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**"A SENSE OF COMPETENCE:"
RE-CONCEPTUALIZING ISSUES OF COMPETENCE FOR WOMEN IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION**

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Competence development in outdoor education is a complex process that is shaped by gender-role socialization, learning environments, and by individual differences. Outdoor educators need to further their understanding of this process so they can fully empower themselves and their students. Outdoor programs need to be designed to support the development of both competence in outdoor skills and a sense of competence in these skills so program participants will be able to fully participate in outdoor activities. This abstract provides an introduction to the issue of competence development and further discussion of this topic is available in Loeffler (1997).

It is critical to draw a distinction between actual competence and sense of competence (Mulqueen, 1995). A woman's sense of competence is the perception she holds of herself performing within her environment (White, 1976). Women tend to view their personal competence through a filter composed of society's perceptions and responses which, in turn, influence their self-perceptions of their competence (Sternberg & Kolligan, 1990). Consequently, women's sense of competence and actual competence may not be congruent and are often conflicting, resulting in a particular woman perceiving that she is less competent than she actually is in reality (Mulqueen, 1995).

According to Mulqueen (1995), sense of competence is a useful concept for

women because it provides a concrete foundation on which to build or re-build women's self-esteem by helping women find ways to feel more competent. She recognizes that it may not be that women's "actual level of competence needs to change; rather the missing link may be between what they do and how they assess what they do" (p. 9).

There are many ways that outdoor programs can support women in developing a sense of competence. Providing single-gender learning environments can assist in the development of both competence and a sense of competence because it removes the socialization that women should be less competent than men. In a mixed-gender environment, some women may not demonstrate their competence for fear it would show-up the men in the group. Mulqueen (1995) states that "women are socialized not to outperform men and thus inhibit themselves rather than emasculating a man is a direct by-product of our current association of competence with masculinity" (p. 4).

Along with providing single-gender learning environments there are some other pedagogical strategies that can assist in the development of competence. Honoring women's differences allows them to express their competence more completely because it allows them to define their femininity and gender-role in their own terms (Mulqueen, 1995). Supporting women to give up perfectionism and supporting them in both suc-

cess and failure are critical to the development of a sense of competence. Using cooperative learning methods and environments rather than competitive ones tends to assist women in developing a sense of competence (Mulqueen, 1995; Streitmatter, 1994).

In assisting women to feel competent in outdoor activities, we must assist them in bridging the missing link by providing single-gender learning environments, unbiased mixed gender learning environments, and by providing supportive learning experiences that allow (or convince) women to know their competence.

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