



GENDER EQUALITY IN THE NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE: HOW  
INTEGRATING ECOFEMINISM CAN IMPROVE THE CULTURE AND  
EMPLOYMENT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Gender Equality in National Parks Service: How integrating ecofeminism can improve the culture and employment of the National Parks Service

Deandra C. Orr

The National Parks Service (NPS) employs over 20,000 individuals, yet men currently hold a majority of those positions. For women employees, cases of sexism, harassment, and discrimination have been prevalent throughout their NPS careers, along with challenges of wage inequality, and lack of professional development opportunities. This thesis explores more deeply the concept of gender and its relation to the NPS. It also aims to focus on the benefits of incorporating a culture of Ecofeminism to increase an inclusive working environment within the NPS. Integrating values of Ecofeminism in the Park Service could help counter its notoriously masculine culture, and could benefit women employees. Ecofeminism, as a movement, connects the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women, while working towards creating equality among women and men. Interviewing current and former employees captured a snapshot of the work culture within the NPS, and brought to light many of the issues facing women. While each individual interviewed had unique stories, it was clear gender plays a huge role in NPS employees' experience and continues to be a detriment to NPS women. In order to create a more equal working environment for women, it is important to understand a change of framework, and a change of NPS culture is essential.

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## **Introduction**

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed an act creating the National Park Service (NPS) (Miles, 1995); national parks and monuments became protected from development and commercial construction. Up until the late 19th century, national parks had not existed. Currently, the NPS oversees over 85 million acres of land. Although 100 years has passed since the NPS was created, men primarily hold a majority of the jobs and leadership positions, and a lack of gender balance remains prevalent.

Grounded in military roots, American Army and Cavalry men originally oversaw the national parks. Thus, in its early years, the NPS functioned as male-dominated organization, in terms of both leadership and conceptual framework (Kaufman, 1996). Although one of the first women park ranger - Clare Marie Hodges – was appointed in 1918 (Figure 1), she was a rare and temporary exception, as women in NPS remained quite marginalized. Indeed, as of 2017, 20,000 individuals worked for the National Parks Service (National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, 2018), yet men accounted for almost two thirds of those employees. In comparison, women make up about 56% of the work force in the United States in 2015 (United States Department of Labor, 2016). It is extremely important to recognize the significance of balanced involvement among men and women in the protection and progression of national parks and the progression of women in the workplace. The value of an ecofeminist approach

could help dismantle the culture of masculinity in national parks, and create a new approach, benefiting both present and future employees.



Figure 1: Clare Marie Hodges, the first woman NPS ranger in Yosemite National Park, 1918. Photo courtesy of *National Park Service Archives*.

## **Significance**

Throughout the National Parks Service's history, women have had fewer opportunities to provide input into the development of the National Park System--including areas of environmental management, preservation, and executive decisions--when compared to men. This research will add to the ever-evolving conversation about environmental issues, gender equality, and furthering our understanding of nature, within an ecofeminist lens.

We need to understand that the National Park Service (NPS) was created by a patriarchal society at a time when women had just begun to assert their civil rights. We also must recognize the longstanding inequality of women in the workplace and the importance of addressing these issues within the current system. Supporting all women in the NPS could modernize its value system by incorporating more inclusivity within its working environment, and sparking new and more effective ways of preserving the environment. Adopting an ecofeminist approach is crucial to understanding that changing policies or regulations within the NPS is not enough. Ecofeminism teaches us that we must transform the established masculine culture and how men portray and relate to women.

By interviewing both men and women who are former and current park employees, this thesis explored gender in relation to the NPS. By collecting employees' stories I aimed to get a true sense of how, or if, the culture of the park service impacted their experiences. By gathering the personal narratives, we can begin to understand the real toll the Parks Service masculine culture has on individuals and how it has affected women on a deeper level.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review and Background**

This thesis explores the idea of gender and its relation to the National Parks Service (NPS), but more precisely, how its masculine culture has impacted women employees throughout the decades. It aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How does the concept of gender impact women and their professional development and experience in the NPS?

