, regardless of gender.

As female outdoor educators, both authors are cognizant of our ability to combine two great passions: the outdoors and education. Seldom, however, do women maintain long-term employment in the outdoor learning profession given its arduous nature and unconventional operations (Edwards & Gray, 1998). Additionally, the outdoor industry is associated with technical prowess and physical competence. Gender-based socialisation often clouds women's perceptions of success, creating a lonely journey for those who choose to remain (Loeffler, 1995; Warren & Loeffler, 2006).

An intractable problem for both female authors in the outdoor profession was feeling either dissuaded or torn between family roles and career longevity. Female outdoor leaders, when attempting to explain their career choice, are either pigeon-holed as "adventure women" or as "teachers," neither of which completely describe our role.

As women actively involved in the outdoor learning profession, we recognise periods of peace and turmoil in our respective journeys. Within the backdrop of experiential learning, we attempt to capture, analyse and share these experiences in order to unite and acknowledge women. The primary motivation for this paper is the desire to understand the etiological factors that have enabled women to achieve career longevity or bolstered their resilience.

In addition, we seek to share the voices of three Australian women who have flourished in their respective outdoor learning vocations. An important dimension of this study was to understand the motives of women entering the profession and the impact of burnout as their career unfolded.

Gender trends in outdoor pursuits

A number of studies have explored women's experiences and perceptions of adventure (Bialeschki, 1992; Boniface, 2006; Mitten & Woodruff, 2010; Pohl, Borrie & Patterson, 2000; Warren, 1996a) and the importance of leisure activities for women (Henderson, 1990; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1994). Collectively, the research suggests positive social and behavioural benefits for women. In addition, Little's (2002) research found that women continually negotiate social and psychological boundaries to participate in adventure recreation.

The social norms, bolstered by a popular media trafficking in stereotypes, are shifting as women prioritise their responsibilities and pursue their adventure goals. Women find value and meaning from adventurous pursuits: "rather than passively accepting or even acknowledging constraints … women were active; creative participants constructing personally satisfying environments and life stories" (Little, 2002, p.172). Although individual definitions of 'adventure' may vary, a growing consensus holds that inclusive communities untainted by gender stereotypes rejuvenate women for their work in the world (Boniface, 2006). In response to social and psychological research, outdoor education trends are moving away from "quest" and "conquering" activities towards themes of "journey" and "empowerment". This paradigm shift has favoured female involvement and association with the out-of-doors (Simpson, 1991).

Within psychological research on employee motivation, it is widely accepted that personal values relevant to life experiences influence attitudes towards work and vocational choice. Irrevocably, our values and beliefs significantly affect job satisfaction, commitment and work motivation (Judge & Bretz, 1992; Roe & Ester, 1999). Job motives, unlike work values, refer to an individual's orientation, drive or incentive towards an activity or occupation (Buchanan & Huczynski, 1997). This cultural and motivational shift implies that the increased value of outdoor pursuits for women could subsequently inspire unique vocational pursuits.

Research into the motives of those entering the teaching professions revealed three primary factors lead people to choose the field: 1) extrinsic factors, referring to the nature of the work; 2) intrinsic factors, especially passion and personal conviction; and 3) altruistic factors related to a holistic desire to inspire change in individuals and society (Andrews & Hatch, 2002; Bastick, 2000; De Cooman, et.al, 2007). Some literature has suggested that altruism is the major reason individuals pursue teaching careers (Brown, 1992; Hayes, 1990; Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat, & McClune, 2001, cited in De Cooman, et al. 2007). These factors may correlate to the motives of outdoor leaders given that teaching is the most closely related profession.

Women working in the outdoor learning profession

An increase in the number of women in outdoor learning vocations, we believe, arises less from wanting to conquer a "male-dominated" field and more about a deep desire to be immersed in an environment that encourages discovery and freedom (Bartley & Williams, 1988; Colley, 1984; McKenna, 1997): "satisfaction and achievement on a personal basis rather than in the terms of societal expectations" (Allin, 2003, p. 235). The relationship between "job" and "experience" is more prevalent in recent times as career direction results in the post-industrial world from an evaluation of personal values and interests (Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel, 2008).

