

DRESS LIKE A WOMAN, PADDLE LIKE A MAN: EXPLORING GENDERED
SUBJECTIVITIES IN WHITEWATER KAYAKING

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ABSTRACT

DRESS LIKE A WOMAN, PADDLE LIKE A MAN: EXPLORING GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES IN WHITEWATER KAYAKING

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Like many areas in the field of Experiential and Outdoor Education, the paddlesport industry is male dominated and struggles with misogyny, sexual harassment, and inequity (LaFortune, 2020; Langolis, 2018; Shilton, 2016). Whitewater kayaking is the most male-dominated paddlesport with men representing between 63% and 65% of all participants between 2013 and 2019 (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). Although that number remains high, male participation over all paddlesports is declining at about one percent per year as female participation increases by the same amount (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). Sport is a leading definer of masculinity in Western societies (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020). In particular, action sports like whitewater kayaking are often considered as a way to challenge or change cultural beliefs about gender (Comley, 2016, p. 2). I used narrative inquiry to explore how professional women kayakers perform their gender in the spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. To do this, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with professional women kayakers who started paddling before the age of 15. Using Polkinghorne's analysis of narratives (1995) and Lather's (1993) paralogical validity, I "restoryed" the participant narratives to create a four-part audio podcast. This podcast is one

method of Creative Analytic Practice. My results and discussion are combined with the theories of gender performativity (Butler, 1988) and discipline (Foucault, 1977) throughout the podcast.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The freestyle kayaking competition had just wrapped up, the scores were in, and we were hanging out next to the river. Soon, there were only two of us left chatting; it was now or never...

Before I could ask if he would buy me a six-pack of beer for the party later that evening, he surprised me with an unwelcome question: "Why don't you dress up for the awards ceremony tonight?" Catching me off guard, I replied indignantly: "What? Dress up how? I. Am. Dressed." He turned his full attention to me, pausing to look me up and down. I wondered what he was seeing, glancing down at myself as well. I sported purple Chaco sandals and black athletic shorts. My hair was tied up in a ponytail, mostly covered by a crooked black flat brim hat, and my bright blue t-shirt was baggy and branded with the logo of the kayak company I landed a sponsorship with the year before. I looked back at him as he spoke again: "Well yeah, but why don't you put some effort in? You could brush your hair and put on a dress and some makeup." I laughed, and feigned retching. "Ewww. That's not me. I don't like all that girl stuff. I don't even own makeup," I lied.

I grimaced again, and continued, "I just don't see the point; it seems like a lot of effort for nothing. Besides, people will look at me weird if I get dressed up. Why would I change now?" Beginning to feel uncomfortable, I looked back at the river and started to stand up from my seat on the bleachers, an excuse to leave just beginning to pass my lips, when he interrupted me. "Think about it. There are no other women out here getting dressed up after kayaking events. You would get more respect if you dressed like a woman. You'd look great, and it would help you to stand out from the other competitors! Don't you want people to see how pretty you are?"

What is the difference between dressing like a woman and dressing like a kayaker? Why is the image of a woman wearing a dress and makeup the representation of femininity that is valued? Would I be more respected if I paddled a pink kayak? Why is femininity valued differently in different contexts? I am interested in exploring the ways that women act, dress, and represent themselves within a sport that expects us to simultaneously dress like a woman and paddle like a man to be respected. With this in mind, the purpose of this thesis is to explore how self-identified women professional kayakers perform their gendered subject positions while negotiating the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater rivers and the kayaking community.

I am choosing to explore the construction of gender, subjectivity, and language in the context of whitewater kayaking, partially because that space is where I first began to think about what a woman is “expected” to be, and that continues to impact me today. Whitewater kayaking has gained popularity in the United States since the development of fiberglass kayak molds in the 1950s and the subsequent launch of commercial plastic kayak manufacturing (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). The paddlesports industry served 22.9 million U.S.-Americans in 2018, and whitewater kayaking makes up around 11% of that number, behind recreational kayaking, canoeing, rafting, sea kayaking, and stand-up paddling (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). Whitewater kayaking is an action sport that has received relatively little research, compared to other action sports like snowboarding or skateboarding.

Whitewater kayaking can be thought of as leisure, an action sport, and adventure recreation. I am primarily referring to it as an action sport throughout this paper because this research looks at the experiences of professional women kayakers. However, even professionals (when not competing or training) may kayak with friends as leisure, or organized adventure recreation, so I use these three different terms and related research to discuss kayaking

throughout this thesis. I define a professional kayaker as someone who receives compensation from a company, business, or brand, in the form of gear, money, or something else for their participation in whitewater kayaking. Additionally, I use the terms *kayaker* and *paddler* interchangeably to refer to people who use a whitewater kayak to navigate whitewater rivers. Kayakers use decked plastic or fiberglass boats with a double-bladed paddle and paddle from a seated position (rather than kneeling).

Although increasing numbers of women between the ages of 18 and 24 are participating, whitewater kayaking is the most male-dominated paddlesport, with men representing 63% to 65% of participants from 2013 to 2019 (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). These higher male participation rates are frequently seen in action sports and outdoor and adventure education (Gray, 2016; Gray et al., 2017; Olive et al., 2015; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Thorpe & Olive, 2016; Warren, 2015). Many of the first outdoor camps and programs catered exclusively to men and boys, particularly out fear of the idea that “the boys had become weak and needed to get in better physical shape” (Mitten, 2018, p. 28). Risk, challenge, and adventure are core values of outdoor education and defining characteristics of action sports; values typically associated with masculinity (Kennedy & Russell, 2020). Furthermore, traits perceived to be masculine continue to be prioritized within outdoor leadership (Gray et al., 2020), while traits perceived as feminine have been considered less important. Perhaps because of this divide, gender is arguably the most researched aspect of social justice in outdoor recreation, education, and action sports (Rogers & Rose, 2019; Thorpe & Olive, 2016). The research has illuminated challenges that women face in balancing the constrictions of the gender binary (Gray et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Thorpe & Olive, 2016).

Recent data have shown that male participation across all paddlesports is declining at about one percent per year between 2016 and 2018, from 55% to 53%, as female participation increases by the same amount, from 45% to 47%; an increase of 458,000 women across three years (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). As women enter these spaces in growing numbers and navigate their roles in this industry, it is essential to understand how women perform and negotiate their gendered subject positions in these spaces and continuously deconstruct harmful narratives, such as the one posed by my fellow kayaker in the opening vignette, to create spaces that are more welcoming to women.

It is important to note that theories of gender performativity inform my understanding and conceptualization of gender in this thesis. *Gender performativity* highlights the idea that our gender is not one objective and inflexible identity, but that gender reality is *performative*, “which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1988, p. 527). These performances are not temporary but are ongoing, and through these performances, we *make our selves*. As individual women enter different spaces, they display certain versions of “woman” in each. The unique ways we perform our genders have a collective impact on what is culturally understood and accepted as gender, and in turn, these performances are shaped by that same culture (Fisher et al., 2018; Spencer, 2014). In short, the performances simultaneously make and are made by culture. This thesis is also influenced by the ideas of Foucault (1977), who said that culture is developed through *discipline* and power being exerted over others.

Aligning with performative theories of gender, I use the terms “subjectivity” and “subject position” throughout this research, rather than the term “identity.” *Identity* implies an inflexibility that fails to adequately describe the ever-changing elements of our self-representation (Spencer, 2014). On the other hand, *subjectivity* is constantly changing based on

context; it is dynamic rather than static (Thorpe, 2008). Additionally, subjectivity acknowledges the power structures in play as we perform our *selves* in various contexts. The performances cannot be separated from the subjectivity of the person. In parallel to the impact that gender performance has on cultural understanding of gender, external power structures also act to “determine the possibilities of gendered performances” (Spencer, 2014, p. 12). These cultural and societal power structures both impact and are impacted by our gendered performances. Power, performance, and subjectivity are inextricably linked.

I use a feminist poststructuralist paradigm to guide my questions, methods, and analysis during this research. “Poststructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organization and power” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). By taking a poststructuralist view, I believe that language shapes reality and that no one objective “truth” exists outside the meaning of reality produced through discourse. I make the poststructuralist assumption in this research that meaning is constructed through discourse and language. Since gender is one aspect of the world that has been constructed through language and cultural practice, it can also be deconstructed (St. Pierre, 2000). I hope this research plays a role in deconstructing (and therefore, perhaps reconstructing) new versions of the established gender expectations within whitewater kayaking.

In leisure spaces like those surrounding whitewater kayaking, we can all see what is possible and who it is possible for us to become; they are spaces for resistance and empowerment (Henderson & Gibson, 2013). These spaces exist within societal and cultural power structures where we are disciplined to “correctly” perform as subjects within these spaces, particularly in terms of our gender (Foucault, 1977; Spencer, 2014). Foucault believed that nothing can be objective; that what is thought to be ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ is considered that way because of

the effects of power. For Foucault, power is what produces reality, and his idea of discipline is one way that power is exercised over others.

In society and within outdoor and adventure leadership, women face “implicit messages, beliefs, values, and assumptions based on gender that commonly lead to constraints, biases, and lack of opportunity” (Allen-Craig et al., 2020, p. 122). One way that those messages are spread is through gender-based “hidden curriculum” messages found in adventure education programs, which prioritize stereotypically male values and traits (Warren et al, 2019). Although the number of women working in outdoor programs is increasing, they remain underrepresented in program administration (Gray et al., 2017). Women suffer from sexual harassment and inequity within the professional whitewater industry (LaFortune, 2020; Langolis, 2018; Shilton, 2016). Through attempting to understand and highlight the ways that gender is produced and reinforced in the kayaking community, we can foster more inclusive attitudes in these spaces. I believe that by emphasizing non-dominant discourses in these spaces (i.e., the voices of women) we can literally change the gendered regimes in the kayaking community.

As the number of women in paddlesports increases each year (Outdoor Foundation, 2019), ensuring that rivers are inclusive spaces that value women’s experiences can help keep those women involved in the sport. By studying the gender performances of women professional kayakers, I can explore the narratives of femininity and masculinity that these elite members of the community experience and see reproduced. These women’s narratives, experiences, and gender performances may positively influence the participation of the next generation of women paddlers. For example, the experienced women snowboarders interviewed by Laurendeau & Sharara (2008) believed “that by changing the image surrounding women in snowboarding, they may subsequently create space and respect for women boarders generally” (p. 38). I hope this

research can provide a reflexive counter-narrative to the dominant and frequently hyper-masculine narrative present in outdoor recreation (Kennedy & Russell, 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2016) and whitewater kayaking.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the ways that self-identified women professional kayakers negotiate their gendered subject positions and the interactions between language on gendered culture in kayaking spaces. I address these ideas by answering the following research questions:

R1. How do professional women kayakers perform their gender in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking?

R2. Do these performances resist, reinforce, or repurpose the status quo?

My results are presented using Creative Analytic Practice (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) in the form of a podcast; a four-part audio series titled *Women in Whitewater*.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I discuss the definition of whitewater kayaking as an action sport. Next, I provide a brief history of whitewater paddling, followed by a review of pertinent literature in the sport. Third, I dive into an overview of the research regarding women's experiences in action sports, adventure recreation, outdoor education, and leisure. Finally, I highlight the primary theories relevant to this thesis, including the feminist poststructuralist research paradigm and the theories of gender performativity and discipline.

Action Sports

In this literature review, I cite research that refers to whitewater kayaking as adventure recreation, leisure, and an action sport. Since this thesis examines the gender performances of professional whitewater kayakers, I have chosen to refer to kayaking primarily as an action sport. Examples of action sports include whitewater paddling, skateboarding, surfing, snowboarding, motocross, rock climbing, mountain biking, and BMX (Bennett et al., 2002; Kerns & Whiteside, 2020; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2013). Action sports are nontraditional sports or sports out of the mainstream characterized by their mostly individual nature and inclusion of risk or danger (Bennett et al., 2002; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2013). In the introduction to the book *Women in Action Sport Cultures*, Thorpe & Olive (2016) broadened their definition of action sports to “include activities that developed as an alternative to more traditional, rule-bound competitive sports” (p. 3) like roller derby and ultimate frisbee. I use that definition of action sports, which I believe clearly encompasses whitewater kayaking.

Whitewater Kayaking

A Brief History

Action sports increased in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s with interest driven by “alternative” youth and emphasis on carefree philosophies and subcultural styles (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2013). Whitewater paddling was one of those newly popular sports. Boats were built more easily and quickly using “new materials like fiberglass” (Mayer, 2017, p. 14). The introduction of slalom racing into the 1972 Munich Summer Olympics and the release of the Hollywood film *Deliverance* also helped bring the sport onto the main stage (Mayer, 2017).

Whitewater kayaking exploded in popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s. Major corporate leisure sport brands like Nike and Subaru (Schaffer, 2009) provided sponsorship for big events, the biggest whitewater kayak companies had “bidding wars” (Schaffer, 2009, par. 6) for athletes, and it seemed like the only direction for participation numbers to go was up.

Then it wasn't. According to the research firm Leisure Trends Group, whitewater kayaking hit its peak in 2002, with 3.9 million paddlers spending 14 million days on the water. By 2004, the last year before LTG changed its survey methods, kayaker days had fallen by half. (Schaffer, 2009, par. 6)

While some paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts theorized that whitewater kayaking had hit its peak in participation, the 2019 Special Report on Paddling (Outdoor Foundation, 2019) emphasizes that “the growth of whitewater kayaking looks promising. At 56 percent, whitewater kayaking had the highest first-time participation of any paddlesport in 2018” (p. 23). The continued growth and the increasing interest in whitewater paddling from women and girls support the need for research that explores women’s experiences in the sport.

Related Literature

Although research on whitewater rafting, canoeing, or sea kayaking may share similar characteristics, I have focused this section of the literature review only on research that addresses whitewater kayaking. Additionally, while there are several sports-medicine articles on whitewater performance and paddling technique, I have chosen to exclude those from this literature review to highlight the articles relevant to this thesis. Because many of these studies have relatively small samples and are not intended to be generalized, I want to make clear that I am using them only as examples to build a picture of existing research and the ways that it might connect with my research questions. Qualitative research on whitewater kayaking has used phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and grounded theory to explore various dimensions of whitewater kayaking (Allin, 2018; Bartram, 2001; Mayer, 2017; Sanford, 2007; Whiting et al., 2011). Despite the differences in research focus, some similar ideas can be found within this range of research topics:

- the use of whitewater kayaking to challenge dominant societal discourses of gender
- feelings of connection to something larger than oneself
- discrepancies between media narratives of extreme sport and the realities of participant experience

Participant motivations for whitewater kayaking change over time, yet paddlers report similar elements of experience through four different phases of participation in the sport (Mayer, 2017). Mayer (2017) referred to these phases or themes as “initiating,” “deepening,” “imagining,” and “appreciating.” However, rather than occurring in a linear timeline, these themes depict the whitewater kayaking experience at any given moment in time, “a co-constituted emerging phenomenon” (p. 106). They found that “over time, whitewater kayakers

feel connected to something larger than themselves” (p. iii). This finding is reflected by both Sanford (2007), who compared whitewater paddling to a religious experience, and Whiting et al. (2011), who emphasized the significance of the paddling community as a motivational source.

Looking at paddlers in community whitewater parks, Whiting et al. (2011) explored the factors influencing participation in whitewater kayaking. They labeled two primary motivations for participation: environmental-based motivations and the kayaking community. Furthermore, paddlers discussed two primary categories of benefits they received due to their participation: interpersonal relationships and physical benefits. The presence of community and interpersonal relationships as motivations for and benefits of paddling whitewater further support Mayer’s (2017) statement about whitewater kayakers’ feelings of connection; “the convergence of spiritual and nature experience...represented in statements of gratitude, appreciation, and being connected to something larger than themselves” (Mayer, 2017, p. 105).

Sanford’s (2007) paper can provide insight into the possibilities of whitewater kayaking as a spiritual experience. She highlighted the similarities between meditative practices and the heightened concentration necessary for whitewater paddlers to run challenging whitewater. Whiting et al. (2011) echoed these similarities and found that “many paddlers described these [psychological] benefits of kayaking in metaphysical anecdotes like the ‘river speaking to them,’ or the water ‘touching their souls’” (p. 10); and in Mayer’s (2017) analysis of *BombFlow* media’s “Go to CHURCH” episode where he says:

Later in the episode, a kayaker mentions praising Jah by running a stout on Easter Sunday. A stout refers to a big waterfall, and Jah appears to be a reference to a higher power. When the kayaker uses the term, he looks toward the sky and holds his hand in

the air. The message is clear. They are going to the river to kayak to participate in a form of spirituality. (p. 117)

While these articles examine the experiences and motivations of whitewater kayakers, they lack a focus on gender negotiation and the experiences of women kayakers in particular. Although Mayer (2017) intentionally selected research participants to have three men and three women, Whiting et al. (2011) never mentioned the gender of the whitewater paddlers that they interviewed.