2. Can an ecofeminist lens improve our understanding of the place of women in the NPS and help us understand the way to a more equitable future for all NPS women?

The research also explored the connection between feminism and the environment, specifically the concept of ecofeminism. Are there points of intersection between the NPS and ecofeminism? Can looking through the lens of ecofeminism help continue improving the culture of the NPS, and increase positive working experiences for its current and future employees? While focused on the NPS, this study fits into a broader conversation regarding gender issues in the environmental profession, and evolving ideas concerning environmental justice.

This chapter reviews the current literature on the history of the National Parks System, the National Park Service, women, and ecofeminism, and is divided into three sections. This first section reviews how the Park System was established in the 18th century and the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. It also speaks to the U.S. military's early role in the protection of national parks, and examines the conception of the Parks Service's masculine culture. A description of women's challenges in the environmental movement and the NPS follows in the second section. To provide appropriate context, it provides background along with challenges and barriers women have faced to be seen as equal contributors in the National Park Service, and summarizes women's current roles in the NPS and the continuous lack of representation. The third section introduces the theory of ecofeminism, providing background into what

ecofeminism is and how it differs from other types of feminism. It explores how an ecofeminist lens could benefit the NPS's current and future employees.

## **Section 1: History of National Parks**

### **A Brief History of the National Parks**

Up until the 19th century, people did not intentionally preserve the natural landscape of an environment. The birth of National Parks was viewed by many as equally as radical an idea as the Declaration of Independence. Until the American invention of “national parks”, the word “park” itself was understood as being the equivalent to a “garden”—wherein nature was viewed as a manicured space, including cut grass, trimmed hedges, and forests cleared of undergrowth, and artistic planting (Nash, 1970). People viewed parks and wilderness differently: wilderness was the frightening, an unordered condition from which man was relieved to have emerged, and parks were seen as symbols of this emergence, and control over nature (Gothein, 1979).

The idea of national parks originated from American landscape painter George Caitlin, who became well known for his portraits of indigenous peoples, native species, and natural landscapes. As he studied his subjects in 1832, he feared the complete disappearance of the unspoiled beauty was becoming a true threat (Miles, 1995). Traders and settlers viewed the West as an endless, hostile wilderness, yet a source of limitless resources, full of promise and economic opportunity, which drew Europeans from their homelands to claim property and wealth as the fur trade flourished in young America. To protect that wilderness, Caitlin envisioned “a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to

come, a nation's Park containing both man and beast" (Miles, 1995). Although Caitlin first floated his proposal to Congress in 1832, it took three decades before real movement began.

Finally, in 1864 under Abraham Lincoln's presidency, Congress gave the Yosemite Valley to the State of California (Figure 2) for "public use, resort, and recreation" (Miles, 1995). Although this significant moment went fairly unnoticed at the time, as America was broken apart by the Civil War, the idea of national parks had taken hold. The protection of Yosemite Valley in 1864 served as platform for land conservation, which in return provided a model for the birth of the National Park System (Lower, 2018).



Figure 2: View of lower Yosemite Valley from Union Point on the Four Mile Trail, 1866, two years after Yosemite became protected. Photo Courtesy of *National Park Service Archives*.

On March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Yellowstone Park Act (Figure 3), creating the first official National Park in the United States. The act set aside two million acres from protection of settlement, occupancy, or sale. This park differed from Yosemite in a number of ways: it was America's first official national park, drastically larger in size, and was managed by the United States rather than a single state (Miles, 1995). The protection of natural spaces became an action item for Congress, but protecting spaces as grand as Yosemite and Yellowstone required much more than the mere act of creating a wild park.