Research into hiring trends in the outdoor adventure field indicated a substantial increase of women in positions of responsibility between 1983 and 1997 (Garvey & Gass, 1999). In addition Garvey and Gass (1999) and Munge (2007) report that hiring preferences included employers' desire for institutional qualifications, technical skills and personal experience. Medina (2001) explored employment opportunities, positions, job responsibilities and training backgrounds of outdoor educators and adventure leaders in North America. She found the difference in gender by position was within university faculty, coordinators and instructors. Interestingly,

> … the four highest represented positions by males were, director (28.1%), instructor (11.2%), coordinator (9%), and professor (9%). The four highest represented for females were, director (24.6%), coordinator (18.4%), instructor (15.8%) and teacher (7.9%). (Medina, 2001, p.153)

An emerging balance in leadership suggests that the number of women in management positions will continue to grow as a result of women increasingly attaining academic degrees. This development begs the question, *how have the women in these positions navigated the challenges of the profession?*

The continuing dilemma for women in outdoor vocations is the paradox between ambition and social expectations (Jordan, 1991; Knapp, 1985; Warren, 1996a; Wittmer, 2001). The perception exists that

"superwoman" status must be obtained before a woman can rank as an advanced outdoor leader (Warren, 1996a). The female outdoor myth includes having strength beyond one's stature and an ability to "demonstrate competence in all outdoor skills… she will carry the heaviest pack with a smile and she demonstrates complete command of her camp, stove, compass and canoe" (p.15). The pursuit of this status can drive women to bear loads beyond their male counterparts in a bid for gender parity. This perspective is endorsed by Teal (1994), who argued that women guides often feel the pressure to be even better than the men to be accepted. Belief (or perhaps fear) of this illusion may contribute to burnout or early exit of women from the outdoor industry; women may be discouraged or drained by their own elevated expectations and desire to over-compensate.

Allin and Humberstone's (2006) investigation of "careership" in outdoor education, explored the work experience of two female outdoor educators in Britain. Their testimonies reveal the economic realities and short-term nature of outdoor employment and highlight that gender socialization continues to shape the career decisions of women. Women's discomfort and pattern of early exit from the career lifts the veil on the reality that the outdoor profession is yet to attain a gender neutral position. Allin (2000) finds that many women continuing in the outdoor profession have conformed to a "male dominated" environment, and have pursued competence within those parameters. Women are faced with a choice between adapting or pursuing a deeper change in the field: "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" (Lugg, 2003, p. 33).

In this paper, we attempt to elucidate consistencies in career decisions among three Australian outdoor educators. Boniface (2006) argues that, despite the growing research clarifying and supporting women's experiences outdoors, we face a continuing need to hear genuine stories rather than simply discuss prevailing perceptions. The authors are acutely interested in understanding both the opportunities and challenges experienced by women throughout their careers.

Sustainability issues in the outdoor learning profession

Burnout, a work-related syndrome predominantly affecting those employed in face-to-face service roles, "is conceptualised as a three-dimensional phenomenon consisting of exhaustion, depersonalisation and unaccomplishment" (Friedman, 2000, p.598). The condition is not limited to individuals' emotions, but rather infused with environmental and experiential factors (Lambert, 1994).

Researchers have speculated about the root causes of fatigue, tedium and burnout within the outdoor profession (Birmingham, 1989; Edwards & Gray, 1998; Gray & Birrell, 2005). Thomas (2001) investigated the causes of stress for outdoor practitioners and determined that irrespective of role diversity within the profession, the leading factors were: time constraints, relationship difficulties, job characteristics and employee preparation as well as perceptions of the profession's value. Moreover, Thomas (2002/2003) highlighted the initiatives employed by managers to alleviate those challenges. This research confirms the multi-dimensional nature and management of burnout and suggests,

> … given the potential for burnout for employees in the outdoor profession, preventative strategies should become enshrined and incorporated into outdoor education organisation philosophy and administration procedures. (Thomas, 2002/2003, p.61)

Based on this premise, the viability and sustainability of our profession must come under the researcher's microscope. Our study investigates the experiences of three female outdoor educators over the span of their careers (> 5yrs), and consequently provides greater insights into the manifestations and management of burnout in the outdoor learning field. Friedman and Farber (1992) researched the relationship between teacher self-concept and burnout and found that professional satisfaction, which is the gratification experienced from work, decreases symptoms of burnout. Interestingly, altruistic teachers — those focused on influencing others and cultural change — have a higher tolerance for the stress inherent in teaching (Friedman & Farber, 1992). Furthermore, they suggest that collaborative initiatives focused on intrinsic rewards for the classroom and teachers prove effective in combating burnout.