The characterization of whitewater paddling as a religious experience and the emphasis on community and camaraderie present a different picture of whitewater kayaking than shown by sports media (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020; Mayer, 2017). Sanford (2007) said that “it is telling that whitewater paddlers rarely talk of ‘conquering’ or ‘beating’ the river” (p. 883). This observation does not correspond to the media narrative of action sports that revolves around the traditionally masculine selling of risk, domination over nature, and depictions of conquest (Mayer, 2017). Women’s participation in sport is increasing, but their coverage in sports media is not increasing alongside their participation numbers (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020). Furthermore, the representation in advertising and media continues to highlight women in the outdoors as unique, implying that they either need a man to guide them or additional feminization to “look like a real woman,” which further reinforces culturally expected gender roles and stereotypes (McNeil et al., 2012).

Adventure Recreation, Action Sports, and Gender

In this section, I give a picture of the research on gender, adventure recreation, action sports, and leisure. First, I briefly summarize research on constraints, motivations, and the negotiation of those constraints to women’s participation. Second, I propose that unique

characteristics of action sports provide an opportunity to disrupt the status quo of sport participation.

For a long time, adventure recreation has been seen by media and mainstream Western populations as “a male dominated arena,” (Little, 2002, p. 159). Researchers have written about the gendered beginnings of outdoor and adventure recreation and education, noting the emphasis on “rugged individualism” in early programs like Outward Bound and the Boy Scouts (Gray et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2020; Warren, 2015; Warren et al., 2019). Early research of women in adventure recreation highlighted the ways that women are “often highly and uniquely constrained in their leisure” (Little, 2002, p. 158).

Women *do* participate in adventure recreation, and evolving research has demonstrated that the constraints to women’s participation are both negotiable and negotiated by women (Little, 2002). Four categories of constraints were highlighted: socio-cultural, the family and other commitments, self, and technical (Little, 2002). Women negotiated these constraints using four key techniques: prioritize, compromise, creative adventure, and anticipate (Little, 2002). When women perceived that the constraint was major, they restructured their ideas of participation; when constraints were minor, they reinforced the reasons they participated. Rather than ceasing participation altogether, women were willing to reduce participation, adjust their involvement, and anticipate change or new challenges (Little, 2002). Similarly, women who participated in the action sports of skydiving and snowboarding used three strategies to negotiate space within these sports: avoidance, downplaying gender, and underscoring benefits (Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008).

Other research has focused on finding the cause of differences in gender representation by looking at the motivations for participation in adventure recreation activities, including

whitewater kayaking. This research showed that women had higher social motivations and emphasized the importance of experiencing nature and relaxation, while males had higher sensation-seeking and self-image motivations (Ewert et al., 2013; Gilbertson & Ewert, 2015; Lee et al., 2007). Male paddlers also reported slightly higher sensation seeking motivation scores than women specifically in a population of whitewater kayakers (Ivester, 2017).

Sensation seeking and risk-taking are often emphasized as key motivations for participation in action and adventure sports (Kar & Tarafder, 2020; Lee et al., 2015), but research has shown that this may not be consistent across all high-risk activities and sports, and that there may be other significant motivators (Barlow et al., 2013; Immonen et al., 2017). For example, Barlow et al. (2013) found that sensation seeking was a core motivator for skydiving but was not a motive for mountaineers. Mountaineers derived more motivation from “the heightened emotion regulation and agency” (Barlow et al., 2013, p. 473) from the high-risk nature of their sport. Although Barlow et al. did not compare motivations by gender, Frühauf et al. (2017) found no significant differences regarding gender in the motivations of freeride skiers (p. 4) across the five themes that they identified: “challenge, nature, friends, balance, and freedom / pleasure” (p. 4).

Women who engaged professionally in a risk-taking sport (like rally driving, parachuting, skiing, or snowboarding) scored lower in impulsivity and sensation seeking than amateur women who participated primarily through leisure (Cazenave et al., 2007). The professional women also scored significantly higher on a femininity scale that measured “tenderness and consideration toward others” (Cazenave et al., 2007, p. 430), meaning that they tended to have more tenderness for themselves and others, and were more likely to have relationships with others that are “more supportive and based less on aggression” (p. 430). Lastly, the professional women demonstrated

a compensation based risk-taking profile, resulting in feelings of competence and self-knowledge, rather than one based on escapism (Cazenave et al., 2007).

By participating in leisure and action sports women can gain freedom and confidence (Thorpe & Olive, 2016). From the conception of most action sports, women were frequently active participants (Thorpe, 2017). Since many of these sports began as non-competitive (for example, surfing, skateboarding, or rock climbing), there was no forced segregation of women and men during participation. Men participated alongside women, opening opportunities for the subversion of traditional gender rules and norms (Thorpe, 2017; Thorpe & Olive, 2016). A similar theme is present in the early days of whitewater kayaking; women like Risa Shimoda pioneered running hard whitewater alongside the men. She was the first woman to paddle the Green River Narrows in North Carolina, the Hudson River Gorge in New York, and the second to run the infamous North Fork of the Payette in Idaho (Mayer, 2017). Researchers theorize that action sports offer “the potential for alternative gender relations” (Thorpe & Olive, 2016, p. 3) because of these non-competitive and side-by-side characteristics of action sports participation.

Scholars believe that action sports provide an opportunity to challenge stereotypical representations of women (Thorpe & Olive, 2016), and I argue that whitewater kayaking is an especially unique venue. Societal discourse “categorizes men as strong, aggressive, powerful, swift, competitive and superior” (Bartram, 2001, p. 6). Traditional sports like basketball and football are also characterized by strength, aggression, power, speed, and competition. The similarities between these characterizations support the “cultural notion of sport as belonging to physically dominating hegemonic masculinity” (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020, p. 52). Because of this, women are typically encouraged to participate in more passive forms of leisure, like crafts, hobbies, or reading books and magazines when men are encouraged towards sport (Bartram,

2001). However, action sports emphasize both masculine elements of risk and feminine elements of aesthetics, which can lead to more acceptance of women in these spaces.

Whitewater kayaking, like snowboarding or skateboarding, is an extremely technique-driven sport, where a paddler is significantly better when they emphasize technique than when they rely on strength and speed alone. Anecdotally, I have seen repeatedly while teaching kayaking that the paddlers who rely on balance and intentional strokes are much more successful than the paddlers who charge into the current, hoping that their strength will be sufficient. The false assumption that strength is most important is unfortunately widely accepted by many whitewater kayakers. However, an emphasis on proper technique creates a playing field that does not need to prioritize stereotypically masculine characteristics, thus making it more accessible for women.

I believe it is essential to look beyond motivations for participation or negotiation of constraints and at the narratives that women live, tell, and re-tell as participants in these spaces. In order to address women's experiences in an action sport like kayaking, I use a feminist poststructuralist research paradigm.

Feminist Poststructuralism

Poststructuralists look to dismantle language and discourse to look beyond what is said to see what is implicit and unsaid. They look critically at "clear" language, believing that language is not innocent (Berbary, 2017). One assumption of poststructuralism is that the deconstruction of language can offer opportunities to discover how reality is constructed (Davies & Gannon, 2005). By interrogating language, a goal of poststructuralism is to reveal power structures that are implicit in "common sense" language (Berbary, 2017, p. 723). In this way, poststructuralism works to link language, social organization, and power (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

I make the poststructuralist assumption in this research that discourse and language construct meaning and reality. By taking a poststructuralist view, I believe that language shapes reality and that no objective “truth” exists outside the meaning of reality produced through discourse. I hope to understand how “our language *words our worlds*, and [how] we may, through language, subvert common sense and the structures it upholds” (Berbary, 2017, p. 724).

Performativity Theory

The theory of gender performativity is perhaps most simply summarized by Simone de Beauvoir: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (2011, p. 283). I borrow primarily from Judith Butler’s (1988) ideas in this research, describing gender performativity as the way gender is constructed through a “stylized repetition of acts” (p. 519). A couple of things characterize this theory: (1) Gender is constructed through a series of repeated performances, it is not implicit (Butler, 1988); (2) These acts both influence and are influenced by culture (Fisher et al., 2018; Spencer, 2014); (3) These gendered performances are not separate from the individual (Butler, 1988). Research has used performativity theory to describe women’s subjectivities in a number of leisure and outdoor spaces, including sorority sisters (Berbary, 2012); fly anglers (Fennell & Berbeck, 2019); and women watching *The Bachelor* (Spencer, 2014).

One example of gender performativity discussed by Laurendeau & Sharara (2008) are the decisions of women snowboarders to frequently “engage in practices aimed at challenging the stereotype that women boarders are less skilled than their male counterparts” (p. 38). Rather than disguising their gender, many of these women took actions to emphasize their femininity by choosing to wear lighter colors, or make sure their hair is showing. By differentiating themselves from the men on the hill, they make sure that “others on the hill will know that it is a woman performing with a degree of expertise” (Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008, p. 38). Consciously or

unconsciously, these women hope that by emphasizing their gender on the slopes, it will promote the image that women are capable snowboarders, encouraging participation from other women.

Discipline

For Foucault (1977), power is what produces reality, and his idea of *discipline* is one way to exercise that power over others. Discipline is a technique for directing human behavior and can be overt (meaning power is exercised through rules) or covert (power is exercised through subtle interactions) (Berbary, 2017). Berbary (2017) used Foucault's theories of discipline and power alongside Butler's (1988) ideas of gender to research women's gender performance in a college sorority. The ways that we use power to discipline ourselves or others helps shape and retain the rules about what is acceptable in a space. Foucault (1977) believed that "discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise" (p. 17). A poststructuralist, Foucault understood that nothing can be objective; that what is thought to be 'correct' or 'appropriate' is considered that way because of the effects of power.

The purpose of this chapter has been to highlight some of the relevant action sport, whitewater kayaking, and adventure recreation literature, with a focus on the connections between these venues and women's experiences. Additionally, this chapter presented feminist poststructuralism and gender performativity as a useful paradigm and theory to further explore how self-identified women professional kayakers negotiate their gendered subject positions. In the following chapter, I elaborate on the methodology and methods that I used to explore this idea.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY & METHODS

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways that self-identified women professional kayakers negotiate their gendered subject positions in the spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. In the following section, I expand upon the methodology and methods that I used to address this purpose. First, I explain the methodology of narrative inquiry. Next, I walk through my data collection methods, including interview techniques and participant selection. Third, I address researcher reflexivity and research validity. Finally, I examine ethical considerations before concluding with my plans for data analysis and representation.

Narrative Inquiry

I used narrative inquiry as my primary methodology to perform this research. A field of study that spans across subjects, from history to film, philosophy to linguistics (Connelly & Clandin, 1990), narrative inquiry is a research design where the researcher studies the lives of individuals by asking those individuals to provide stories about their lives (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Narrative inquiry can be applied to any spoken or written account (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), and this research looked at spoken accounts through semi-structured individual interviews.

Narrative inquiry assumes that people construct their realities by narrating their own stories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher typically records and explores the story(ies) told by participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Often, in the end, “the two narratives of participant and researcher become...a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Sometimes this literally takes the form of a collaborative narrative or, a composite character used to show the dominant themes across all

participant narratives (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maple & Edwards, 2010; Rogers & Rose, 2019). The analysis and construction of these stories frequently involve “restorying” participant narratives using literary elements, like scene, plot, characters, timing, structure, and tone (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). While I used literary elements to “restory” participant narratives, I chose not to create a composite character, because I thought that it was more valuable for all of these women’s voices to stand alone.

A number of studies have used narrative inquiry within physical education and fitness, outdoor education, recreation, leadership, and leisure sciences (Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2016; Grimwood et al., 2017; Lewis & Kimieck, 2018; Remington & Legge, 2016; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Smith et al., 2012). Within the classroom, Remington & Legge (2018) used narrative inquiry to understand teachers’ implementation of outdoor education in the classroom, while Grimwood et al. (2017) used it to explore educator perception of the meanings and impacts of urban outdoor education programs on nature connectedness. Lewis & Kimieck (2018) utilized a narrative inquiry framework in their study of river guides to explore their experiences and understand the creation and maintenance of the lifestyle of outdoor leaders.

Notably, narrative inquiry has been helpful in supporting feminist and critical theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) and is a valuable method to investigate women’s experiences and their perceptions of those experiences. Researchers have used narrative inquiry to explore these perceptions of experience within a mixed-gender gym (Fisher et al., 2016), within outdoor leadership (Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2019), and within women’s careers in parks and recreation (Smith et al., 2012). This use shows the relevance of narrative inquiry as a methodology to deeply understand the lived experience of professionals in outdoor recreation and women within that context. Narrative inquiry has already been shown to be appropriate for

understanding these ideas of gender and femininity. My research builds upon this established use to weave in the feminist poststructuralist research paradigm, a research framework that complements the studies referenced above.

There are no clear scripted steps that describe how to do narrative inquiry analysis. Instead, the methodological flexibility “allows for a freedom and flexibility of data analysis that may be lost when using other methods” (Maple & Edwards, 2010, p. 39). In my research process, I gave participants a narrative reflection prompt, then utilized 1-hour long semi-structured individual interviews to collect more detailed data.

Data Collection

Qualitative data is most appropriate for addressing my research questions and exploring how self-identified women kayakers negotiate their gendered subject positions, because “qualitative methods potentially allow women to be the ‘experts’ about their own experiences” (Montell, 1999, p. 50). This ability for the qualitative researcher to center the voice of women further supports my use of a feminist poststructuralist research paradigm.

My research participants were 10 self-identified professional women kayakers and myself. The research participants and I generated qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. These interviews took place via Zoom, at a predetermined time decided between researcher and participants. All interviews were audio recorded.

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

After selecting participants with the guidance of my committee, I conducted a 15-to-30-minute Zoom meeting with each participant to obtain informed consent and collect information on a selection of demographic questions through an online Qualtrics survey (see Appendix One). Many of the survey questions were adapted from Hughes et al., 2016.

After the completion of informed consent during the first Zoom meeting, I provided the participants with the following reflection prompt: *“How do you perform your gender in kayaking spaces? Please share a story that illustrates how you navigate being a woman in kayaking spaces.”* While on the initial Zoom call, I clarified the prompt (when necessary) beginning with the following script: *“When I say ‘perform your gender,’ I mean that I’m interested in the actions and decisions that you make (consciously or unconsciously), or the thoughts that you have, in and around kayaking spaces, that have to do with your gender identity or gender presentation. How do you act in kayaking spaces? How do you dress? How do you act (and react) in relation to other kayakers (non-binary, women, or men) What do you say, do, or think? What (if at all) does your gender identity have to do with your experiences in the whitewater kayaking community?”*

I asked participants to consider the prompt before their interviews and had them compose a one-to-two-page narrative (400-800 words) in response and send that written narrative to me one week before the interview took place. These interviews all took place over Zoom and lasted up to one hour. All participants did send me their written narrative before meeting for our Zoom interviews, and there was no participant attrition.

I used semi-structured interviews for this research for three reasons. First, this style of interview provided a structure to examine specific research questions or topics of discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This allowed me to have consistency in the overall structure of interviews and the broad ideas that I planned to examine. Semi-structured interviews still provide enough flexibility for the interview to be unique to each participant (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee freedom to discuss their ideas and allow

the interviewer to ask specific follow-up questions grounded in the information given by participants.

During the research process, my role was simultaneously that of researcher and participant. I began by writing my own narrative response to the prompt, and considering my own responses to the interview questions before meeting with participants. However, during the interviews, my role was primarily as a witness “giving testimony to the lives of others” (Lather, 2007, p. 41), meaning that I kept my stories temporarily private as not to detract or from their narratives.

The interviews were audio and video recorded with participant consent and transcribed after recording using Zoom’s audio transcription. I composed an interview guide to help conduct the interviews, as Hesse-Beiber (2007) suggested. The interview guide was tailored specifically to each interviewee; at least three questions in each guide was unique to each individual participant. The goal of these interviews was to provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences as women in the whitewater kayaking community through storytelling. The interview guide included some of the following themes, questions, or prompts:

1. Can you tell me about how you began kayaking and your path to where you are now?
2. Please read your written narrative out loud.
3. Thank you for sharing your story with me. You only had a limited space to tell it - is there more context you would like to provide to this story?
4. How (if at all) has your gender been beneficial for you in whitewater kayaking?
5. How (if at all) has your gender been a barrier for you in whitewater kayaking?
6. What do you think about when getting ready to paddle?
7. What ways do you observe people in the kayaking community performing gender?

8. How would you like to see the kayaking community be more inclusive?

Follow-up and additional questions were asked during each interview based on participant responses and written narratives.

Participant Selection

As a method, narrative inquiry does not define a suggested sample size, but six to ten interviewees are often considered acceptable (Kim, 2016). The sample size for this research was ten participants and myself. This decision to keep a relatively small group size is intentional and aligns with the goal of feminist poststructural work to look for the “local rather than the universal” (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 148). This focus on the local means that the stories shared by participants are their unique experiences, and are not intended to stand as a model for all whitewater kayakers. Rather than looking to generalize the participants’ stories to the lives of all women, I looked to deeply understand their individual stories and experiences in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking.

As a woman intimately connected with the whitewater industry, and a whitewater kayaker myself, I have established relationships with many women in this community. To recruit research participants for this study, I drew upon my connections through the whitewater community. By choosing to use study participants with whom I might already know, I can rely on the trust and rapport I already have with these women to enhance the interview process.

I used purposeful criterion sampling (Schreier, 2018) to identify participants. Participants had to meet the following selection criteria:

1. Participants must self-identify as women.
2. Participants must have started kayaking before the age of 15 years old.

3. Participants must be considered professional kayakers (either for their competitive expertise or their local impact in the sport), meaning that they get compensation through money, gear, or something else for their participation in whitewater kayaking.