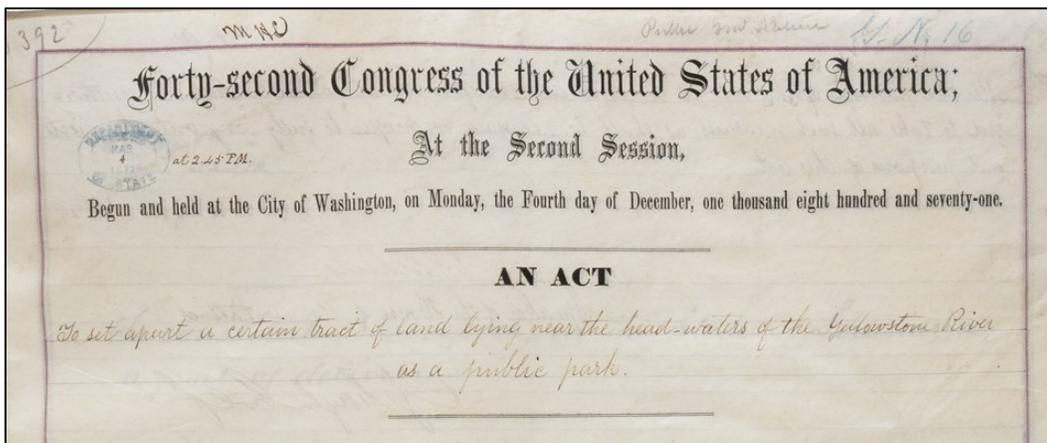


Figure 3: March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Yellowstone National Park Protection Act into law, and the world's first national park was born. Photo courtesy of *National Park Service Archives*.

### **Military Roots and Masculine Culture**

Although Congress designated large pieces of land as national parks, it failed to appropriate funds for their maintenance and security. Official stewards were needed in order to keep settlers from cutting trees, killing wildlife, and

developing sites within the parks' boundaries. Eventually protection fell under the auspices of the U.S. Army, creating an intersection between military forces and national parks. In 1886, the first of the U.S. Cavalry men marched into Yellowstone National Park. With Congress providing little input into the details of park management, a quasi-military style structure took hold. The military approach was then adopted at several other parks (Buck, 1946).

The military administration at Yellowstone provided the first model for early management to the parks: soldiers charted different elements of the natural landscape, kept account of poachers and park vandals, and provided general maintenance. However, without any other laws and regulations in place, Congress gave the military unstructured rule over parks, including providing them with a legal code, and machinery for its enforcement (Figure 3). The military built roads and structures, and took control of management of tourists and those that entered the park, which was met with hostility and aggression at times. Soldiers stopped poachers and illegal trapping and hunting, while also preventing "tourists who insisted upon collecting specimens and carving their 'unlovely names upon everything that is beautiful within their reach'" (Buck, 1946). Soldiers at Yellowstone kept watch over geysers. They charted eruptions, even forcing those caught signing their names to scrub off the offending graffiti. (Buck, 1946).

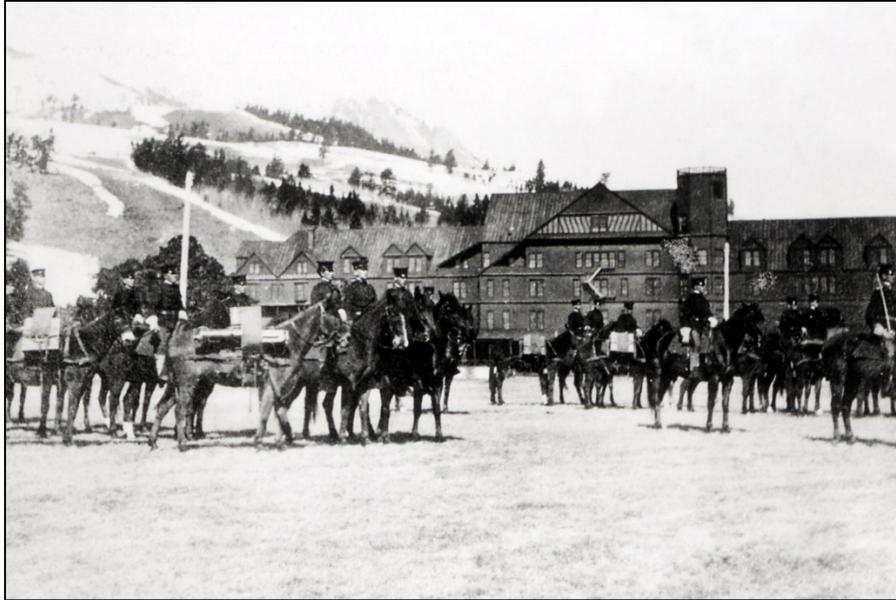


Figure 4: Machine gun platoon at Fort Yellowstone, date unknown.  
Photo courtesy of *National Park Service Archives*.