Friedman and Farber (1992) concluded that establishing strong self-concepts amongst women would increase professional satisfaction and reduce the frequency of "burning out" in the early years of career development. Farber (2000) investigated burnout amongst teachers and found three types of dissatisfaction. Faber termed these three types: (1) "Worn-out", (2) "Classic/Frenetic", and (3) "Under Challenged". Worn-out teachers essentially surrender because the stress or constraints outweigh gratification. Classic/Frenetic teachers are uncompromising in their pursuit of accomplishment to the point of exhaustion. Under challenged individuals are not faced with excessive stresses; rather, they are confronted by tedious, repetitive, un-stimulating work with inadequate incentive (Farber, 2000). Thomas (2002/2003) noted that all three subtypes of burnout arise in outdoor education.

In this study we look at women who have successfully achieved longevity in the outdoor fields and attempt to better understand how they avoid or recover from the various types of burnout in the field. Lastly, we address the effect of burnout on female practitioners, and how it can affect their direction or perception of the outdoor professions. Gray and Birrell (2005) posit that burnout may be endemic in the outdoor profession, especially for women. Those who have been to 'burnout and back' emerge with renewed self-discovery, increased self-efficacy and matured perspectives on life balance. What are their stories? By obtaining a clearer picture of the types of burnout experienced by women, we hope that the field has a clearer understanding about sustainable pathways for practitioners.

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative approach and involves the collection of "spoken data" from a small sample of participants (n=3) to ascertain the dispositions, etiological factors, motives and values associated with longevity in the outdoor professions. Interviews involved dialogue around a designated topic or theme and were particularly useful at getting to the story behind personal experience, as well as women's own narrative framing of their career trajectories.

Despite evidence that women are achieving an enhanced quality of life through participation in outdoor adventure pursuits (Lloyd & Little, 2005; Henderson, 1992; Mitten, 1992), a voice for women in the outdoors is still somewhat limited. The life histories methodology extracts the insider's perspectives as the subject recounts events, history or personal experience (Tierney, 2000). The method is also well suited to explore attitudes, values, beliefs and motives indirectly, by seeing how they emerge in autobiographical recollection. This approach provides insights into an individual's strategies, resources, opportunities, aspirations, constraints and turning points.

Life histories originate from considering both the 'foreground' of life — our experience — and the 'background' influencing life — our social and historical contexts. This conceptual framework is crucial to interpreting narratives and formulating research conclusions (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). We sought to investigate and present these women's life histories in a manner that provides depth and significance, appreciating the complex nature of their lives and, indeed, the outdoor industry itself. This method provides an ideal instrument to represent the experiences of minority groups in order to bring about social change. Dhunpath (2000) argues that this approach is "the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience" (p.544).

The three women in this study, whose identities are protected with pseudonyms, are currently working in the outdoor profession. Variety is reflected in their age, organisational backgrounds, career experience and specialisation. Liza is the director of programs at a large outdoor education provider. Her breadth and depth of experience in facilitating, leading and coordinating residential camping, environmental education and community recreation programs spans twenty-five years in both the USA and Australia. Jackie is an assistant to the director of outdoor education at a large city secondary school. She has been developing her skills and guiding for six years. Her current role entails administrative responsibilities and outdoor facilitation. Lucy has more than thirty years experience in a variety of educational settings leading to her current coordinator and teaching position in tertiary education. She started her professional career as a secondary teacher and has worked closely with educational communities to develop and implement unique programs.

This study emerged from a minor thesis embedded within a postgraduate course. The face-to-face interviews were conducted to obtain a manageable sample of data; consequently the life histories reflect concise, focused biographies. The guiding questions included:

- Subjectively narrate your journey as an outdoor professional. What are the meaningful experiences that have inspired you to continue so long?
- How long have you been in the outdoor industry?
- What influenced or attracted you to the outdoors?
- When was it that you first entertained "the long haul" in the outdoor field?
- Are there patterns or cycles of movement people follow through the industry?
- How has gender influenced your experience or decisions?
- Can you associate with Farber's (2000) types of burnout? Explain.
- What is your strategy for sustainability?
- As you consider your service to the industry, what have been your greatest challenges or accomplishments?