I recruited participants by reaching out through social media posts on Instagram and Facebook using my personal accounts. As Mayer (2017) noted in their dissertation, my position as an insider in the whitewater kayaking community allowed me to assemble a group of paddlers that best represented the demographic that I am researching—women professional kayakers who started paddling before the age of 15.

I fit all desired characteristics of the study participants. Because of this, I was both participant and researcher. In a pseudo-autoethnographic sense, I explored my experiences of being a woman in the kayaking world alongside these other women. However, my role during the interviews was to witness their stories, so I only shared my narrative at the end of each interview, if asked.

Researcher Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers frequently use reflexivity as a methodological tool “to legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations” (Pillow, 2003, p. 175). Simply put, reflexivity is self-reflection by the researcher that helps create an honest narrative; it acknowledges how the researcher’s background and subject positions may shape their interpretation of the data (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). I asked these participants to be vulnerable, so I needed to be vulnerable alongside them. Pillow (2003) challenges researchers to lean into this vulnerability by practicing what she calls “uncomfortable reflexivity”: or “A reflexivity that pushes toward an unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable, cannot be a simple story

of subjects, subjectivity, and transcendence of self-indulgent telling” (p. 192), meaning that I intentionally tried to consider ideas that I was unfamiliar or uncomfortable with. This gave me the opportunity to be reflexive of my power in what I wrote and how I represented my research—to make my voice apparent in this writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Spencer & Paisley, 2013).

My dual roles as researcher and participant required me to be reflexive throughout the entire research process. As a professional woman kayaker and an active participant in the whitewater kayaking industry, I would have been unable to objectively distance myself from the research. I acknowledged my experiences and considered the possible impacts of them during the data analysis process. Reflexivity takes self-awareness and requires me to constantly step back to observe my interactions within the contexts of this research (Lather, 1993). That is why I am open about my positioning.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this research was voluntary, and participants could choose to terminate participation in the study at any point. The participants had the option to adopt pseudonyms to maintain anonymity; three chose to remain anonymous, while seven chose to use their real names. The individual interviews discussed gender and subjectivity, and asked questions about the participants’ personal experiences. These topics could have caused some discomfort for participants but were acknowledged and clearly explained within an informed consent form. I was given permission by seven of the participants to use portions of their interview audio in the final podcast narratives and was given permission to use a voice actor to represent the other three participants’ voices. This study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the Western Carolina University IRB office.

Data Analysis

Interviews took place via Zoom and were audio and video recorded. Although I planned to use the video recording to aid in my data analysis as a way to provide rich description, I ended up with enough notes about tone that I never re-watched the audio portions. Because all ten of my interviews were conducted via Zoom, I was able to use the automatic closed captions to develop transcriptions of the audio. I cross-checked the transcriptions with the audio recordings and added notes by hand. This increased contact with the data benefitted all analysis phases, especially as I was initially becoming familiar with the data.

When conducting a narrative inquiry, the researcher is not just “passively recording and reporting the narrator’s reality,” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 158, 2016) but they are writing and restorying those narratives. I started analyzing the data at the same time as I completed my interviews, using simultaneous procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), rather than generating all data before beginning my analysis. None of the research participants expressed interest in being a part of the data analysis process, however I reached out a number of times to confirm that they were comfortable with the way that I was representing their voices.

I analyzed the data from these interviews and written narratives using a method called narrative inquiry with my early steps modeled on Polkinghorne’s analysis of narratives (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995). Rather than utilizing coding to perform my data analysis, I immersed myself in the data, attempting to use my writing as a method of developing a deeper understanding of the data (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). First, after each interview was finished, I re-listened to the audio recording from the Zoom call, and re-read both their written narrative and the interview transcript. Second, I copied each narrative into a spreadsheet, and categorized themes and ideas that I recognized within each individual narrative. This led to my

creation of one large list of ideas. Themed coding can have the unintended side effect of depersonalizing and decontextualizing narrative data, which is antithetical to poststructuralist feminist research (Maple & Edwards, 2010). While I did develop a list of themes as I was reviewing the interview audio and transcripts, they were only used as a guide to organize my ideas. Finally, I took this list and compared my wording for each theme; questioning (for example) why I chose the word “culture” for one sentence but the word “dynamic” for another. Basically, I looked for similarities, differences, and contradictions in my summary of my interviewee’s ideas. After analyzing the data and writing the four podcast episodes, I sent the transcript and audio to participants for their review.

Paralogical Validity

In addition to my reflexivity throughout the research process, I utilized paralogical validity (Lather, 1993). Lather (1993) proposes this reconceptualized validity as one of four ways to re-frame validity as a “counter-practice of authority,” (p. 677) and an “incitement to discourse,” (p. 674) or a disruption of the status quo. This framing of validity comes from a desire to consider validity after poststructuralism, an alternative to positivism’s truth or not truth ideas, a validity grounded in “theorizing our practice” (p. 674). In particular, the goal of paralogical validity is to highlight differences and contradictions within the research.

The following checklist provides characteristics of paralogical validity that I used to guide my data analysis:

- fosters differences and heterogeneity via the search for "fruitful interruptions"
- implodes controlling codes, but still coherent within present forms of intelligibility
- anticipatory of a politics that desires both justice and the unknown, but refuses any grand transformation

- concerned with undecidables, limits, paradoxes, discontinuities, complexities
- searches for the oppositional in our daily practices, the territory we already occupy

(Lather, 1993, p. 686).

While completing all 10 interviews, I read, re-read, and listened to all of the transcripts and interview audio. Then, I carefully read each interview and took note of the major themes that I felt were represented in each. I then took all of those ideas and imagined how they all fit together—the similarities and contradictions within each. I based my data analysis on Woodbrooks’s (1991) use of a “tale-telling approach,” which they used by writing three tales: the realist tale, the critical tale, and the deconstructed tale. While Woodbrooks (1991) chose to represent these tales in the writing of three separate stories, I elected to tell two stories that incorporated each of these three tales interspersed throughout each of them.

The process of writing each of these stories allows me to break down the multifaceted nature of stories and crystalize ideas (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). While writing these three tales, I did not code the data, but I did use vague themes as a way to present and understand the data in an intelligible way. I chose to highlight differences and contradictions in the research, and I intentionally do not plan to present a grand summary at the end of this research. I want to leave my results partially open to individual interpretation.

Data Representation

Often used in ethnography, creative analytic practice (CAP) is a method for analyzing and representing data (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). “The goals of CAP are to reflect experiences in ways that represent their personal and social meanings rather than simplifying and reducing to generalize” (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 120). CAP allows researchers to contextualize leisure in the world alongside all its complexities. Scholars have used CAP to

represent research in the form of screenplays (Berbary, 2012), fictional writing (Caulley, 2008), poetry (Richardson, 2002), and art (Inckle, 2010).

Specifically, I chose to represent my data in in podcast form. Using podcasting as a form of creative analytic practice for this thesis was appropriate for a number of reasons. First, a podcast is an audio storytelling format; allowing me to use methods of podcast creation to ‘restory’ the interviews and participant narratives. In particular, I used the book *Make Noise: A Creator's Guide to Podcasting and Great Audio Storytelling* (Nuzum, 2019) as a guide to create a compelling story. As an audio medium, using a podcast allowed me to literally incorporate the voices of the women that I interviewed, which aligns with my stance as a feminist researcher. The transcript of the four podcast episodes that I created make up the entirety of my manuscript. You can access the audio recordings through the feed on the website womeninwhitewater.wordpress.com or through your favorite podcast hosting app. Researchers have used podcasts to represent both thesis and dissertations (Trono, 2020; Williams, 2020).

As part of the EOE thesis handbook, I have chosen the manuscript thesis format option. That option requires Chapters One, Two, and Three, plus a full-length manuscript aimed at a specific journal and formatted as such. In this option, the next chapter is my complete manuscript. Following that manuscript and its references, there is an additional chapter of this thesis, the Epilogue. In that chapter, I share some final reflections and recommendations for future research that did not fit appropriately into the manuscript format. I have chosen to submit my manuscript to the *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, which requires authors to submit a manuscript that is no more than 8000 words (plus reference list and abstract) and is written in APA format. In the following journal article, I only include the links to the podcasts for publication, as it is important and philosophically consistent for readers to listen to the

women's voices as they tell their stories. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I have also provided the full transcript for each of the podcasts in Appendix B.

**Dress Like A Woman, Paddle Like A Man: Exploring Gendered Subjectivities in
Whitewater Kayaking**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the ways that self-identified women professional kayakers negotiate their gendered subject positions in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. Particularly, I wanted to explore how these performances resisted, reinforced, or repurposed the gender “status quo” in the sport. To do this, using feminist poststructuralist narrative inquiry, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with professional women kayakers who started paddling before the age of 15. Using Polkinghorne’s analysis of narratives (1995) and Lather’s (1993) paralogical validity, I “restoryed” the participant narratives to create a four-part audio podcast. This paper is presented in part using creative analytic practice (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), specifically in podcast format. As such, the work is designed to be heard, rather than read (Williams, 2020). Furthermore, the podcast is written to be accessible to the whitewater kayaking community. Following the introduction, literature review, and methodology sections there are four podcast episodes. Episode One contains a brief introduction, literature review, and a detailed description of my methods and methodology. Episodes Two and Three blend the results and discussion sections with Butler’s (1988) theory of gender performativity (Episode Two) and Foucault’s (1977) ideas of power and discipline (Episode Three). Episode Four provides lessons for the kayaking community. Links to each audio episode are given at the beginning of each “episode” section. The transcripts of the podcast audio can be found at womeninwhitewater.wordpress.com.

Keywords: creative analytic practice, whitewater kayaking, podcast, gender performativity, discipline

Introduction

The freestyle kayaking competition had just wrapped up, the scores were in, and we were hanging out next to the river. Soon, there were only two of us left chatting; it was now or never...

Before I could ask if he would buy me a six-pack of beer for the party later that evening, he surprised me with an unwelcome question: "Why don't you dress up for the awards ceremony tonight?" Catching me off guard, I replied indignantly: "What? Dress up how? I. Am. Dressed." He turned his full attention to me, pausing to look me up and down. I wondered what he was seeing, glancing down at myself as well. I sported purple Chaco sandals and black athletic shorts; my hair was tied up in a ponytail, mostly covered by a crooked black flat brim hat. My bright blue t-shirt, baggy and branded with the logo of the kayak company I landed a sponsorship with the year before. I looked back at him as he spoke again: "Well yeah, but why don't you put some effort in? You could brush your hair and put on a dress and some makeup." I laughed, and feigned retching. "Ewww. That's not me. I don't like all that girl stuff. I don't even own makeup," I lied.

I grimaced again, and continued, "I just don't see the point; it seems like a lot of effort for nothing. Besides, people will look at me weird if I get dressed up. Why would I change now?" Beginning to feel uncomfortable, I looked back at the river and started to stand up from my seat on the bleachers, an excuse to leave just beginning to pass my lips, when he interrupted me. "Think about it. There are no other women out here getting dressed up after kayaking events. You would get more respect if you dressed like a woman. You'd look great, and it would help you to stand out from the other competitors! Don't you want people to see how pretty you are?"

What is the difference between dressing like a woman and dressing like a kayaker? Why is the image of a woman wearing a dress and makeup the representation of femininity that is

valued? Would I be more respected if I paddled a pink kayak? Why is femininity valued differently in different contexts? I am interested in exploring the ways that women act, dress, and represent themselves within a sport that expects us to simultaneously dress like a woman and paddle like a man to be respected. With this in mind, the purpose of this research is to explore how self-identified women professional kayakers perform their gendered subject positions while negotiating the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater rivers and the kayaking community.

Whitewater Kayaking

I am choosing to explore the construction of gender, subjectivity, and language in the context of whitewater kayaking. Whitewater kayaking has gained popularity in the United States since the development of fiberglass kayak molds in the 1950s and the subsequent launch of commercial plastic kayak manufacturing (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). The paddlesports industry served 22.9 million U.S.-Americans in 2018, and whitewater kayaking makes up around 11% of that number, behind recreational kayaking, canoeing, rafting, sea kayaking, and stand-up paddling (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). Whitewater kayaking is an action sport that has received relatively little research, compared to other action sports like snowboarding or skateboarding.

I define a *professional kayaker* as someone who receives compensation from a company, business, or brand, in the form of gear, money, or something else for their participation in whitewater kayaking. Additionally, I use the terms *kayaker* and *paddler* interchangeably to refer to people who use a whitewater kayak or decked canoe to navigate whitewater rivers.

Although increasing numbers of women between the ages of 18 and 24 are participating, whitewater kayaking is the most male-dominated paddlesport, with men representing 63% to 65% of participants from 2013 to 2019 (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). These higher male participation rates are frequently seen in action sports and outdoor and adventure education

(Gray, 2016; Gray et al., 2017; Olive et al., 2015; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Thorpe & Olive, 2016; Warren, 2015). Many of the first outdoor camps and programs catered exclusively to men and boys, particularly out of fear that the boys were becoming too “weak” (Mitten, 2018, p. 28). Risk, challenge, and adventure are core values of outdoor education and defining characteristics of action sports—values typically associated with masculinity (Kennedy & Russel, 2020). Furthermore, traits perceived to be masculine continue to be prioritized within outdoor leadership (Gray et al., 2020), while traits perceived as feminine have been considered less important. Perhaps because of this divide, gender is arguably the most researched aspect of social justice in outdoor recreation, education, and action sports (Rogers & Rose, 2019; Thorpe & Olive, 2016). The research has illuminated challenges that women face in balancing the constrictions of the gender binary (Gray et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2019; Thorpe & Olive, 2016).

Recent data have shown that male participation across all paddlesports is declining at about one percent per year between 2016 and 2018, from 55% to 53% as female participation increases by the same amount, from 45% to 47%; an increase of 458,000 women across three years (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). As women enter these spaces in growing numbers and navigate their roles in this industry, it is essential to understand how women perform and negotiate their gendered subject positions in these spaces and continuously deconstruct harmful narratives, such as the one posed by my colleague in the opening vignette, to create spaces that are more welcoming to women.

Gender Performativity

It is important to note that theories of gender performativity inform my understanding and conceptualization of gender in this research. *Gender performativity* highlights the idea that

our gender is not one objective and inflexible identity, but that gender reality is *performative*, “which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1988, p. 527). These performances are not temporary but are ongoing, and through these performances, we *make* our *selves*. As individual women enter different spaces, they display certain versions of “woman” in each. The unique ways we perform our genders have a collective impact on what is culturally understood and accepted as gender, and in turn, these performances are shaped by that same culture (Fisher et al., 2018; Spencer, 2014). In short, the performances simultaneously make and are made by culture. This research is also influenced by the ideas of Foucault (1977), who argues that it is necessary to focus on power relations, “focusing not on *what power is*, but on *how it operates*” (Deacon, 1998, p. 113, emphasis in original). *Discipline* is one way that power is exerted through indirect means (Foucault, 1977). Importantly, we internalize this discipline to the point that we discipline ourselves and those around us through overt or covert methods (Berbary, 2012).

Aligning with performative theories of gender, I use the terms “subjectivity” and “subject position” throughout this research, rather than the term “identity.” *Identity* implies an inflexibility that fails to adequately describe the ever-changing elements of our self-representation (Spencer, 2014). On the other hand, *subjectivity* is constantly changing based on context; it is dynamic rather than static (Thorpe, 2008). Additionally, subjectivity acknowledges the power structures in play as we perform our *selves* in various contexts. The performances cannot be separated from the subjectivity of the person. In parallel to the impact that gender performance has on cultural understanding of gender, external power structures also act to “determine the possibilities of gendered performances” (Spencer, 2014, p. 12). These cultural

and societal power structures both impact and are impacted by our gendered performances. Power, performance, and subjectivity are inextricably linked.

Feminist Poststructuralism

I use a feminist poststructuralist paradigm to guide my questions, methods, and analysis during this research. “Poststructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organization and power” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). By taking a poststructuralist view, I believe that language shapes reality and that no one objective “truth” exists outside the meaning of reality produced through discourse. I make the poststructuralist assumption in this research that meaning is constructed through discourse and language. If gender is one aspect of the world that has been constructed through language and cultural practice, it can also be deconstructed (St. Pierre, 2000). I hope this research plays a role in deconstructing (and therefore, perhaps reconstructing) new versions of the established gender expectations within whitewater kayaking.

Discipline

Leisure spaces like whitewater kayaking are spaces where we see what is possible and who it is possible to become; they are spaces for resistance and empowerment (Henderson & Gibson, 2013). These spaces exist within societal and cultural power structures where we are disciplined to “correctly” perform as subjects within these spaces, particularly in terms of our gender (Foucault, 1977; Spencer, 2014). Foucault believed that nothing can be objective; that what is thought to be ‘correct,’ ‘appropriate,’ or even ‘natural’ is considered that way because of the effects of power, with various institutions holding power to “judge” normalcy (Foucault, 1977). The whitewater kayaking industry and broadly, the outdoor industry, can be seen as one of those institutions. We are disciplined in such spaces by “norms” around how to look and act. For Foucault, power is what produces reality, and discipline is one way to exercise that power.