While they did not receive training in parkland management, they did their duty, taking a militaristic approach to preserving and protecting Yellowstone from environmentally harmful practices, and left the park in a physically maintained state. Although there was success in protecting early parks, the military structure enabled a white, male-dominated and hierarchical culture of masculinity, aimed to dominate nature. Some of the aggressive tactics the military used under a lingering eye of Congress proved hard to diminish once their control was transitioned to a new organization, the National Park Service.

### **Introduction of the National Park Service**

As more years passed, several more parks became established, all overseen by the Department of the Interior, requiring additional time and attention

to maintain them. In fact, during his time in office, President Theodore Roosevelt, “the conservation president” doubled the number of parks from five to ten between 1901 and 1909 (Eagan, 2010). Park advocates, consisting of geologists, anthropologists, attorneys, and politicians, dedicated to the preservation and scientific use of the parks formed their own alliance soon after, establishing the National Parks Association. In the early 1900’s, this group of men met in Washington D.C. with President Woodrow Wilson to outline a new agency to improve the National Parks Association (Miles, 1995). Then, on August 25, 1916, the president signed the “Organic Act”, dissolving the National Parks Association and established the National Park Service.

“[T]he Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations...by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (National Parks Index, 2016).

The U.S. military thus officially handed off park responsibilities to the National Park Service. Due to the influx of settlers in the West coupled with the impact of the Industrial Revolution, preservation that national parks provided became a valued asset to American society (Miles, 1995), and the NPS grew into an invaluable guardian for national parks and has continued to preserve and protect the land (National Parks Index 2012-2016).

## **National Parks and National Park Service Today**

Currently, the National Park Service protects more than 84 million acres in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories, overseeing museums, historical sites, monuments and preserves (Lower, 2018). National parks make up over 50 million acres the NPS protects. A park may be set aside for purposes of public recreation and enjoyment or because of its historical or scientific interest. Most of the landscapes and their accompanying plants and animals in a national park have been kept in their natural state to focus on the protection of both land and wildlife (Sellers, 2009).

As of 2018, the federal government had protected 417 national sites, 60 of which are designated national parks (Lower, 2018). National Parks have come a long way since their establishment in the 1860's, and to this day rank among one of America's most popular institutions for recreation, education, economic, and research purposes (Miles, xiii). Covering almost 4% of United States' land, national parks need significant time and attention for their continued preservation. The core mission of the National Park Service is to protect park resources and values, and to provide enjoyment for the public for this and future generations. By design, parks attract a substantial amount of public interest which in turn generates a stream of visitors engaging in a variety of activities (Foresta, 2011). Among their many attributes, National Parks support educational and recreational activities for both international and domestic visitors. These also serve as the park's primary source of income. In 2017 alone, 331 million park guests spent an estimated \$18.2 billion visiting National Park Service lands across the country

(National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, 2018). Parks not only bring in revenue but demand a substantial amount of employees to maintain their status and keep their programs running.

As of 2017, over 20,000 permanent, seasonal, and temporary individuals work for the National Parks Service, as well as over 315,000 volunteers (National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, 2018). Currently, the top positions filled by most employees include Park Rangers, Maintenance Mechanics, Miscellaneous Clerks and Assistants, Guides, and General Managers in Natural Resources and Biological Sciences (Office of Personnel Management, Enterprise Human Resources Integration, 2019). Currently, men hold more of these positions than women: roughly two thirds are occupied by males.

While the creation of the National Parks and National Parks Service launched one of America's best ideas, the lack of female representation paired with masculine roots left by early military presence has yet to offer equal representation of women and men. Although millions of visitors come to parks to be enchanted by wilderness, those that steward the land continue to represent a white and masculine image, leaving women to struggle to be seen.