Once the data was obtained, the manuscript was returned to the participants for checking. Upon receipt of the participants' approval, the data was carefully analysed to identify concept patterns and themes in relation to career-decisions. Lastly, we have compared and discussed these consistencies in relation to research of professional satisfaction and Faber's (2000) typology of burnout.

Results and Discussion

Several emergent core topics were identified in the life histories, including: 1) orientation towards the outdoors; 2) decisions and motivations for entering the field; 3) career opportunities; and 4) challenges. The women all began their biographies with reflections on childhood memories. They conveyed a sense of gratitude for positive connections to the outdoors, which in turn stimulated a desire to explore and appreciate natural learning environments. The avenues of opportunity they presented highlight the subtle influence of socio-historical factors on career trajectory. Furthermore, their experiences reveal a relationship between personal and professional satisfaction (motivation) and burnout for outdoor women.

Orientation towards the outdoors

Liza grew up one street from the beach and has fond childhood memories of life as a "beach bum". In these years she developed love and affinity for the ocean and being outdoors. While these early experiences influenced Liza's disposition towards the outdoors, she did not attribute her career path to this experience. However, she did anchor her enthusiasm for experiential education in her experiences as an aunt at the age of twelve,

> I instantly learned something about myself; I loved to observe learning and create opportunities for them [the children] to be excited about learning. (Liza)

Like Liza, Lucy spent a lot of time outside as a child; in creeks building dams and exploring. "For me this had a big influence on my fondness to be outdoors, rain, hail or shine". The combined exposure to the Girl Guides movement, weekends away camping and family holidays to her uncle's farm influenced Lucy's enjoyment in the outdoors and small communities.

> I used to just love this; we didn't do traditional "adventurous" activities, we were simply outdoors, living, milking the cows, being in the paddocks, shooting, fishing and rabbit catching; this was genuine fun for me. (Lucy)

As a young woman Lucy was also enthusiastic about sport and had many opportunities in leadership roles. Opportunities came naturally to her as she participated in many athletic pursuits and refers to these early experiences as "connections to the outdoors".

Jackie grew up in a country town where being outdoors was an integral part of living in a farming community. She loved being active and spent her younger years learning from experiences on the farm. In year eight she attended an outdoor education program with her school and distinctly remembers going home thinking, "that [outdoor education] would be a great lifestyle and exciting job" (Jackie).

Unbridled freedom and early encounters in nature were instrumental factors in shaping a positive disposition towards the outdoors. Bourdieu (1984) identifies this experience as habitus, where both home and school generate or regulate pursuits. In turn, aspirations are learnt from opportunities made possible to the individual (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) and the connection to the natural environment proves critical to the development of identity for these women.

Decisions and motivations for entering the field

Liza's entry into employment in the outdoors can be understood in light of Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) careership model which suggests that vocational decisions are based on an individual's "horizons for action" (p.34). 'Horizons for action' are the opportunities that individuals believe are available to them. For example, Liza's economic situation could not initially support university education; nonetheless, she was intentional about her decisions to move into the hospitality industry and motivated by the prospect of travel. Collectively, these experiences were important in her career history as they solidified her passion for training staff and mentoring young people.

> I started to realise that once I learnt a skill, I could easily pass it onto someone else in a fun and very hands-on way... Various leadership roles over the years offered me purpose, and allowed me to consider and negotiate exactly what skills I have and needed to establish a path forward. I've been lucky that at each point of change, there has been a really challenging opportunity to jump to. I have always asked myself "is there opportunity to challenge myself here, an opportunity to learn?" (Liza)

These life experiences correspond to Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) sociological model for career turning points. Career change can be due to three factors: firstly, "structural", which is the influence of external factors; secondly, "self-initiated", driven by an individual's desire for change; or lastly "forced", sparked by an event or circumstance out of the individual's control. Jackie's story reveals her 'horizons for action' resulted in a structural turning point, the completion of her schooling. Coming from a family of educators, she reflects on the pressure to pursue further education and an esteemed profession,

> There was an expectation that I would go to university and follow socially accepted pathways. However, in year twelve I was still searching; I knew that I wanted be involved in something that invested in helping people and involved genuine relationship. I looked into medical vocations and teaching. However, I didn't want to pursue an avenue without real conviction (Jackie).