Women in Outdoor Recreation

In society and within outdoor and adventure recreation, women face “implicit messages, beliefs, values, and assumptions based on gender that commonly lead to constraints, biases, and lack of opportunity” (Allen-Craig et al., 2020, p. 122). One way those messages are spread is through gender-based “hidden curriculum” messages, which prioritize stereotypically male values and traits have been found in adventure education programs (Warren et al, 2019). Although the number of women working in outdoor programs is increasing, they remain underrepresented in program administration (Gray et al., 2017). Women suffer from sexual harassment and inequity within the professional whitewater industry (LaFortune, 2020; Langolis, 2018; Shilton, 2016). Through attempting to understand and highlight the ways that gender is produced and reinforced in the kayaking community, we can foster more inclusive attitudes in these spaces. I believe that by emphasizing non-dominant discourses in these spaces (i.e., the voices of women) we can begin to change the gendered regimes in the kayaking community.

As the number of women in paddlesports increases each year (Outdoor Foundation, 2019), ensuring that rivers are inclusive spaces that value women’s experiences can help keep those women remain involved in the sport. By studying the gender performances of women professional kayakers, I can explore the narratives of femininity and masculinity that these elite members of the community experience and see reproduced. These women’s narratives, experiences, and gender performances may positively influence the participation of the next generation of women paddlers. For example, the experienced women snowboarders interviewed by Laurendeau & Sharara (2008) believed “that by changing the image surrounding women in snowboarding, they may subsequently create space and respect for women boarders generally” (p. 38). I hope this research can provide a reflexive counter-narrative to the dominant and

frequently hyper-masculine narrative present in outdoor recreation (Kennedy & Russell, 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2016) and whitewater kayaking.

With this in mind, the purpose of this research is to explore the ways that self-identified women professional kayakers negotiate their gendered subject positions and the interactions between language on gendered culture in kayaking spaces. I address these ideas by answering the following research questions:

R1. How do professional women kayakers perform their gender in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking?

R2. Do these performances resist, reinforce, or repurpose the status quo?

Literature Review

In this section, I provide a brief history of whitewater paddling, and a review of some significant literature on the sport. Next, I dive into an overview of the research regarding women's experiences in action sports, adventure recreation, outdoor education, and leisure. Finally, I highlight the primary theories that are relevant to this research, including the feminist poststructuralist research paradigm and theories of gender performativity and discipline.

Whitewater Kayaking

A Brief History

Since this research examines the gender performances of professional whitewater kayakers, I have chosen to refer to kayaking primarily as an action sport. Examples of action sports include whitewater paddling, skateboarding, surfing, snowboarding, motocross, rock climbing, mountain biking, and BMX (Bennett et al., 2002; Kerns & Whiteside, 2020; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2013). Action sports increased in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s with interest driven by "alternative" youth and emphasis on carefree philosophies and subcultural styles

(Thorpe & Wheaton, 2013). Whitewater paddling was one of those newly popular sports. Boats were built more easily and quickly using “new materials like fiberglass” (Mayer, 2017, p. 14). The introduction of slalom racing into the 1972 Munich Summer Olympics and the release of the Hollywood film *Deliverance* also helped bring the sport onto the main stage (Mayer, 2017).

Whitewater kayaking exploded in popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s. Major corporate brands like Subaru and Nike provided sponsorship for big events, the biggest whitewater kayak companies had “bidding wars” (Schaffer, 2009, par. 6) for athletes, and it seemed like the only direction for participation numbers to go was up.

Then it wasn't. According to the research firm Leisure Trends Group, whitewater kayaking hit its peak in 2002, with 3.9 million paddlers spending 14 million days on the water. By 2004, the last year before LTG changed its survey methods, kayaker days had fallen by half. (Schaffer, 2009, par. 6)

While some paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts theorized that whitewater kayaking had hit its peak in participation, the 2019 Special Report on Paddling (Outdoor Foundation, 2019) emphasizes that “the growth of whitewater kayaking looks promising. At 56 percent, whitewater kayaking had the highest first-time participation of any paddlesport in 2018” (p. 23). The continued growth and the increasing interest in whitewater paddling from women and girls support the need for research that explores women’s experiences in the sport.

Related Literature

Participant motivations for whitewater kayaking change over time, yet paddlers report similar elements of experience through four different phases of participation in the sport (Mayer, 2017). Mayer (2017) referred to these phases or themes as “initiating,” “deepening,” “imagining,” and “appreciating.” However, rather than occurring in a linear timeline, these

themes depict the whitewater kayaking experience at any given moment in time, “a co-constituted emerging phenomenon” (p. 106). Mayer (2017) found that “over time, whitewater kayakers feel connected to something larger than themselves” (p. iii). This finding is reflected by both Sanford (2007), who compared whitewater paddling to a religious experience, and Whiting et al. (2011), who emphasized the significance of the paddling community as a motivational source. Looking at paddlers in community whitewater parks, Whiting et al. (2011) explored the factors influencing participation in whitewater kayaking. They labeled two primary motivations for participation: environmental-based motivations and the kayaking community.

Sanford’s (2007) paper discusses whitewater kayaking as a spiritual experience. They highlighted the similarities between meditative practices and the heightened concentration necessary for whitewater paddlers to run challenging whitewater. Whiting et al. (2011) echoed these similarities and found that “many paddlers described these [psychological] benefits of kayaking in metaphysical anecdotes like the ‘river speaking to them,’ or the water ‘touching their souls’” (p. 10); and in Mayer’s (2017) analysis of *BombFlow* media’s “Go to CHURCH” episode where he says:

Later in the episode, a kayaker mentions praising Jah by running a stout on Easter Sunday. A stout refers to a big waterfall, and Jah appears to be a reference to a higher power. When the kayaker uses the term, he looks toward the sky and holds his hand in the air. The message is clear. They are going to the river to kayak to participate in a form of spirituality. (p. 117)

While these articles examine the experiences and motivations of whitewater kayakers, they lack a focus on gender negotiation and the experiences of women kayakers in particular. Although

Mayer (2017) intentionally selected research participants to have three men and three women, Whiting et al. (2011) never mention the gender of the whitewater paddlers that they interviewed.

The characterization of whitewater paddling as a religious experience and the emphasis on community and camaraderie present a different picture of whitewater kayaking than shown by sports media (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020; Mayer, 2017). Sanford (2017) said “it is telling that whitewater paddlers rarely talk of ‘conquering’ or ‘beating’ the river (p. 883). This observation does not correspond to the media narrative of action sports that revolves around the traditionally masculine selling of risk, domination over nature, and depictions of conquest (Mayer, 2017). Women’s participation in sport is increasing, but their coverage in sports media is not increasing alongside their participation numbers (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020). Women’s representation in advertising and media continues to highlight women in the outdoors as unique, implying that they either need a man to guide them or additional feminization to “look like a real woman,” further reinforcing culturally expected gender roles and stereotypes (McNeil et al., 2012).

Adventure Recreation, Action Sports, and Gender

In this section, I give a picture of the research on gender, adventure recreation, action sports, and leisure. First, I briefly summarize research on constraints, motivations, and the negotiation of those constraints to women’s participation. Second, I propose that unique characteristics of action sports provide an opportunity to disrupt the status quo of sport participation.

For a long time, adventure recreation has been seen by media and mainstream Western populations as “a male dominated arena,” (Little, 2002, p. 159). Researchers have written about the gendered beginnings of outdoor and adventure recreation and education, noting the emphasis on “rugged individualism” in early programs like Outward Bound and the Boy Scouts (Gray et

al., 2017; Gray et al., 2020; Warren, 2015; Warren et al., 2019). Early research of women in adventure recreation highlighted the ways that women are "often highly and uniquely constrained in their leisure" (Little, 2002, p. 158).

Women do participate in adventure recreation, and evolving research has demonstrated that the constraints to women's participation are both negotiable and negotiated by women (Little, 2002). Four categories of constraints were highlighted: socio-cultural, the family and other commitments, self, and technical (Little, 2002). Women negotiated these constraints using four key techniques: prioritize, compromise, creative adventure, and anticipate (Little, 2002). When women perceived that the constraint was major, they restructured their ideas of participation; when constraints were minor, they reinforced the reasons they participated. Rather than ceasing participation altogether, women were willing to reduce participation, adjust their involvement, and anticipate change or new challenges (Little, 2002). Similarly, women who participated in the action sports of skydiving and snowboarding used three strategies to negotiate space within these sports: avoidance, downplaying gender, and underscoring benefits (Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008).

Other research has focused on finding the cause of differences in gender representation by looking at the motivations for participation in adventure recreation activities, including whitewater kayaking. This research showed that women had higher social motivations and emphasized the importance of experiencing nature and relaxation, while males had higher sensation-seeking and self-image motivations (Ewert et al., 2013; Gilbertson & Ewert, 2015; Lee et al., 2007). Male paddlers also reported higher sensation seeking motivation scores than women specifically in a population of whitewater kayakers (Ivester, 2017).

Sensation seeking and risk-taking are often emphasized as key motivations for participation in action and adventure sports (Kar & Tarafder, 2020; Lee et al., 2015), yet other research demonstrates that these motivators may not be consistent across all high-risk activities and sports, and that there may be other significant motivators (Barlow et al., 2013; Immonen et al., 2017). For example, Barlow et al. (2013) found that sensation seeking was a core motivator for skydiving but was not a motive for mountaineers. Mountaineers derived more motivation from “the heightened emotion regulation and agency” (Barlow et al., 2013, p. 473) from the high-risk nature of their sport. Although Barlow et al. did not compare motivations by gender, Frühauf et al. (2017) found no significant differences regarding gender in the motivations of freeride skiers (p. 4) across the five themes that they identified: “challenge, nature, friends, balance, and freedom / pleasure” (p. 4).

Women who engaged professionally in a risk-taking sport (like rally driving, parachuting, skiing, or snowboarding) scored lower in impulsivity and sensation seeking than amateur women who participated primarily through leisure (Cazenave et al., 2007). The professional women also scored significantly higher on a femininity scale that measured “tenderness and consideration toward others” (Cazenave et al., 2007, p. 430), meaning that they tended to have more tenderness for themselves and others, and were more likely to have relationships with others that are “more supportive and based less on aggression” (p. 430). Lastly, the professional women demonstrated a compensation based risk-taking profile, resulting in feelings of competence and self-knowledge, rather than one based on escapism (Cazenave et al., 2007).

Participation in leisure and action sports can be a space for resistance and empowerment (Henderson & Gibson, 2013; Thorpe & Olive, 2016). From the conception of most action sports, women were frequently active participants (Thorpe, 2017). Since many of these sports began as

non-competitive (for example, surfing, skateboarding, or rock climbing), there was no forced segregation of women and men during participation. Men participated alongside women, opening opportunities for the subversion of traditional gender rules and norms (Thorpe, 2017; Thorpe & Olive, 2016). A similar theme is present in the early days of whitewater kayaking; women like Risa Shimoda pioneered running hard whitewater alongside the men. She was the first woman to paddle the Green River Narrows in North Carolina, the Hudson River Gorge in New York, and the second to run the infamous North Fork of the Payette in Idaho (Mayer, 2017). Researchers theorize that action sports offer “the potential for alternative gender relations” (Thorpe & Olive, 2016, p. 3) because of these non-competitive and side-by-side characteristics of action sports participation.

Scholars believe that action sports provide an opportunity to challenge stereotypical representations of women (Thorpe & Olive, 2016). Societal discourse “categorizes men as strong, aggressive, powerful, swift, competitive and superior” (Bartram, 2001, p. 6). Traditional sports like basketball and football are also characterized by strength, aggression, power, speed, and competition. The similarities between these characterizations support the “cultural notion of sport as belonging to physically dominating hegemonic masculinity” (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020, p. 52). Because of this, women are typically encouraged to participate in more passive forms of leisure, like crafts, hobbies, or reading books and magazines when men are encouraged towards sport (Bartram, 2001). However, action sports emphasize both masculine elements of risk and feminine elements of aesthetics, which can lead to more acceptance of women in these spaces. I argue that whitewater kayaking is an especially unique venue to challenge stereotypical representations of women because of the importance of both feminine and masculine elements.

Whitewater kayaking, like snowboarding or skateboarding, is an extremely technique-driven sport, where a paddler is often significantly better when they emphasize technique than when they rely on strength and speed alone. Anecdotally, I have seen repeatedly while teaching kayaking that the paddlers who rely on balance and intentional strokes are much more successful than the paddlers who charge into the current, hoping that their strength will be sufficient. The false assumption that strength is most important is unfortunately widely accepted by many whitewater kayakers. However, an emphasis on proper technique creates a playing field that does not need to prioritize stereotypically masculine characteristics, thus making it more accessible for women.

I believe it is essential to look beyond motivations for participation or negotiation of constraints and at the narratives that women live, tell, and re-tell as participants in these spaces. In order to address women's experiences in an action sport like kayaking, I use a feminist poststructuralist research paradigm.

Feminist Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist researchers look to dismantle language and discourse to look not only at what is said but also what is implicit and unsaid. They look critically at "clear" language, believing that language is not innocent (Berbary, 2017). Poststructuralists believe that the deconstruction of language offers opportunities to discover how reality is constructed (Davies & Gannon, 2005). By interrogating language, poststructuralists look to reveal power structures that are implicit in "common sense" language (Berbary, 2017, p. 723). In this way, poststructuralism guides us to link language, social organization, and power (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

I make the poststructuralist assumption in this research that discourse and language construct meaning and reality. By taking a poststructuralist view, I believe that language shapes

reality and that no objective “truth” exists outside the meaning of reality produced through discourse. I hope to understand how “our language *words our worlds*, and [how] we may, through language, subvert common sense and the structures it upholds” (Berbary, 2017, p. 724).

Poststructuralism and feminism are frequently used together in research (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Pillow & St. Pierre, 2000; Spencer & Paisley, 2013; Berbary, 2012). Davies and Gannon (2005) define three feminisms: radical, critical, and poststructural, saying that “feminist post-structuralism troubles the binary categories male and female, making visible the constitutive force of linguistic practices, and dismantling their apparent inevitability” (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 312). In particular, “poststructural feminists are troubled by the very category ‘woman’ and work to keep that category unstable and undefined” (Pillow & St. Pierre, 2000, p. 7).

Gender Performativity

The theory of gender performativity is perhaps most simply summarized by Simone de Beauvoir: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (2011, p. 283). I borrow primarily from Judith Butler’s (1988) ideas in this research, describing gender performativity as the way gender is constructed through a “stylized repetition of acts” (p. 519). A couple of features characterize this theory: (1) Gender is constructed through a series of repeated performances, it is not implicit (Butler, 1988); (2) These acts (or gendered performances) both influence and are influenced by culture (Fisher et al., 2018; Spencer, 2014); (3) Gendered performances are not separate from the individual (Butler, 1988). Research has used performativity theory to describe women’s subjectivities in a number of leisure and outdoor spaces, including sorority sisters (Berbary, 2012); fly anglers (Fennell & Berbeck, 2019); and women watching *The Bachelor* (Spencer, 2014).

Laurendeau & Sharara (2008) discuss one example of gender performativity in particular; the decisions of women snowboarders to frequently “engage in practices aimed at challenging the stereotype that women boarders are less skilled than their male counterparts” (p. 38). Rather than disguising their gender, many of these women took actions to emphasize their femininity by choosing to wear lighter colors, or make sure their hair is showing. By differentiating themselves from the men on the hill, they make sure that “others on the hill will know that it is a woman performing with a degree of expertise” (Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008, p. 38). Consciously or unconsciously, these women hope that by emphasizing their gender on the slopes, it will promote the image that women are also capable snowboarders, encouraging participation from other women.

Discipline

For Foucault (1977), power is what produces reality, and his idea of *discipline* is one way that power is exercised over others. Discipline is a technique for directing human behavior and can be overt (meaning power is exercised through rules) or covert (power is exercised through subtle interactions) (Berbary, 2017). Berbary (2017) used Foucault’s theories of discipline and power alongside Butler’s (1988) ideas of gender to research women’s gender performance in a college sorority. The ways that we use power to discipline ourselves or others is what shapes the rules about what is acceptable in a space. Foucault (1977) believed that “discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise” (p. 17).

For Foucault, nothing can be objective; what is thought to be ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ is considered that way because of the effects of power. In particular, the effects of indirect power and the internalization of discipline have the ability to control what is appropriate. He said, “the

judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements” (Foucault, 1977, p. 304).

In the introduction, I shared a narrative from my own life, where I was asked “why don’t you dress up for the awards ceremony tonight?”. This is an example of covert discipline, an offhand comment from a friend to a friend. But this comment stuck with me, and came to mind a week later as I was getting changed before the awards ceremony for another kayaking event. Ten years later, I still think about the rest of what he said “you would get more respect if you dressed like a woman” when I pack for kayaking events. I made, and still make, specific choices about what I wear based on that discipline. I internalized that discipline, and for many years would have told you that I was just dressing how I wanted, without realizing the impact that conversation had on my perceptions on what clothing is appropriate to wear to kayaking events.

