



Journal of Research in Gender Studies 9(1), 2019
pp. 174–175, ISSN 2164-0262, eISSN 2378-3524

BOOK REVIEW

The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Outdoor Learning

Tonia Gray (Western Sydney University)

Denise Mitten (Prescott College)

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 928 pages

978-3-319-53549-4

I recall being a wilderness trip guide in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Early on in my career, I was asked to lead an all women's trip. My response consisted of some offhanded commentary about not believing in gender segregated wilderness trips. Since that time, a lot has changed relevant to my own knowledge and understanding of women in outdoor learning and a lot has changed for me personally and professionally, impelling me to reconsider that short-sighted perspective. I am a professor of outdoor recreation and also the Director of a Social Justice and Equity Studies program at a Canadian university. I am delighted to have been asked to provide a review of *The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Outdoor Learning*.

The Table of Contents reads like a “Who’s Who” of significant women who are guiding, facilitating, researching, and celebrating the outdoors. The book’s focus is to move beyond the ways in which mainstream Western culture has typically marginalized both women and the land, subjugating both to a lesser status compared with men’s experiences, histories, and perspectives (p. 23). Co-editors Dr. Tonia Gray and Dr. Denise Mitten have well-established careers in outdoor leadership and recreation and are well-suited to bring together this excellent compilation, albeit a long one, totaling over 900 pages. The co-editors contend that the goal of the book is to provide an intersectional exploration of the various (sometimes colliding) elements of gender bias and inequalities in outdoor learning (p. 5). There is no doubt in my mind that they not only accomplish this goal but exceed it. The book is profoundly illuminating and educative and also incredibly refreshing as each contribution is written by a female author. Book sections include: 1) Setting the Scene; 2) Contested Spaces: Gender Disparity in

Outdoor Learning Environments; 3) Motherhood and Outdoor Learning Environments: Chaos and Complexity; 4) Leadership, Learning, Transformations, and Identity; 5) Case Studies of Women in Action; and 6) Towards an Inclusive and Nourishing Future for Women in Outdoor Learning Environments.

Some of the section chapters are more anecdotal in nature, telling stories of women's experiences in nature (4, 33, 39). Other chapters are more research based (6, 8, 18, 26, 35, 45, 52). A number of chapters provide an interesting historical review of influential programs and texts (2, 10, 17, 28, 40, 48). Among others, chapters 13, 15, 56, and 62 provide opportunities for action. Each chapter is written with great insight and acuity by women of all ages – indigenous women, mothers, daughters, students, queer women, and scholars. Chapters challenge previously-held hegemonic assumptions including: stereotypes about women, history of early adventurers, (dis)abilities, girl scouts, outdoor competencies, identity formation, and the myth of the Superwoman, among others.

This book provides a well-needed contribution to the field of outdoor learning and serves as a “must read” for both burgeoning and well-seasoned outdoor leaders, regardless of gender. In fact, male outdoor educators and facilitators (as well as women) would greatly benefit from investing time in learning from the authors' perspectives and histories as there exists a significant paucity of writing representing women's experiences generally.

The text is a compelling read; at times, you can almost hear the voices of these women and imagine them in the settings that they describe. *The Palgrave International Handbook of Women and Outdoor Learning* is a compilation that exudes vulnerability, strength, humility, perseverance, grace, humor, vision, and insight. I highly recommend this wonderful, new addition to the terrain of literature on outdoor learning.

Mary C. Breunig (California State University, Sacramento)