Jackie's attraction to the outdoors was grounded in a strong desire to see lives transformed; in addition, she had a friend exemplifying this professional avenue. Jackie alludes to an intrinsic desire to be challenged and engaged and, learning outside the institutionalised curricular she had experienced over the previous twelve years.

Enjoyment of sport and physical activity is an unmistakable feature of Lucy's early identity. "I played a lot of competitive sport which influenced my decision to go to university and study" (Lucy). Lucy's initial motives for pursuing opportunities out-of-doors grew from a desire to construct meaningful learning environments that transferred learning to life. At this turning point in the late 1970s, there was no formal outdoor education association in Australia.

> Physical activity came naturally to me, and I was oblivious to the fact that ninety-five percent of the population would hate it. I realised that kids didn't fit, but I wasn't quite sure what it was that would be good… I remembered the stuff with the [Girl] Guides, and so I began doing some 'hardtop' activity camps at which I guided canoeing. These outdoor programs and activities were quite haphazard; however, I found it rewarding and interesting that the students began to respond. There was still little around in relation to what "it" was we were "doing" outdoors (Lucy).

Again Lucy's career decisions are consistent with Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) careership theory suggesting that "socialising", "evolutionary" and "dislocating" routines surrounding identity leverage against turning points. For example, the self-initiated transitions in Lucy's professional life suggest "evolutionary routines", a gradual shift in her identity. She moved beyond the athletic abilities of her youth into the outdoor profession through serendipitous teaching opportunities. Her deep interest in a theoretical understanding of experiential education was fuelled by curiosity about a friend's international study in adventure education. Lucy recognises her fortune in working alongside and being mentored by some influential and inspirational people.

> I was interested in what was going on with outdoor education internationally; I felt that what I was doing was not enough... I really wanted to know why. In the summers I worked with some inspirational people that led me to pursue study (overseas) where I completed a Masters in Outdoor Education. Following this I was approached to teach at a tertiary institution (Lucy).

These testimonies introduce a basis for understanding career decisions and the negotiation of various opportunities; however, beyond these experiences lies a deep conviction driving a dedication to this field.

> I have always been motivated as an educator … I love being in education and working with people in the outdoors. Anything I do in the outdoors is refreshing, creative, and inspirational. The outdoors creates a level playing field [full of] opportunities for a person to learn about themselves in a small community [and] additionally about the environment and sustainability. This three-fold philosophy has become a researched mantra of Australian outdoor education - self, others and the natural world. (Lucy)

Scant evidence exists in these life histories to suggest these women entered the outdoor professions to accomplish their own adventure goals. Rather, they share a common interest in young people, the process of learning and the natural environment. Anecdotal discussions regarding longevity of outdoor leaders suggest that those with the "educator" disposition find joy in seeing others grow; the motivator isn't

the hike, it's the personal discovery experienced by the participants. Those "quest"-spirited leaders, in contrast, may get bored with walking the same path every day because their motivator is the hike rather than the people or their learning.

> The outdoors is not merely the backdrop for education; rather education is the justification to get outdoors. It is possible to groom people in the industry that have an appreciation for the outdoors and a desire to pass this onto others. They have a genuine ability to instil respect and learning (Liza).

Career Opportunities

The candidates all discussed various 'unique' opportunities they had encountered throughout their careers. While a degree of serendipity had some bearing on these prospects, the outcome remained consistent: new experiences stimulated positive professional self-concept. For example, although Jackie is at an early stage in her 'career', her story so far suggests the significant influence of consistent but varied opportunities.

> [In recent times] I have been exposed to more adventurous programs; these have increased my passion for outdoor experiential learning and skill development. I like expeditions and the process of a journey with people, the establishment of a "temporary community". An expedition allows a unique exposure to life without comforts, people simply have each other. The physical and relational challenge keeps me inspired (Jackie).

Likewise, in contemplating her second return to the USA Liza considered,

> …do I stay and be a big fish in a small pond, or leave to be a small fish in a big pond? I thought through the advantages and the magic of bringing people together from all sorts of backgrounds into a big melting pot and making it work... Benevolence opportunities presented greater opportunity to take underprivileged kids to camp – this opportunity was unique (Liza).