Methods & Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways that self-identified women professional kayakers negotiate their gendered subject positions in the spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. In the following section, I expand upon the methodology and methods that I will use to address this purpose. First, I explain the methodology of narrative inquiry. Next, I walk through my data collection methods, including interview techniques and participant selection. Third, I address researcher reflexivity and research validity. Finally, I examine ethical considerations and their impact on the research before concluding with my plans for data analysis and representation.

Narrative Inquiry

I used narrative inquiry as my primary methodology to perform this research. Used in fields of study from history to film, philosophy to linguistics (Connelly & Clandin, 1990), narrative inquiry is a research methodology where the researcher studies the lives of individuals by asking those individuals to provide stories about their lives (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Narrative inquiry can be applied to any spoken or written account (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This research in particular looked at spoken accounts through semi-structured individual interviews.

Narrative inquiry assumes that people construct their realities by narrating their own stories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher typically records and explores the story(ies) told by participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Often, in the end, “the two narratives of participant and researcher become...a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Sometimes this literally takes the form of a collaborative narrative or, a composite character used to show the dominant themes across all participant narratives (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Maple & Edwards, 2010; Rogers & Rose, 2019). The analysis and construction of these stories frequently involve “restorying” participant narratives using literary elements like scene, plot, characters, timing, structure, and tone (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). While I used literary elements to “restory” participant narratives, I chose not to create a composite character, because I thought that it was more valuable for all of these women’s voices to stand alone.

A number of studies have used narrative inquiry within physical education and fitness, outdoor education, recreation, and leadership, and leisure sciences (Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2016; Grimwood et al., 2017; Lewis & Kimieck, 2018; Remington & Legge, 2016;

Rogers & Rose, 2019; Smith et al., 2012). Within the classroom, Remington & Legge (2018) used narrative inquiry to understand teachers' implementation of outdoor education in the classroom, while Grimwood et al. (2017) used it to explore educator perception of the meanings and impacts of urban outdoor education programs on nature connectedness. Lewis & Kimieck (2018) utilized a narrative inquiry framework in their study of river guides to explore their experiences and understand the creation and maintenance of the lifestyle of outdoor leaders.

Notably, narrative inquiry has been helpful in supporting feminist and critical theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) and is a valuable method to investigate women's experiences and their perceptions of those experiences. Researchers have used narrative inquiry to explore these perceptions of experience within a mixed-gender gym (Fisher et al., 2016), within outdoor leadership (Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Rogers & Rose, 2019), and within women's careers in parks and recreation (Smith et al., 2012). This use shows the relevance of narrative inquiry as a methodology to deeply understand the lived experience of professionals in outdoor recreation and women within that context. Narrative inquiry has already been shown to be appropriate for understanding these ideas of gender and femininity. My research builds upon this established use to weave in the feminist poststructuralist research paradigm, a research framework that compliments the studies referenced above.

There are no clear scripted steps that describe how to do narrative inquiry analysis. Instead, the methodological flexibility "allows for a freedom and flexibility of data analysis that may be lost when using other methods" (Maple & Edwards, 2010, p. 39). In my research process, I gave participants a narrative reflection prompt, then utilized 1-hour long semi-structured individual interviews to generate more detailed data.

Data Generation

Research methods that generate qualitative data are most appropriate for addressing my research questions because “qualitative methods potentially allow women to be the ‘experts’ about their own experiences” (Montell, 1999, p. 50). This ability for the qualitative researcher to center the voices of women also supports my use of a feminist poststructuralist research paradigm.

My research participants were 10 self-identified professional women kayakers and myself. The research participants and I generated qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. These interviews took place via Zoom, at a predetermined time decided between researcher and participants. All interviews were audio recorded.

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

After selecting participants (see participant selection section below for specifics on the selection process), I conducted one 15-to-30-minute Zoom meeting with each participant to obtain informed consent and collect information on a selection of demographic questions through an online Qualtrics survey (see Appendix One). Many of the survey questions were adapted from Hughes et al. (2016).

After the completion of informed consent during the first Zoom meeting, I provided the participants with the following reflection prompt: *“How do you perform your gender in kayaking spaces? Please share a story that illustrates how you navigate being a woman in kayaking spaces.”* While on the initial Zoom call, I clarified the prompt (when necessary) beginning with the following script: *“When I say ‘perform your gender,’ I mean that I’m interested in the actions and decisions that you make (consciously or unconsciously), or the thoughts that you have, in and around kayaking spaces, that have to do with your gender identity or gender presentation.*

How do you act in kayaking spaces? How do you dress? How do you act (and react) in relation to other kayakers (non-binary, women, or men) What do you say, do, or think? What (if at all) does your gender identity have to do with your experiences in the whitewater kayaking community?"

I asked participants to consider the prompt before their interviews and had them compose a one-to-two-page narrative (400-800 words) in response and send that written narrative to me one week before the interview took place. These interviews all took place over Zoom and lasted up to one hour. All participants did send their written narratives before our Zoom interview, and there was no participant attrition.

I used semi-structured interviews for this research for three reasons. First, this style of interview provided a structure to examine specific research questions or topics of discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This allowed me to have consistency in the overall structure of interviews and the broad ideas that I planned to examine. Semi-structured interviews still provide enough flexibility for the interview to be unique to each participant (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee freedom to discuss their ideas and allow the interviewer to ask specific follow-up questions grounded in the information given by participants.

During the research process, my role was simultaneously that of researcher and participant. I began by writing my own narrative response to the prompt, and considering my own responses to the interview questions before meeting with participants. However, during the interviews, my role was primarily as a witness “giving testimony to the lives of others” (Lather, 2007, p. 41), meaning that I kept my stories temporarily private as not to detract or from their narratives.

The interviews were audio and video recorded with participant consent and transcribed after recording using Zoom's audio transcription. I composed an interview guide to help conduct the interviews, as Hesse-Beiber (2007) suggested. The interview guide was tailored specifically to each interviewee; at least three questions in each guide was unique to each individual participant. The goal of these interviews was to provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences as women in the whitewater kayaking community through storytelling. The interview guide included some of the following themes, questions, or prompts:

1. Can you tell me about how you began kayaking and your path to where you are now?
2. Please read your written narrative out loud.
3. Thank you for sharing your story with me. You only had a limited space to tell it - is there more context you would like to provide to this story?
4. How (if at all) has your gender been beneficial for you in whitewater kayaking?
5. How (if at all) has your gender been a barrier for you in whitewater kayaking?
6. What do you think about when getting ready to paddle?
7. What ways do you observe people in the kayaking community performing gender?
8. How would you like to see the kayaking community be more inclusive?

Follow-up and additional questions were asked during each interview based on participant responses and written narratives.

Participant Selection

As a method, narrative inquiry does not define one suggested sample size, but six to ten interviewees are often considered acceptable (Kim, 2016). The sample size for this research was ten participants and myself. This decision to keep a relatively small group size is intentional and aligns with the goal of feminist poststructural work to look for the "local rather than the

universal” (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 148). This focus on the local means that the stories shared by participants are their unique experiences, and are not intended to stand as a model for all whitewater kayakers. Rather than looking to generalize the participants’ stories to the lives of all women, I looked to deeply understand their individual stories and experiences in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking.

As a woman intimately connected with the whitewater industry, and a whitewater kayaker myself, I have an established relationship with many women in this community. To recruit research participants for this study, I drew upon my connections through the whitewater community. By choosing to use study participants with whom I might already know, I can rely on the trust and rapport I already have with these women. I used purposeful criterion sampling (Schreier, 2018) to identify participants. Participants had to meet the following selection criteria:

4. Participants must self-identify as women.
5. Participants must have started kayaking before the age of 15 years old.
6. Participants must be considered professional kayakers (either for their competitive expertise or their local impact in the sport), meaning that they get compensation through money, gear, or something else for their participation in whitewater kayaking.

I recruited participants by reaching out through social media posts on Instagram and Facebook using my personal accounts. As Mayer (2017) noted in their dissertation, my position as an insider in the whitewater kayaking community allowed me to assemble a group of paddlers that best represented the demographic that I am researching—women professional kayakers who started paddling before the age of 15.

I fit all desired characteristics of the study participants. Because of this, I was both participant and researcher. In a pseudo-autoethnographic sense, I explored my experiences of being a woman in the kayaking world alongside these other women. However, my role during the interviews was to witness their stories, so I only shared my narrative at the end of each interview, if asked.

Researcher Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers frequently use reflexivity as a methodological tool “to legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations” (Pillow, 2003, p. 175). Simply put, reflexivity is self-reflection by the researcher that helps create an honest narrative; it acknowledges how the researcher’s background and subject positions may shape their interpretation of the data (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). I asked these participants to be vulnerable, so I needed to be vulnerable alongside them. Pillow (2003) challenges researchers to lean into this vulnerability by practicing what she calls “uncomfortable reflexivity”: or “A reflexivity that pushes toward an unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable, cannot be a simple story of subjects, subjectivity, and transcendence of self-indulgent telling” (p. 192), meaning that I intentionally tried to consider ideas that I was unfamiliar or uncomfortable with. This gave me the opportunity to be reflexive of my power in what I wrote and how I represented my research—to make my voice apparent in this writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Spencer & Paisley, 2013).

My dual roles as researcher and participant required me to be reflexive throughout the entire research process. As a professional woman kayaker and an active participant in the whitewater kayaking industry, I would have been unable to objectively distance myself from the research. I acknowledged my experiences and considered the possible impacts of them during the

data analysis process. Reflexivity takes self-awareness and requires me to constantly step back to observe my interactions within the contexts of this research (Lather, 1993). That is why I am open about my positioning.

Data Analysis

Interviews took place via Zoom and were audio and video recorded. Although I planned to use the video recording to aid in my data analysis as a way to provide rich description, I ended up with enough notes about tone that I never re-watched the video portions. Because all ten of my interviews were conducted via Zoom, I was able to use the automatic closed captions to develop transcriptions of the audio. I cross-checked the transcriptions with the audio recordings and added notes by hand. This increased contact with the data benefitted all analysis phases, especially as I was initially becoming familiar with the data.

When conducting a narrative inquiry, the researcher is not just “passively recording and reporting the narrator’s reality,” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 158, 2016) but they are writing and restorying those narratives. I started analyzing the data at the same time as I completed my interviews, using simultaneous procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), rather than generating all data before beginning my analysis. None of the research participants expressed interest in being a part of the data analysis process, however I reached out a number of times to confirm that they were comfortable with the way that I was representing their voices.

I analyzed the data from these interviews and written narratives using a method called narrative inquiry with my early steps modeled on Polkinghorne’s analysis of narratives (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995). Rather than utilizing coding to perform my data analysis, I immersed myself in the data, attempting to use my writing as a method of developing a deeper understanding of the data (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). First, after each interview was

finished, I re-listened to the audio recording from the Zoom call, and re-read both their written narrative and the interview transcript. Second, I copied each narrative into a spreadsheet, and categorized themes and ideas that I recognized within each individual narrative. This led to my creation of one large list of ideas. Themed coding can have the unintended side effect of depersonalizing and decontextualizing narrative data, which is antithetical to poststructuralist feminist research (Maple & Edwards, 2010). While I did develop a list of themes as I was reviewing the interview audio and transcripts, they were only used as a guide to organize my ideas. Finally, I took this list and compared my wording for each theme; questioning (for example) why I chose the word “culture” for one sentence but the word “dynamic” for another. After analyzing the data and writing four podcast episodes, I sent the transcript and audio to participants for their review.

The process of writing each of these stories allows me to break down the multifaceted nature of stories and crystalize ideas (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I chose to highlight differences and contradictions in the research, and I intentionally do not plan to present a grand summary at the end of this research. I want to leave my results partially open to individual interpretation (Spencer & Paisley, 2013).

As I figured out how to “story” the data, I intentionally included both similarities and contradictions, modeled on the idea of paralogical validity (Lather, 1993). Lather (1993) proposes this reconceptualized validity as one of four ways to re-frame validity as a “counter-practice of authority,” (p. 677) and an “incitement to discourse,” (p. 674) or a disruption of the status quo. This framing of validity comes from a desire to consider validity after poststructuralism, an alternative to positivism’s truth or not truth ideas, a validity grounded in

“theorizing our practice” (p. 674). In particular, the goal of paralogical validity is to highlight differences and contradictions within the research.

The following checklist provides the characteristics of paralogical validity that I used to guide my data analysis:

- fosters differences and heterogeneity via the search for "fruitful interruptions"
- implodes controlling codes, but still coherent within present forms of intelligibility
- anticipatory of a politics that desires both justice and the unknown, but refuses any grand transformation
- concerned with undecidables, limits, paradoxes, discontinuities, complexities
- searches for the oppositional in our daily practices, the territory we already occupy

(Lather, 1993, p. 686).

Data Representation

Often used in ethnography, creative analytic practice (CAP) is a method for analyzing and representing data (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). “The goals of CAP are to reflect experiences in ways that represent their personal and social meanings rather than simplifying and reducing to generalize” (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 120). CAP allows researchers to contextualize leisure in the world alongside all its complexities. Scholars have used CAP to represent research in the form of screenplays (Berbary, 2012), fictional writing (Caulley, 2008), poetry (Richardson, 2002), and art (Inckle, 2010).

Specifically, I chose to represent my data in in podcast form. Using podcasting as a form of creative analytic practice for this research is appropriate for a number of reasons. First, a podcast is an audio storytelling format; allowing me to use traditional methods of podcast creation to ‘restory’ the interviews and participant narratives. In particular, I used the book *Make*

Noise: A Creator's Guide to Podcasting and Great Audio Storytelling (Nuzum, 2019) as a guide to create a compelling story. As an audio medium, using a podcast allowed me to literally incorporate the voices of the women that I interviewed, which aligns with my stance as a feminist researcher (providing women with the space to tell their own story in a way of their own choosing (thus empowering)). The transcript of the four podcast episodes that I created make up the entirety of my manuscript. The audio recordings can be accessed in their entirety through the feed on my website, womeninwhitewater.wordpress.com or through any podcast hosting application. Researchers have used podcasts to represent both theses and dissertations (Trono, 2020; Williams, 2020).

I begin the four-part podcast series with a summary of my introduction, literature review, and methods for the listeners. It can be found at [Podcast Episode #1: Prologue](#).

Discussion

[Podcast Episode #2: The Performance of Pink](#).

[Podcast Episode #3: Discipline of the Body](#).

Conclusion

[Podcast Episode #4: Lessons for the Kayaking Community](#).

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EPILOGUE

This is the epilogue to *Women in Whitewater*. It is not a part of the journal article, but is a part of my thesis, and I think is important to include in audio format for those involved in the whitewater kayaking community who have listened to this podcast. I want to conclude with some final observations. There are a few limitations of this work that I would like to acknowledge. First, I discuss the impact of the number of participants that I interviewed. Then, I share some thoughts about the use of a podcast as a method to share research, and this thesis in particular. Finally, I want to take note of possible directions for future research on gender in whitewater kayaking.

My original proposal was to conduct five interviews, but when I shared my recruitment materials on Instagram and Facebook, I was contacted by over 15 women within the first 20 hours of posting. I immediately ceased taking any new participants. As I started to return these messages and explain the requirements of my research, a number of women retracted their interest in participation, leaving me with ten interested participants. In a decision assisted by my thesis chair, I decided not to narrow down this field to five. I felt like women in kayaking were excited and ready to share their stories with me, and I didn't want to take that chance away from any of them. I was also concerned that I would have participants either not submit a narrative or have to reschedule our interview call and I wanted to cover any potential participant attrition.

But facilitating ten interviews left me with approximately ten hours of audio to analyze. I was quickly overwhelmed with the variety of stories and ideas that I was hearing. I felt pressure to ensure that everyone's story was included, especially the contradictions within and between each. However, this research is a master's thesis, and my time, space, and resources were limited. As you heard in the podcast, I ended up selecting two theories to guide which stories

were highlighted in the podcast, gender performativity and discipline. This narrowing of focus resulted in the first two limitations that I want to consider.

First, by not including all of the stories and themes that were shared via narrative and interview, I feel like I am letting my participants down. I don't want them to feel like their stories were less worthwhile if they weren't shared. By only sharing two major themes, there is less depth to this research. The diversity of opinions and stories is not as clearly represented as it could have been if I had been able to dedicate an entire episode to each participants' story for example.

Second, by choosing not to include everything, my influence as researcher and curator became very obvious. I realize now, only in retrospect that I selected two themes that resonated most with my experiences and history with whitewater kayaking. Upon making my initial decision, I was sure that I was selecting the two ideas that had been discussed the most across all participants' narratives and interviews. Although that thought is not entirely wrong, I also happened to "coincidentally" select two ideas that I am very passionate about.

A limitation unrelated to the format of the podcast is that the sample of women I interviewed was fairly homogenous. Ten women, nine citizens of the USA, five from the southern USA in particular, six were straight, all were white, and they were born between 1987 and 2002. Most of these women were born into professional or working-class families, and all had at least some college education. While we may not know if this sample is or isn't representative of the demographics of women professional kayakers, it is not diverse.

Now, why a podcast? I believe that there are two benefits to using a podcast as a form of creative analytic practice to represent research. First, a podcast is an audio storytelling format, which allowed me to use methods of podcast creation to 'restory' the interviews and participant

narratives. Second, as an audio medium, using a podcast allowed me to literally incorporate the voices of the women that I interviewed. This fits the foundational belief that feminist research is to center less-heard voices and “reveal lived realities of power inequalities and difference” (Jenkins et al., 2019, p. 415).