Identity and value are infused within these women's vocational journeys, and they navigate their career path with a "value compass" (McKenna 1997, p. 112). Ostensibly, women want their work to be meaningful with elements of challenge, flexibility and care. Jackie's description of her career reflects this:

> My character has been shaped by this profession. For some the "traditional work" environment may bring enough challenge. However, for me the opportunities, experience and challenges out of my control have absolutely changed who I am; I would not substitute this time for anything else (Jackie).

Jackie testifies that she outgrew her time as an instructor, and she continues to witness staff develop a boredom from routine programs that "deteriorate their heart" for the work. Returning to Farber's (2000) subtypes of burnout, "under-challenged" describes professionals that are neither overextended nor fatigued, they are simply unstimulated. Perhaps an important question to ask is: what level of responsibility do individual organisations take in coordinating professional development opportunities? Moreover, how do you facilitate variety without overextending individuals to stave off the danger of under-challenging staff?

Liza maintained that young people are attracted to outdoor leadership because of emerging beliefs about work-life balance. Flexible employment agreements enable staff to maintain their enthusiasm for work by experiencing a variety of programs and opportunities to diversify their skills.

> The outdoor industry potentially draw a higher percentage of people who align their personally philosophies with organisations and who are interested in making a difference in other people's lives – perhaps this is because we capture them when they are young. Unfortunately they "grow –up" and feel social pressure to "get a real job"; this is the result of an industry misunderstood (Liza).

Challenges

Although these stories reflect individual dispositions and various life stages, all three women reflected on periods of fatigue in their careers. The women represented in this study have experienced consistent autonomy, mastery and purpose in their career history resulting in a large degree of professional satisfaction. However, their stories bear witness to the challenge of work-life balance and the manifestations of burnout for those involved in outdoor education.

After two years in a demanding role, Jackie wrestles with options for the future. While she loves the outdoor profession and remains convinced of its effectiveness, managing healthy relationships and a family with her current role would be too difficult.

> I observe people trying to do this, and for me I identify too many sacrifices. Managing both would not align well with my beliefs and family values – To me family is number one under God. A role like my current one could be in conflict with this philosophy. A traditional progression would be to move into an administrative focused role; this for me would reduce opportunities to be involved in and observe change in people's lives (Jackie).

Lucy suggested that the "gypsy" lifestyle taken up by many professionals is less sustainable for women and is likely to influence their career choices.

> You can be the most passionate person and you still could move on potentially, it is very, very hard at the entry level, especially for women. I have found the retention rate for women to be shorter than that of men; I think because they [women] tire quicker from not being able to go home and/or have a base (Lucy).

Jackie's experience and Lucy's observations remind us of the broader social issues that affect professionals. Holland (1973), in his theory of vocational choice, suggests that vocational satisfaction, stability, and achievement depend on the consistency between abilities, values, and accomplishments. Jackie's expressions of compromise imply that this position will inevitably be incongruent with her values. Accordingly, these factors will influence job dissatisfaction. This situation highlights a key factor in understanding the mindset of those considering a long-term future in the outdoor profession.

The types of barriers to women's career progression are complex, but on a basic level there are internal and external barriers that arise out of our control. A 'forced transition' in Liza's career was when she became ill with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS). This 'dislocating routine' initiated a different rhythm for her work and life,

> At that point I asked myself, if you are going to make a life out of this, how can you do it? What will it take? I then switched into a different gear; instead of functioning in fourth, I would shift back to third and even first when the time allowed ... You actually have to be able to balance how much responsibility you take on (Liza).

Lucy's professional identity has been influenced by increased responsibility. In retrospect, the leadership roles in her professional career have induced stress and burnout. At one stage she attempted to manage the responsibilities as an executive director and an extensive daily commute. Not surprisingly, this arrangement was unsustainable. Leadership and responsibility introduced more pressure than her experiences teaching in the "field". Lucy's reflections emphasize deep conviction and motivation as well as her experience in anticipating overextension. These characteristics if mismanaged align with Farber's (2000) "classic" subtype of burnout, which suggests that exhaustion can result from an unrelenting investment to a significant outcome.

Gender-based challenges remain influential on the progression of women in the outdoor field. While gender-role socialisation doesn't limit Jackie's expressions of competence, it has challenged her to outdo her male co-leaders to be accepted as equal.

> I do feel there is a challenge to be a "macho", and be able to do everything. Even with logistics there have been expectations that I should be able to do it as well and as quickly as the guys can; for example, loading a canoe trailer, it is the stupidest idea ever, but I have found myself attempting it (Jackie).

Perhaps these gender-based challenges drive females to physical exhaustion. "Worn-out" professionals find themselves under increasing pressure to invest more of themselves (Farber, 2000). The pressure for women to defy gender-role stereotypes can also be burdensome. Jackie recalls a recent, predominantly male expedition, where her resolve to carry the heaviest pack and light the fires every night proved exhausting. Upon reflection, she realised that these were internalised expectations and that men value opportunities to lead and take on responsibility. This perspective is interesting in relation to Farber's (2000) subtypes, as he suggests that individuals are worn-down from dealing with environments perceived to be out of their control. In contrast, in her account, Jackie appears to have been worn-down by an attempt to remain in control of "her camp". This commitment to ideals exemplifies the frenetic "classic" type of burnout (Farber, 2000).

What is important about these challenges is their relationship with burnout. Maslach and Leiter (1997) maintain that the cause of burnout cannot be isolated to the individual nor the work environment; rather it is a "mismatch between the 'nature of the job' and

the 'nature of the person' who does the job" (p.9). We need to understand that outdoor leaders will manage their exposure to different challenges in various ways based on their intrinsic motivations. The professionals represented in this study in a sense are 'altruistic' educators; despite being more adaptive to extrinsic pressures, they appear more susceptible to "classic" burnout (Farber, 2000), in that their dedication to "others" and to the "cause", if unrestrained, eventually leads to exhaustion. While much can be done to improve extrinsic factors influencing career transitions, intrinsic factors are pivotal to longevity in the profession.

Conclusion

The three life histories reveal how women navigate their experiences of fatigue and burnout and achieve career longevity in the outdoors. Their attraction to the profession was initiated by early exposure and fed a disposition to the natural environment; clear intrinsic motivators influenced the negotiation of their careers. Intrinsic and altruistic factors were significant aspects of long-term engagement with outdoor leadership.

Participants in Allin and Humberstone's (2006) study encountered "turning points" because of contradictory gender dispositions and an unsustainable gypsy lifestyle. These external factors coupled with the anticipation of burnout influenced their transitions. Similarities exist within the life histories of our study with those articulated by Farber's (2000) subtypes of burnout. The findings indicate that these women were aware of how burnout manifests in their lives and were also cognizant of how to manage their career trajectories through the nature of their workplace choices.

Liza, Lucy and Jackie have chosen a profession that utilises the outdoors as a platform for learning. Individuals whose work is closely aligned with their interests, values, and skills, are still susceptible to burnout. Even when faced with extrinsic obstacles, they will persist for a greater purpose. These leaders must learn to understand their own limitations and find a balance between investment and renewal activities or, ironically, their high motivations can lead to particularly devastating career burnout.

The significance of these findings in relation to sustainable pathways is two-fold. Firstly, longevity in any field is maximised if an individual's personal philosophy aligns with organisational values. Therefore, organisations may benefit from developing these values in consultation with staff. Secondly, even women who were successful and managed lengthy careers in outdoor fields at times demonstrated signs of burnout and fatigue during their career trajectories. One danger of gender stereotypes is that feelings of fatigue might be misinterpreted as confirming women's unsuitability for these careers, rather than predictable and manageable career issues, especially given the intensity of many women's dedication to their jobs. Misunderstanding this phenomenon may result in professional dissatisfaction.

Career satisfaction cannot eventuate without adequate opportunity and support networks. There is a tendency for women to feel that they need to be "superwoman" in order to survive the physical, social and emotional demands of the outdoor work environment. This factor alone makes them more susceptible to burnout. The three women in this study affirm that we must value ourselves for who we are – not for what we do.

Finally, this study is limited in its exploration of the issues associated with job satisfaction and the manifestations of burnout. We focused on three women, and we caution that the findings cannot be generalised to a wider population group. However, comparative analysis of the experiences of men in outdoor education professions would be worthwhile in a bid to uncover what parallels do exist.

The salient message for managers in the field is that, when a workplace environment is flexible, challenging and purposeful, career longevity for women in the outdoors is amplified.

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