Finally, a podcast has the ability to share research in a public and accessible format. I would have really benefited from being able to access these ideas in my youth. Research from the Outdoor Industry Association Review of Paddlesports (2019) says that “the biggest year-over-year growth [in whitewater] is with youth ages 6 to 12. In fact, participation among children ages 6 to 12 has increased by 126 percent since 2013.” (p. 23). When I was a middle schooler, even though I loved to watch the male dominated *BombFlow* videos, I wanted to hear stories about kayaking that did something other than glorify the “dirtbag” culture. I didn’t know that I could get a degree in Experiential and Outdoor Education, and it wasn’t until I entered my master’s program that I even realized people were doing research on the adventure sports that I love.

Even if I had known that there was research in the field of outdoor and experiential education when I was a young person, I’m not sure that I would have known how to reach out and access it. Would I have ever found it if the research could only be reached through academic journals behind paywalls? But I could have found them through a podcast. I strongly believe that future research in all fields should consider the use of podcasting as a form of creative analytic practice. Part of the inspiration behind my choice to use a podcast came from listening to the podcast *My Gothic Dissertation* by Anna Williams (2020), and I borrowed her method of using a sound effect to indicate the presence of a citation.

Given the accessibility that I wanted this podcast to have, I struggled to use gender performativity as a dominant theory in this thesis. I felt challenged to explain how gender is performed in a way that would be accessible to general audiences. I still worry about how many kayakers will begin listening to Episode One, get to my statement that this thesis interprets gender as something that is produced and not something that is implicitly true or binary, and then will turn it off. I worried that taking a poststructuralist stance on gender would challenge too many assumptions. I worried that my primary message, which is that we should all think critically about our actions, words, and the importance of raising up and highlighting women's voices, would be overshadowed, or ignored by people who think that the idea of gender being fluid is a step too far.

I think that whitewater kayaking is an action sport venue that could be used for more research relating to gender in sport cultures. The sheer number of women that reached out to me with interest in sharing their stories as a part of this research shows that women are ready to talk about their experiences. Many of them shared that they wished that conversations about risk, fear, or gender assumptions were being had on a larger scale in their communities. Future research on gender in kayaking should look at exploring the ways that women and men view risk taking within the sport.

Thank you so much to Avery, Brooke, Caroline, Cat, Claudia, Denise, Diane, Emily, Grace, and Rachel for sharing your stories as a part of this thesis. Finally, a special thank you to my committee: Dr. Callie Schultz, Dr. Denise Mitten, and Debby Singleton for all of your support. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you on the river.

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APPENDIX A

1. What is your birth year?
2. Do you currently consider yourself to be:
 - a. Heterosexual or straight
 - b. Gay or lesbian
 - c. Bisexual
 - d. Fluid
 - e. Pansexual
 - f. Queer
 - g. Demisexual
 - h. Questioning
 - i. Asexual
 - j. Something not listed here, please specify:
 - k. I prefer not to answer
3. How do you describe your current relationship or marital status?
4. Which categories best describe you? Select ALL that apply to you:
 - a. American Indian or Alaska Native—For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community
 - b. Asian—For example, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese
 - c. Black or African American—For example, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali

- d. Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin—For example, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Columbian
 - e. Middle Eastern or North African—For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian
 - f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander—For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese
 - g. White—For example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French
 - h. Some other race, ethnicity, or origin, please specify: _____
 - i. I prefer not to answer
5. How old were you when you first started learning to whitewater kayak?
6. How many years has it been since you first started learning to whitewater kayak?
(Open ended)
7. In what area of the United States did you begin kayaking?
- a. Midwest—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin
 - b. Northeast—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont
 - c. South—Arkansas, Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia
 - d. West—Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming
 - e. Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories

- f. Something not listed here, please specify: _____
 - g. I prefer not to answer
8. In what area of the United States do you primarily live now?
- a. Midwest—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin
 - b. Northeast—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont
 - c. South—Arkansas, Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia
 - d. West—Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming
 - e. Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories
 - f. Something not listed here, please specify: _____
 - g. I prefer not to answer
9. Which of the following best describes your socioeconomic status or class at birth?
- a. Working Class
 - b. Service Class
 - c. Professional
 - d. Something else, please specify: ____
 - e. I prefer not to answer
10. Which of the following best describes your socioeconomic status or class currently?
- a. Working Class

- b. Service Class
- c. Professional
- d. Something else, please specify: ____
- e. I prefer not to answer

11. Which category best describes your education?

- a. Some high school
- b. High school diploma or equivalent
- c. Vocational training
- d. Some college
- e. Associate's degree (e.g., AA, AE, AFA, AS, ASN)
- f. Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BBA BFA, BS)
- g. Some post undergraduate work
- h. Master's degree (e.g., MA, MBA, MFA, MS, MSW)
- i. Specialist degree (e.g., EdS)
- j. Applied or professional doctorate degree (e.g., MD, DDC, DDS, JD, PharmD)
- k. Doctorate degree (e.g., EdD, PhD)
- l. Something else, please specify: _____
- m. I prefer not to answer

12. What best describes the industry you primarily work in?

(Questions 2, 4, 8, 11 adapted from Hughes et al., 2016)

APPENDIX B

Episode One – Prologue

Welcome to Women in Whitewater, a four-part limited audio series exploring what it's like to be a woman in the professional whitewater industry. My name is Rowan Stuart, and this podcast is the result of my Outdoor and Experiential Education Master's Thesis research at Western Carolina University. The purpose of this thesis was to explore how professional women kayakers perform their gender in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. I also wanted to examine whether these performances resist, reinforce, or repurpose the status quo.

This is episode one - the prologue. In this episode, I introduce my research, describe the methods that I used to gather data, and give an overview of the feminist poststructuralist research paradigm. If that sentence didn't make sense to you yet, don't worry about it! It is my goal that everyone who listens to this podcast will walk away with a better understanding of poststructuralism, gender performativity, and discipline and how those three theories apply in whitewater kayaking. In every episode, I have tried to blend theory with the stories that were told to me by other women kayakers, as well as some of my own. This podcast is designed to appeal to two different audiences: first, the research fields of outdoor, adventure, and experiential education and recreation, and perhaps more importantly, the public whitewater kayaking community, where all of these stories come from. Now, let's start off with the story that prompted me to write this thesis:

Rowan: The freestyle kayaking competition had just wrapped up, the scores were in, and we were hanging out next to the river. Soon, there were only two of us left chatting; it was now or never...

Before I could ask if he would buy me a six-pack of beer for the party later that evening, he surprised me with an unwelcome question: "Why don't you dress up for the awards ceremony tonight?" Catching me off guard, I replied indignantly: "What? Dress up how? I. Am. Dressed." He turned his full attention to me, pausing to look me up and down. I

wondered what he was seeing, glancing down at myself as well. I had on purple Chaco sandals and black athletic shorts; my hair was tied up in a ponytail, mostly covered by a crooked black flat brim hat. My bright blue t-shirt was baggy and branded with the logo of the kayak company that I had landed a sponsorship with the year before. I looked back at him as he spoke again: “Well yeah, but why don’t you put some effort in? You could brush your hair...put on a dress or some makeup.” I laughed, and feigned retching. “Ewww. That’s not me. I don’t like all that girl stuff. I don’t even own makeup,” I lied. I grimaced again, and continued, “I just don’t see the point; it seems like a lot of effort for nothing. Besides, everyone would look at me weird if I get dressed up. Why would I change now?” Beginning to feel uncomfortable, I looked back at the river and started to stand up from my seat on the bleachers, an excuse to leave just beginning to pass my lips, when he interrupted me. “Think about it. There are no other women out here getting dressed up after kayaking events. You would get more respect if you dressed like a woman. You’d look great, and it would help you to stand out from the other competitors! Don’t you want people to see that you’re pretty?”

I have chosen to explore ideas of womanhood in the context of whitewater kayaking.

Personally, that space is where I first began to think about what a woman is “expected” to be, and those early explorations of my gender continue to impact who I am today. Additionally, I classify whitewater kayaking as an action sport, as it fits the definition given by Thorpe & Olive (2016) in their book *Women in Action Sport Cultures* to refer to “activities that developed as an alternative to more traditional, rule-bound competitive sports” (p. 3).

By the way, that sound that you just heard is the way that I signal that a citation is present in the episode transcript. All sources used in this episode can be accessed on our website, womeninwhitewater.wordpress.com or you can find the link in our show notes.

Sport is a leading definer of masculinity in Western societies (Kerns & Whiteside, 2020). Action sports are used as a venue to discuss “cultural understandings and expectations” (Comley, 2016, p. 2) and have been referred to as a “potential avenue for changing and challenging traditional cultural beliefs about gender” (Comley, 2016, p. 2). In leisure spaces like whitewater kayaking, we see what is possible and who it is possible for us to become, they are spaces for

resistance and empowerment (Henderson & Gibson, 2013). Women have reported feeling empowered by participating in other sports like racing in triathlons, boxing, playing rugby, bodybuilding, climbing, or solo traveling because they had the opportunity to “resist traditional norms and gendered opportunities for leisure” (Henderson & Gibson, 2013, pp. 121-122).

Like many areas in the field of experiential and outdoor education, the paddlesport industry is male dominated and struggles with misogyny, sexual harassment, and inequity (LaFortune, 2020; Langolis, 2018; Shilton, 2016). Whitewater kayaking is the most male-dominated paddlesport when compared to recreational kayaking, sea kayaking, rafting, or stand-up paddle boarding. From 2013 to 2019, men represented between 63% and 65% of all participants in whitewater (Outdoor Foundation, 2019).

Although that number is still high across the board, male participation over all paddlesports is actually declining at about one percent per year as female participation increases by the same amount (Outdoor Foundation, 2019). Even though women’s participation in whitewater is only gradually increasing, more and more women may be finding their way to the sport in the next few years. With this in mind, what sort of a space will these women who are new to the sport find themselves in? Will they find a welcoming space or one where they feel targeted and excluded?

Currently, in many outdoor spaces, women face “implicit messages, beliefs, values, and assumptions based on gender that commonly lead to constraints, biases, and lack of opportunity” (Allen-Craig, 2020, p. 122). For example, many of the women interviewed by Allen-Craig et al. (2020) shared experiences of being excluded from work meetings, not given promotions, or being humiliated and ignored by coworkers. These stories often came from gender biases about women’s technical skills, or stereotypes that women are more suited for interpersonal skills. As

women enter whitewater in growing numbers and navigate their roles in this industry, I think that it is important for us all to interrogate and deconstruct harmful narratives such as the one in my story that I shared at the beginning of this episode.

One reason that I have chosen to present my research in podcast format is to center the voices of the women who participated in my study. That is also why I have attempted to present this in language that is more accessible, and to reach beyond academia to the whitewater kayaking and outdoor and adventure sport communities.

This research is framed using a feminist poststructuralist research paradigm. One goal of feminist research is to provide a platform for less-heard voices and “reveal lived realities of power inequalities and difference” (Jenkins et al., 2019, p. 415). Given the male-dominated nature of whitewater (and experiential and outdoor education as a whole), I think that it is important to try to understand and highlight the ways that gender is produced and reinforced in the kayaking community.

In order to do this, I’ve been conducting interviews with women-identifying professional kayakers. The women that I interviewed for this research all started kayaking before the age of 15. They were all also considered professionals, meaning that they receive compensation from a company, business, or brand, in the form of gear, money, or something else for their participation in whitewater kayaking. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and took place over Zoom. Before our interviews, each woman sent me a unique self-composed narrative in response to the question “How do you perform your gender in kayaking spaces? Please share a story that illustrates how you navigate being a woman in kayaking spaces.”

The ten women I interviewed ranged in age from 19 to 34, and are all white. Most are currently located in the southern United States of America; however, a couple are located in

western USA, and one participant is from Austria. Three participants opted to select or be assigned a pseudonym; however, the other seven elected to use their own identities for most of their interviews.

I analyzed the data from these interviews and written narratives following the guidelines of narrative inquiry, with my early steps of data analysis modeled off of Polkinghorne's analysis of narratives (1995), which I'll outline briefly in these three steps. First, after each interview was finished, I re-listened to the audio recording from the Zoom call, and re-read both the written narrative and the interview transcript. Second, I copied each narrative into a spreadsheet, and categorized themes and ideas that I recognized within each individual narrative. This led to my creation of one large list of ideas. Third, I took this list and compared my wording for each theme; questioning (for example) why I chose the word "culture" for one sentence but the word "dynamic" for another. Basically, I looked for similarities, differences, and contradictions in my summary of the interviewee's ideas.

I also used something called paralogical validity (Lather, 1993) in the analysis process, which is a way to consider whether the results of research accurately represent what was said, focusing especially on the different interpretations of each story, and attempting not to make assumptions. During this process I tried not to generalize ideas to create patterns where there might not be any, but I did prioritize making a clear and understandable narrative. This narrative is inherently interpreted through the lens with which I see the world; if someone else read all of the narratives and transcripts, their interpretation would likely be different. "Qualitative research [like this] is interpretive research" (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 208), requiring the researcher to reflexively identify the way that they see the world and how their experiences may shape their reading of the data.

This is an important time to tell you some more about myself and my role as a narrator, curator, and participant within this work. I am a 25-year-old white cis woman from the Southeastern USA. I started kayaking when I was 10, got my first sponsorship at age 14, competed in my first international kayaking competition when I was 15, and won the ICF Freestyle World Championships when I was 16. I work in the outdoor industry as a kayak instructor, an outdoor educator, and I remain actively involved in competitive freestyle kayaking. All this to say; I came into this research with my own preconceptions based on my 15-year history in whitewater kayaking.

In feminist poststructuralist research, this acknowledgement about my history and positioning is referred to as reflexivity. Simply put, reflexivity is self-reflection by the researcher that helps create an honest narrative; it acknowledges how the researcher's background and subject positions may shape their interpretation of the data (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Qualitative researchers frequently use reflexivity as a methodological tool "to legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations" (Pillow, 2003, p. 175).

However, I attempted to keep my history and my opinions to myself during the interview process. I wanted to act as a witness to the stories and experiences of the women that I was interviewing. At times I shared my opinions if asked, or towards the end of our interviews, but I felt that it was important for me to encourage these women to share their stories without my influence. The area that my biases and history may have most influenced the direction of this research is during the data analysis. With the variety of topics and ideas discussed across all 10 of these interviews, I chose two relevant theories to guide the narratives that I included. This way I could investigate a reasonable amount of content rather than barely scraping the surface of 20+

different ideas and topics. Those two theories are gender performativity (Butler, 1988) and discipline (Foucault, 1977).

The ten narratives and interviews that research participants shared with me covered a vast range of topics. There were stories about feeling empowered, about being judged, and about finding role models in the sport. Stories about competing in races, being afraid, or simply going out onto the rivers to have a good time. These women shared stories of both harassment and preferential treatment that they had experienced, especially ones that they felt were based on their being a woman. They talked about receiving extra attention or sponsorship because they flirted with the men, but also being publicly judged or called out for the clothes that they were wearing.

It was clear to me before beginning this research that I would never be able to compose one story that would be representative of the experiences of every woman kayaker. According to the 2019 Special Report on Paddlesports (Outdoor Foundation, 2019), there are approximately 949,000 women whitewater kayakers. There is no chance that their stories and experiences are all represented in this thesis. Therefore, these stories and this thesis are not designed to be generalized or applied to all women kayakers.

Now... I've used this word a lot already, but what is poststructuralism? Simply, poststructuralism is the research paradigm that I have used to guide my questions, my methods, and my analysis during this research. Poststructuralism links the ideas of language, social organization, and power (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). It emerged as a critique of structuralism, a paradigm that often interprets reality in a structured or binary way, implying usually that there is a hierarchy between two opposing ideas. A key belief of poststructuralism is

that language shapes reality, basically that there is no one objective ‘truth’ existing outside of the meaning that is created through language.

For example, I learned how a poststructuralist would view “truth” with this example about blue jays. A blue jay is a bird that looks blue to our eyes. However, that blue color is caused by the refraction of light off of the bird’s feathers. If you get a blue jay feather wet, it will actually look brown, because the color pigment in the feathers themselves is brown, not blue. Because of this different interpretation, a poststructuralist wouldn’t spend too much time arguing if that blue jay is blue or brown, instead, they would say that blue jays are both blue and brown, depending on how you see them. Furthermore, we only identify the blue jay as blue (or brown) because we have assigned meaning to the words blue and brown. In addition to meaning, each of those words has a value assigned to it as well. For example, blue is often considered to be more valuable than brown; consider the obsession with blue eyes and use of colored contact lenses. In this podcast, poststructuralist ideas significantly influence my use of the theories gender performativity and discipline.

Episode two of this series focuses on that theory of gender performativity, especially the ideas of Judith Butler. Gender performativity pushes back against the idea that gender is something that we are born with, and instead indicates that gender is something we become. Rather than gender being something permanent and binary, like woman vs. man, gender is something flexible, influenced by our culture, and performed by individuals on a daily basis, As Simone de Beauvoir said “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (2011, p. 283). Specifically, the theories of poststructuralism and gender performativity would say that the production of gender comes from language. This is a quote from the book *Gender(s)* by Elizabeth Stockton (2021):

Audio Clip: “Words enter us, and words live inside us, birthing whole realms of meaning *in* us. Words are even draped on us. We wear “girl” or “boy,” for instance, in the form of clothes and hair and so much more.” (p. 14)

Episode three of this series focuses on Michel Foucault’s ideas of surveillance and discipline. Foucault believed that nothing can be objective; that what is thought to be ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ is considered that way because of the effects of power. For Foucault, power is what produces reality, and his idea of *discipline* is one way that power is exercised over others. He believed that “discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise” (Foucault, 1977, p. 17).

Discipline is a technique for directing human behavior and can be overt (meaning that power is exercised through rules) or covert (meaning that power is exercised through subtle interactions). The ways that we use power to discipline ourselves or others is what shapes the rules about what is acceptable in a space. At the beginning of this episode, I shared a narrative from my own life, where I was asked “why don’t you dress up for the awards ceremony tonight?”. This is an example of covert discipline, an offhand comment from a friend to a friend. But this comment stuck with me, and came to mind a week later as I was getting changed before the awards ceremony for another kayaking event. Ten years later, I still think about the rest of what he said “you would get more respect if you dressed like a woman” when I pack for kayaking events. I made, and still make, specific choices about what I wear based on that discipline. Additionally, I internalized that discipline, and for many years I would have told you that I was just dressing how I wanted, in what was comfortable, without realizing the impact that that conversation had on my perceptions on what clothing is appropriate to wear to kayaking events.

The final episode of this series, episode four, is titled “lessons for the kayaking community.” It includes the stories of the women that I interviewed about the places in kayaking that they like being in the most. It also shares some of their ideas for creating more inclusive spaces and attitudes in the whitewater kayaking community.

Now, before you move on to episodes two, three, and four, I want to take a second again to acknowledge the question “why a podcast?” Here’s the thing... This podcast exists because it’s the podcast that I have always wanted to hear. I think there is a gap in both research and in the media that is calling for easily accessible combinations of research and outdoor and adventure sports. I believe this podcast presents a realistic image of some aspects of the whitewater kayaking community.

As you get into episodes two and three, there will be some uncomfortable and potentially triggering topics, including conversations about sexual assault in episode three. That’s because these stories are real. I wasn’t comfortable sharing a picture of whitewater kayaking that was unrealistic or focused only on the optimistic image that we all hope our adventure sport is. I hope these stories don’t discourage people from giving whitewater kayaking a try.

Thank you for listening, I’ll see you on the river.

[Episode Two - The Performance of Pink](#)

Heads up, there is one use of explicit language in this episode.

Brooke: I recently spent nearly \$3,000 on a bright pink, glittery carbon play boat. I have always paddled pink play boats, and I guess I never really reflected why. I think it’s probably because the spaces I play boat in are primarily male-dominated.

Welcome to episode two of Women in Whitewater, a four-part limited audio series about what it’s like to be a woman in the professional whitewater industry. My name is Rowan Stuart, and this podcast is the result of my Outdoor and Experiential Education Master’s Thesis

research. Today's episode is titled The Performance of Pink. The purpose of this thesis was to explore how professional women kayakers perform their gender in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. Consequently, I also wanted to examine whether these performances resist, reinforce, or repurpose the status quo.

As a reminder, this sound is the way that I indicate a citation is present. All sources used in this episode can be accessed on our website, womeninwhitewater.wordpress.com or through the link in the show notes.

There are three key theories that you will learn about in each of these episodes: poststructuralism, gender performativity, and discipline. If you're new to the podcast, please pause this episode now and go back to episode one which explains my research methods and the idea of poststructuralism.

In this episode, I will define and give examples of gender performativity in the context of whitewater kayaking. How does our appearance change the assumptions that others make about us, and how do those assumptions change the ways that we dress and act? In the next 20 minutes, I will share true stories from professional women whitewater kayakers about the ways they perform their genders and how they are treated while on and around the river. The story that Brooke shared in the introduction to this episode is just one example of gender performance using the power of the color pink. We will return to that story slightly later on in the episode, but first, what does it mean for someone to perform their gender?

The theories of gender performativity in this research come primarily from the ideas of Judith Butler. Butler is an American philosopher, gender theorist, and professor at UC Berkeley.

Audio Clip: "To say that gender is performative is a little different, because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman...We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal

reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that's being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. So, to say that gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start. I know it's controversial, but that's my claim. (BigThink, 2011)

What Butler is saying here is that our gender, our position as genderqueer, woman, man, or otherwise, is literally developed through our actions, or "performances" as she calls them. We are culturally shaped to fit these categories, which is why there are different gender stereotypes and expectations of what identifying as a woman, or a man means in different cultures.

As individual women enter different spaces, they display certain versions of "woman" in each.

Caroline: If I'm going somewhere nice with a couple of my friends from school, I'll wear a nice pair of jeans and nice shoes and a cute shirt or that kind of thing. But if I'm going kayaking, we're just like wearing T-shirts and hoodies.

Grace: River fashion is so relaxed; I think I would get way more judgment if I showed up to the river in high heels and a skirt than I get wearing Carhartt's.

Every action that we take is literally a performance of our genders, from the length of our hair to our clothing choices. These actions and choices may not be intentional, but they still affect the cultural perceptions of gender. In turn, these cultural perceptions shape these actions and choices (Fisher et al., 2018; Spencer, 2014). Basically, the performances both make and are made by culture.

Let's return to our narrative...

Brooke: I have always paddled pink play boats, and I guess I never really reflected why. I think it's probably because the spaces I play boat in are primarily male-dominated, and I want to make a statement as one of the few females out there.

If you are one of the few women who is "cool" enough to have been invited to hang out with those bro pro kayakers, you have to fit in, so you naturally morph yourself into a bro. I noticed myself doing this, and I let it happen. The one way I combat this is by paddling pink boats. Off the water, I act like a bro so I will fit in and continue getting invited, and on the water, I make a blatant attempt to paddle like the boys, because I want

to be as good as them. But despite this, I want everyone to know I am a girl - hence the pink boat.

In these seven sentences, we begin to develop one image of the professional kayaking culture.

We are reminded that whitewater kayaking is a male-dominated sport, with men making up 65% of participants in 2018 (Outdoor Foundation, 2019).

There is an underlying conflict between wanting to paddle like one of the guys to fit in and also be clearly identifiable as a woman. Traveling back in time to their introduction to the sport, this idea of wanting to be immediately identifiable as a girl was mentioned by other women as well.

Emily: I started changing my gear to be more pink and feminine after I got called, “the boy in the eddy.” Someone said, “wow that boy is paddling really well.” And I was kind of embarrassed. I was like, “I’m a girl. Doesn't even make it even cooler than I’m a girl and I’m doing all this stuff?” and they say “Sure.” I want everyone when they see me to not have that awkward moment...I want them to know that I’m a girl.

Brooke started off paddling a black kid’s kayak:

Brooke: People would always say, “look at that little guy go; look at that little boy he's so cute!” My dad would say, “no, she's a girl.” And that was always frustrating to me because there were not very many women on the water, and so I wanted to make it apparent... that “No. I’m a girl... girls can do this.”

Emily and Brooke are using pink as a performance. This helps them to regain their power in these situations where they feel mislabeled, outnumbered, or unseen. However, not all women had these same positive feelings about the performance of pink... Just a note here; in the next quote, Claudia refers to two different color options; aquafresh, which is blue, red, and white, and aurora, which is pink, gray, and blue.

Claudia: I remember picking out my axiom and the two color options were the aqua fresh (blue, red, white - like a toothpaste tube) and the aurora (pink, gray, blue). I’m obsessed with the aurora color palette, but at the time I was like “I’m going to look too much like a girl; I don’t want to be seen as a super big girly girl.” The aurora color

scheme was almost hyper feminine, it's pink, it's purple, and I think in my mind I wasn't ready to claim that color palette yet.

I think that was like the biggest thing when choosing the color of the boat, was that I was worried that my gender would seem like the forefront. That stereotypical femininity would be seen as like the forefront of who I was/am as a paddler, and I didn't necessarily want that. I think this is like me stereotyping, I think this is my own bias. But I see pink and purple, and I think of your stereotypical "girly girls", and I don't necessarily associate girly girls and strength together. (I think that's just my own bias) but that was like my biggest thing, was that I would be seen as a stronger woman or stronger paddler if I wasn't in the pink and purple boat.

Quite literally, the power that the color pink has is one of the most visible gender performances. Claudia claims that it's her own bias and that she's stereotyping, but these associations between pink and femininity are more common than not. Peggy Orenstein, author of the book *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* has this to say:

Orenstein: It's not that pink is intrinsically bad, but it is such a tiny slice of the rainbow, and, though it may celebrate girlhood in one way, it also repeatedly and firmly fuses girls' identity to appearance...

...What happened? Why has girlhood become so monochromatic? Girls' attraction to pink may seem unavoidable, somehow encoded in their DNA, but according to Jo Paoletti, an associate professor of American studies at the University of Maryland, it's not. Children weren't color-coded at all until the early twentieth century...

...It was not until the mid-1980s, when amplifying age and sex differences became a dominant children's marketing strategy, that pink fully came into its own, when it began to seem innately attractive to girls, part of what defined them as female, at least for the first few critical years. (Orenstein, p. 34-36).

The decision to paddle in pink (or not) was conscious for these three women, but is unconscious for many others.

We return again to my research question; Do these performances resist, reinforce, or repurpose the status quo? For Claudia, her decision to not paddle the pink and purple boat was

resistance to the status quo; resistance to the expectation that women like pink and should wear that color as a representation of their “womanness.”

For Emily, she found that her intentional decision to paddle pink boats made her seem more approachable and she felt more like a role model for younger women kayakers.

Emily: It was on the cover of our brochure, and little girls would come up [to me]. I noticed that, with the pink boat, the approachability for all the little girls went up a lot. I didn't look as tough, and I didn't look as unattainable.

For Brooke, the decision to paddle pink was made in an attempt to repurpose the status quo - to intentionally use the color pink in her boat and gear to take the assumption that girls wear pink and to connect that color with her skill and ability as a professional kayaker. She wanted to take the assumption that she had experienced as a child; one that women and girls just aren't kayakers, and flip it on its head. She had this to say... Heads up, this next part is where that swear word comes in.

Brooke: I do sometimes feel the need to prove to myself and to others that-yes, I am a girl, but that doesn't mean I can't go as big as the guys. I may be stinky, dirty, and bro-y like them, but my boat is pink, and I have a fucking vagina, and I can rip just as hard as anyone on a big wave.

This reclaiming and repurposing of stereotypical femininity in kayaking (a space frequently perceived as masculine) was made in other ways by other women as well – through the use of zinc lipstick, tutus, or biodegradable glitter. These women, although clearly reclaiming and repurposing the associations between pink and womanhood, also expressed an underlying frustration with that association.

Emily: Maybe there is a chance I would be taken more seriously if I dressed more “hardcore,” but I don't want to be taken more seriously; I'm happy with what I do and the way that I do it. So, with that, I can dress and act how I feel I want to. Which is goofy, and in pink. I don't mind if people see me as soft, that's fine for me. But when people do that, when they judge you based off something as simple as your boat color, to me it's more of an underlying problem that they're facing themselves. Maybe they feel like they

weren't given the opportunity because they're not "girly" enough. Maybe they feel like they need to be more girly, but they just can't do it because it doesn't fit with their image? I'm not really sure.

These "common sense" associations between femininity and pinkness are culturally developed and reinforced. I think it's important to acknowledge that they aren't biologically determined; that is, nothing is inherently true about girls liking pink; this belief is culturally reinforced through all of our actions. Even when those actions repurpose that idea to push back against other stereotypical expectations or assumptions about femininity, they can still reinforce those cultural associations.

I want to close this episode talking directly to the people who will finish it and still ask "are the assumptions made about women really even that harmful?" These are the stories of some of the women that I have talked with. These are the assumptions that these women have to deal with on the river; maybe not every time that they go kayaking, but often enough that they all have stories to share.

For example, when Avery, who while driving down to the takeout of a river was asked by the parking attendant "oh, are you just running shuttle?" Then again, as she arrived to the put in with a prototype kayak and was overlooked when a man asked her paddling partners (who were both men) if it was their boat while never making eye contact with her.

Or what about Emily, who was told by another woman kayaker, "you would be taken much more seriously if you stopped wearing pink." Or even me, told by a man, "you would get more respect if you dressed like a woman."

What about Denise, who felt like she was an intrusion on a group of men that she knew and wanted to kayak with:

Denise: His mood made me feel like I didn't belong there, even though we'd been paddling together before. After the run, the boys were high fiving, fist bumping, and

saying things like “well done boys” or “that was so sick guys” over and over again. Two of eight guys would tell me that I did well too; the other six didn’t even look at me, and paddled straight past me. When I went to the guy who showed me the lines to thank him, the only thing he said “well the water is lower today, so it was pretty easy anyways”. And just like that, my pride and feeling of success was taken away.

And maybe, if you only heard one of those stories, or if you’ve only experienced something like that once or twice, those stories wouldn’t sound like a big deal. Maybe then you could think that these stories don’t have a significant impact on the women that experience them. However, all ten women that I spoke, and I, have a story that sounded something like this. Every single one of us can speak about the assumptions that are made about us in and around the river, and that says something. These events aren’t isolated, and they are significant.

What impact do these assumptions have on the women in the kayaking community? I’ve attended a number of events, conferences, and meetings where the topic of conversation is, “how can we get more women into these sports?” Maybe one way to do that is to stop treating the women who are already in these spaces as if they don’t belong. Treat us like we do belong.

Thanks for listening, I’ll see you on the river.

[Episode Three – Discipline of the Body](#)

Just a heads up, this episode contains content that may be triggering, including descriptions of sexual assault.

Caroline: My two best friends and I were wandering around the kayaking festival enjoying the warm September day. Since the weather was so pleasant, I was wearing denim shorts, a t-shirt, and a pair of Converse. We approached the section of the festival that harbored tents of various kayak brands that had some of their sponsored athletes sitting beneath them.

“Hey! Caroline!” a female athlete beneath one of the tents yelled to me, “Why are your shorts so short?”

Welcome to episode three of Women in Whitewater, a four-part limited audio series exploring what it’s like to be a woman in the professional whitewater industry. My name is

Rowan Stuart, and this podcast is the result of my Outdoor and Experiential Education Master's Thesis research. The purpose of this thesis was to explore how professional women kayakers perform their gender in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. I also wanted to examine whether these performances resist, reinforce, or repurpose the status quo.

As a reminder, this sound is the way that I indicate a citation is present. All sources used in this episode can be accessed on our website, womeninwhitewater.wordpress.com or through the link in the show notes.

There are three key theories that you will learn in each of these episodes: poststructuralism, gender performativity, and discipline. If you're new to the podcast, please pause this episode now and go back to start with episodes one and two. The ideas of poststructuralism and gender performativity are more thoroughly summarized in those episodes.

Today's episode is titled Discipline of the Body. In this episode I will share true stories from professional women whitewater kayakers about the ways they dress, act, and are treated while on and around the river. We will return to the story that I shared in the introduction later on in the episode, but first, let's do a quick review.

This podcast relies heavily on Judith Butler's performative theories of gender. Butler says that gender is performative, and she means that similar to the way that Simone de Beauvoir said "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (2011, p. 283).

Butler: We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that's being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. (BigThink, 2011)

Basically, what Butler means is that "womanhood" becomes what it is through the actions that we take (consciously or unconsciously) to make it so.

Poststructuralism is the overarching research paradigm of this thesis. Poststructuralist theories are about the power of language to construct our realities. By looking critically at language, one goal of poststructuralist researchers is to reveal the power structures that are hidden in what we say (Berbary, 2017, p. 723). A poststructuralist believes that the deconstruction of language is important because it creates an opportunity to discover how reality is constructed (Davies & Gannon, 2005).

Now, let's return to our narrative...

Caroline: "Hey! Caroline!" "Why are your shorts so short?"

After the demeaning remark left her mouth, my happy-go-lucky mood turned quickly to mortification. I was shocked that this woman had made a comment in front of so many other people that sexualized my seventeen-year-old body.

The fact that I had considered her a role model for many years made the situation even worse. I felt my face go hot with embarrassment. "They're not even that short," I said to defend myself, although I now recognize that I should never have felt the need to justify what I chose to wear.

With this narrative, I want to introduce a new theory - Michel Foucault's ideas about discipline. Foucault was a French philosopher, historian and social theorist born in 1924 (Zink, 2013). He passed away in 1984. In ways that I see as being similar to Butler's ideas about gender being performative (meaning that gender is created through our actions). Foucault believed that "discipline 'makes' individuals" (Foucault, 1977, p. 170), meaning that our actions and decisions are influenced by those who discipline us. That discipline could come from our friends, the media, and various institutions such as church, school, or the outdoor industry. Furthermore, the ways that we discipline ourselves and others is what shapes the unspoken rules about what is acceptable in a space. Discipline can be overt, meaning that it has explicit rules, or discipline can be covert, meaning that it can be hidden behind gestures meant to be friendly or casual (Berbary, 2017).

I used the research of Lisbeth Berbary as a foundation for distinguishing between overt and covert discipline. The 2017 article that is repeatedly referenced in this section of the podcast was written partially in screenplay format. She spent more than 70 hours of participant observations on the Zeta Chi sorority at “USouthern” (which are pseudonyms for both the sorority and the university). Berbary gives this example of overt discipline, saying:

“Experiences with the more overt types of discipline found within Zeta Chi had to do with stories heard about Standards and Nationals. Standards is a ruling body run by elected upperclassmen that acts like a court system within Zeta Chi. After every Chapter meeting, Standards would organize to reprimand and give out punishments (usually forced exclusion from future social events) to women who had committed offenses. The most common offenses were those that could potentially create negative press for Zeta Chi and often had to do with public displays of ‘unladylikeness’ including dancing on bars, being too sexual, being too drunk, or underage drinking” (Berbary, 2017, p. 611).

On the flip side, Berbary uses this example of covert discipline:

Summer

I feel like I’m stuffed in this dress. I can barely breathe.

She begins to adjust the dress in the mirror, pulling it up and reorganizing her breasts.

Summer

My boobs are everywhere. I even have them in the back. Wait till I have to sit down, I’ll probably explode.

Roommate S chuckles, recognizing that Summer has a good sense of humor about her size.

Roommate S

Better watch those boobs. How soon you forget your Rush debacle!

Roommate S says half joking.

Summer

You know I really can’t help it. What, do you want me to wear a sack?

Roommate C

Maybe you better. At least pull it up a bit. You don’t want people to think you’re trashy or that you’re asking for it.

(Berbary, 2017, pp. 616-617).

“This was the discipline of “girl talk”—the rumors, discussions, and confrontations that occurred among the women that reinforced the boundaries of appropriateness through joking, name calling, opinion gathering, trash talking, and complaining... ..This covert system was more about absorbing the messages of girl talk, a slow process of

resocialization in which Zeta Chis began to unconsciously adopt the expectations and boundaries of ladylike behavior” (Berbary, 2017, p. 618).

However, I feel like neither of these types of discipline fit quite right with the “Why are your shorts so short” discipline of Caroline’s appearance. While that statement does not come from an overt or formal rule about acceptable standards, it did not pretend to hide under a covert guise of politeness or subtlety. This woman-on-woman policing fits the description of “respectability politics,” that author Mikki Kendall gives in her book *Hood Feminism*:

audio clip: “We can’t let respectability politics, that is, an attempt by marginalized groups to internally police members so that they fall in line with the dominant culture's norms create an idea that only some women are worthy of respect and protection” (Kendall, 2020, p. 3).

Kendall asserts that feminism has to be for everybody, and that these respectability politics are one barrier to the accessibility of feminism. This pressure to maintain a “good” reputation (given the limited number of professional women in whitewater) “pitted member against member in a fight to uphold ladylike decency” (Berbary, 2017, p. 612).

Michel Foucault (1977) says that discipline is a way that power is exercised on the individual. Discipline is used to control our behaviors and ensure that they fit within culturally accepted expectations.

Caroline: The following day, a thirty-year-old man who had witnessed the woman’s comment about my shorts sent me this message on Instagram: “HEY. Your shorts look good. I think you rock them”.

This message is a result of the culture that covert discipline helped to create. Upon hearing a woman comment about another woman, this man learned that commenting would be acceptable. As an action sport, whitewater kayaking emerged as an alternative to rule-bound traditional sports (Thorpe & Olive, 2016, p. 3). On the surface, it seems like a field that emphasizes

individuality and freedom from the status quo, but there are many covert “rules” that make you fit in when they are followed, but looking too sexy means that you don’t fit in.

By enforcing a culture where slut-shaming a woman for the length of her shorts is acceptable, where do we draw the line of unacceptable? Would it be unacceptable for an adult to talk about a 16-year old’s sex life?

Caroline: Another friend of mine, at the age of sixteen, was insulted over the loudspeaker at a kayaking competition about the details of her sex life. Like...my friend had lost her virginity the week before, and somehow that information got out to everyone. And this lady (who was announcing for the event) actually made a comment about it over the loudspeaker.

My friend was competing in this freestyle event. I think it was right before her competition ride, she was on the water ready to go and had to hear that.

Is that unacceptable? Apparently not.

Brooke: A common topic of conversation is women, and it is often not a respectful conversation.

Just a heads up, the next few minutes will contain subject matter about sexual assault and rape. If these topics will be triggering for you, you might want to skip ahead to [time – will update once podcast is created]. This next story took place between a young woman and some of her kayaking peers in high school.

Anonymous: A few weeks after the semester started, some boys made comments about rape being a joke. When I responded, saying that rape is not a joke, they laughed at me and walked away. The school proceeded to have a talk with them, but most of them brushed it off.

A week or so later, one student came and apologized to the girls for his earlier comments. When he heard this apology, another student who had been making the same jokes laughed again. He started to say that rape is a joke and something that doesn’t actually happen.

At this point, I was furious. I went and screamed at him. I said it was not a joke and I was raped 6 months prior. I proceeded to walk out in tears. Later, when I went to the teachers after, I was the one in trouble for yelling at the boy.

This was an opportunity for the victimized to discipline what she was hearing. She took a stand for herself and the many others who have experienced sexual assault. By using her voice in opposition, she is able to reclaim power.

Rape is an instance in which discourses of power produce the feminine body as violable and weak. Foucault tells us, however, that resistance to this constitutive discourse of power is also located with the feminine body. This notion has great import for a theory of rape prevention. If the feminine body is a surface on which the tenets of a sexually hierarchical culture are written, Foucault suggests that it is also the site where those tenets may be fought. Thus, when women's bodies are defined as a powerful force of counteracting violence, the very power structures that support rape will be crippled. (Henderson, 2007, pp. 229-230)

I asked one of the other women that I interviewed to give me an example of what she and others referred to as the 'bro culture' of whitewater kayaking, and this is one of the stories that they shared.

Anonymous: One night after paddling, the crew was partying and playing rage cage. I was taking a break from the game when one of the guys grabs me and pushes me out the door so no one can see. He pushes me up against the wall and is trying to do things with me. I'm not okay with it and am trying to push him away. I try to open the door to get other people so that they notice that I'm in distress.

A couple of other guys realize that something is happening, and walk out and start yelling at him "Hey leave her alone. Hey, leave her alone!" He lets go of me and just shrugs, saying "Oh, whatever, I wasn't doing anything. No worries, no worries."

Then, there's this other kayaker who has raped two of my friends and sexually assaulted me and we have told other kayakers about this, and they say, "oh wow that's a bummer." But then they still go kayaking with him the next day. They still are friends with him, and they still invite him kayaking. Nobody seems to care, so I stopped telling people about it.

The reactions to sexual assault and rape in this narrative send very clear disciplining messages; from the casual response of the perpetrator saying it's "no worries, no worries," to the dismissive replies from other kayakers who say "wow, that's a bummer". These reactions can create a community where rape culture is normalized and for some has become synonymous with "bro culture". This teaches the members of this space that nothing will happen when they speak up. People learn that it's okay to share stories about a young woman's sex life over the loudspeakers at a kayaking competition. They call out the length of a girl's shorts, publicly ridiculing and gossiping about her. A woman is pushed out the door and sexually assaulted, and no one seems to bat an eye. Jokes about rape and sexual assault are so normalized that...

Anonymous: "Nobody seems to care, so I stopped telling people about it"

We went from a seemingly "harmless" comment about the length of someone's shorts to overlooking sexual assault. This escalation is an example of the ways that culture is created through discipline, and the impact that even small actions can have on the boundaries of that culture. Today's episode has covered some heavy topics. Sharing the stories of those who have experienced sexual assault is never easy. I wrestled with choosing the ideas that are represented in this episode, because I do (mostly) love the spaces that I go kayaking in. I didn't want to discourage women who are interested in entering those spaces with these sorts of stories. But that wouldn't have given an honest picture of some of the experiences that women have had in the kayaking community. However, next week on Women in Whitewater, I will share some lessons for the kayaking community and the stories and spaces that women feel empowered by.

Thanks for listening, I'll see you on the river.

Episode Four – Lessons for the Kayaking Community

Welcome back to Women in Whitewater, a four-part limited audio series exploring what it's like to be a woman in the professional whitewater industry. My name is Rowan Stuart, and this podcast is the result of my Outdoor and Experiential Education Master's Thesis research. The purpose of this thesis was to explore how professional women kayakers perform their gender in the leisure spaces surrounding whitewater kayaking. Consequently, I also wanted to examine whether these performances resist, reinforce, or repurpose the status quo.

This is episode four - Lessons for the Kayaking Community. I want to conclude this series by sharing stories of women in places where they feel empowered. What spaces in the outdoor community do these women want to be in? What recommendations do they have for creating an equitable and inclusive whitewater community?

However, this episode is not intended to be a tidy conclusion where I tell you the one right way to think about these complex issues. Everything is not "all good" here, and this episode does not erase any of the problems discussed in episodes two and three. Instead, it is a call and a challenge to the people in the field; an opportunity to center women's voices around ways that people in the industry can do better. This is not to "put a bow on it," but is instead to offer the kayaking community with ideas for moving forward. In this episode, I'll discuss three things: women only spaces, spaces where womanhood is acknowledged but not considered unique, and the ways that we discuss risk and fear in whitewater.

Rachel: They've been happening all across the country, but I think most notably at the Green River ladies' takeover. These ladies take over days are filled with so much more hooting and hollering that I've ever heard on the river... There's just an energy of paddling with women and paddling on these takeover days that is unmatched and it's really hard to describe unless you're there, and unless you can feel it.

That was Rachel, describing the women's takeover events. This fondness for women only paddling events and trips was echoed by others:

Avery: when there is a big group of women its usually awesome. One time we got to the river early and made a pancake breakfast at the takeout; everyone was really hyped. It's the same super stoked but on a lower scale when it's a smaller group, but at the takeover there's a crazy energy

Many women who participate in outdoor recreation prefer to adventure with other women (Allen-Craig et al., 2020; Mitten, 2018; Mitten & Woodruff, 2009). Many women choose to join all-women trips because these programs better reflected their values, including: "(a) coming home to nature, (b) being in a trip environment that feels emotionally, spiritually, and physically nurturing, (c) travelling to the wilderness for its own sake, not using it as a means to an end...and (d) generally seeing women's strengths as assets to trips" (Mitten, p. 29, 2018). Studies have shown benefits of participation in these programs, including developing "relational bonding, physical confidence and strength, competence, disengagement from traditional gender roles, overcoming fear and gaining autonomy" (Warren, p. 363, 2015).

These positive benefits are echoed by Denise, who shared one of her favorite kayaking memories with me. She says her most supportive experience was a trip to Africa with six other women, she talked about how it felt to surf big waves, and only hear cheers of encouragement from her friends.

Denise: Every day we just tried our best to just encourage each other to push ourselves. We would go crazy if someone made it into the wave and just celebrate each other. It was just so great. I've never experienced that encouragement and empowerment; it was so unique just being in a group of girls.

Many women also spoke about increasing numbers of women in kayaking competitions to make them more like women-only spaces. It's common for the women's class in a kayaking event to be less than half the size of the men's. Professional whitewater kayaker Natalie

Anderson wrote an article titled “Turning Competition from Stress to Fun in Whitewater Kayaking” (2021) that was repeatedly mentioned during my interviews. In it, she says that “When you are one of only a few competitors in a race class, you are always competing to win, whether you want to or not. Quite simply, you are either the winner, or the loser (if you ain't first you're last, sometimes literally)” (par. 7). I heard this sentiment echoed by a number of the women I interviewed.

Avery: I got pretty burnt out on competition. It was frustrating to see my low score on the first page of results.

Rachel: Now I’ve noticed when the women’s class is smaller it and, like these women are pitted against each other, because it's maybe just the two or three of them, it can get a little more competitive.

In the next couple of quotes, the abbreviation NFC refers to the North Fork Championships, a series of races that crown the “Queen and King” of the North Fork of the Payette in Idaho.

Brooke: Women are not going to compete if they see that there’s only two women competing. But if they see that there’s 40 women competing, like at NFC, it just keeps growing and growing and women compete because they want to be a part of that group.

Avery: Once there were more women registered for the North Fork race it was easier to get even more women interested in competing because we wanted to make it as big as possible.

However, I want to highlight that not all women were interested in these women-only spaces. While many made no comment on these events, one specified that she had never attended the women’s takeover (at the Green River) even though she was from the area, and that she had even paddled on the same river that day but with her preferred group of men kayakers. She shared experiences of feeling like she didn’t fit in to these women’s groups

Caroline: I’ve actually never been to an all-women’s group paddle. I feel like I’ve never been like close enough friends with a girl who is going to one of those things to go. I always feel like I compare myself a lot to other women.

While she didn't want to attend a women's only paddle, Caroline did share similar desires; to blend in with her paddling group and not feel targeted by comments that she felt were made just because she was a woman, saying "I just want to blend in."

Other women shared this desire to be considered "just another kayaker" rather than called out for being a "woman kayaker". There is an article written about the word "patronizing" in women's surfing. The word patronizing can mean both to "act as a patron towards" (Olive et al., 2015, p. 4) and also to "treat in a condescending way" (Olive et al., 2015, p. 4). The women surfers interviewed in this article shared stories about being treated differently than men in surfing spaces, and often in ways that were intended to be complimentary or beneficial to them. For example, the woman shared stories about receiving unwelcome advice, or unasked for assistance, like a push onto the wave. They found that these forms of covert discipline were "more difficult to negotiate than openly discriminatory behaviour" (Olive et al., 2015, p. 16). As the authors stated, "While the advice and support some men gave might be intended as altruistic and caring, from the perspective of women, such actions differentiate them in the water, reinforcing and maintaining their place as 'women who surf' rather than simply including them as 'surfers'" (Olive et al., 2015, p. 16).

I've struggled with similar experiences in kayaking settings, where I've been asked by men if I need help carrying or loading my boat. It feels unfair to be offered this assistance when they wouldn't offer it to a man. One of the women that I interviewed shared that she'd had men offer to outfit kayaks and C1's for her, assistance that she didn't think they would offer to someone else, especially a man. One of the women that I interviewed had a man that she paddled with say:

Diane: He had never met a woman kayaker before who he did not see as a liability on the river. He meant this as a compliment and said he intended to tell his daughters about me and how women can be just as strong of kayakers as men.

This comment was intended to be a compliment, a way to tell her that he didn't see her as the typical "woman kayaker," but came out sounding more insulting than complimentary.

The last recommendation that I want to share has to do with the attitude towards safety, fear, and risk in whitewater. Many of the women that I spoke with shared that they felt like women and men perceived and valued fear and risk taking differently.

Brooke: I think kayaking glorifies risk too much, but I also think in life that some risk is good. And I think that the way we treat women taking risks is very different than the way we treat men taking risks.

Cat: I feel like men are expected to be strong and just throw caution to the wind, whereas for women it's like: "oh its fine she's scared, she's a girl". People look at men and think "Oh you're going to run the big stuff, and if you don't, you're a pussy". But when they look at women, it's like they think "I'm not expecting you to go run that hundred-foot waterfall because you're a girl, you're going to get scared".

The militaristic origins of outdoor recreation led to an increased value of stereotypically masculine traits like physical strength, toughness, or stoicism (Gray et al., 2020). Possibly because of this, kayaking media typically doesn't show professional men kayakers showing fear before running difficult rapids or sections of river. This leads to a 'go big or go home' attitude that seems to be more prevalent with men in the kayaking community.

Brooke: I was scared of running the Pelican rapids on the Slave. And this guy said "Being scared of it isn't an excuse". And I was like "Well, it's a major class five rapid, it kind of is an excuse actually; you could die".

Rachel: Women do a really good job of checking in with each other on the river. Like "It looks like you got a little spun out or something; do you want to take a second to collect yourself?" It's no big deal, it's not bringing the attention to anything bad, it's just like a genuine check in. I feel like I tried to do that with my guy friends as well and it's just it's not received in the same way. [Rowan asks "How would you say it's received then?"] 'Oh, just like push on downstream, you know, just get over it'.

I believe that there needs to be more research about possible gender differences in attitudes towards safety, fear, and risk taking in action sports and adventure recreation.

Brooke: In my experience, I have seen that women make better decisions, and women calculate their risks better.

Furthermore, there is a call for more honest media in professional kayaking.

Cat: If we could get videos where people are running the big stuff but then have honest interviews about it. If they were able to put real interviews into those videos that were like “honestly, I’m a little nervous,” it would make other people be like “Oh, it’s okay to be scared.

How can you go out of your way on the river to deconstruct gender-based assumptions and stereotypes? I want to conclude with one way that Rachel is taking charge of the spaces she spends time in.

Rachel: Deconstructing to me means going first on a rapid. Or really being vocal in decision making and safety because I do have the skills and abilities to be there, I do have the skills. Overhearing dialogue that doesn’t recognize women in that light, as equals, and stopping that is a huge piece for me. I feel like we do work and paddle in a very male dominated scene. So just changing the dialogue, because we don’t want people to pick up these habits and keep them forever. We need to hold each other accountable for being inclusive.

If you take one thing from listening to this podcast, hopefully it’s this. The next time you go kayaking, pay close attention. Who is in your kayaking crew? What do you say to each other and what messages might be hidden in the words that you use? How can *you* resist or repurpose the gender status quo in whitewater?

Thanks for listening, I’ll see you on the river.