## **Section 2: Women's role in the environmental movement and NPS**

### **An Overview of Women's role in the Environmental Movement**

Traditional gender roles kept women tethered to primarily domestic roles for centuries. Backed by cultural reinforcement, American women were taught their primary duties revolved around homemaking and caretaking. As a result,

women have fought to be seen as equal contributors on environmental issues for decades.

Throughout most of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainstream environmental groups functioned as male dominated organizations, in terms of both leadership and conceptual framework (Gottlieb, 2005). However, in the 1960's and 1970's, the rise of women taking action in environmental organizations, demonstrations, and even leadership positions, emerged. These actions proved women's influence and broke down gendered barriers concerning their capability (McCammon, Banaszak, 2018). Some women led in scientific pursuits. For example, Ellen Swallow Richards-- often identified as the nineteenth-century pioneer for women in environmental discipline-- helped assess drinking water in homes. With her knowledge in chemistry, she led the first water-contaminant survey in the state of Massachusetts and advocated for higher regulations around water quality and sewage treatment (Gottlieb, 2005). Some women took on a novelist's approach, such as writer Willa Cather, who helped redefine women's relationship to nature, rejecting the belief that women feared nature (McCammon, Banaszak, 2018). Instead, she promoted female characters who gained strength and autonomy from their roles in the land. Women also were seen in important activist roles regarding nuclear technology, radioactive and chemical wastes. In addition to sitting on advisory panels, contributing to environmental research and lobbying organizations (Gottlieb, 2005).

It was not until the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's that gender issues more directly came into play regarding women's challenges, one of which concerned

their role in the work place. Women began collectively speaking up for equality and inclusion. Demand for equity in the workplace, outside the workplace, and in education, grew. Over time women working for environmental agencies became more prevalent. The matter of preventing workplace discrimination brought women together from across class, political, and racial lines. Women fought discrimination in hiring and promotion in jobs in public and private employment. Women from the Women's Bureau and newly founded National Organization for Women (NOW) lobbied President Johnson to add women to his 1965 Executive Order, mandating that federal contractors take "affirmative action" to recruit, hire and promote underrepresented groups, specifically those that were female (Orleck, 2016). Finally, in in 1967, Johnson agreed, extending the order to cover the hiring and advancement of women. After this momentous decision, between 1967 and 1984, employment of women grew by 15.2% (Orleck, 2016).

With the tireless effort of many over the decades, professional working women emerged and created opportunities to contribute their environmental knowledge and power in roles that had been primarily belonged to men. While the environmental movement saw momentum behind women workers, this too was taking place within the National Park Service

### **Women's historic role in the NPS**

While men played a significant role in the development of the National Park Service, although less recognized, women contributed as well. Still, decades of social restrictions kept women from influencing change in the same way as their male counterparts.

In the early years of establishing national parks, nature and wilderness became associated with hunting, mountaineering, and fishing; these leisure activities were often pursued by men. President Theodore Roosevelt, one of the key players in the development of multiple national parks, participated in these “manly” activities, often supporting the gender divide by fostering the notion that “nature was a vigorous sport, while a woman’s role was ‘keeping the home and bearing and rearing her children’” (Gottlieb, 2005). Even so, early park advocates included women, many of whom envisioned the national park movement as an opportunity to create educational programs, “where moral, spiritual, and patriotic values would be passed on to future generations” (Kaufman, 1996).

While women rarely managed to become park rangers, Clare Marie Hodges and Helene Wilson did just that in 1918, (Enss, 2013). Women anthropologists and botanists held field positions through the 1920’s and 1930’s. However, even well qualified and educated women found it difficult to find or keep jobs in the Park Service. Despite women’s official and unofficial contributions throughout those two decades, the “male oriented culture of the service would accept these talents from women only if she assumed her traditional role as a wife and performed essential duties as a surrogate for her husband” (Kaufman, 1996).

Women’s roles in the NPS have shifted and changed since the creation of the parks. In the early twentieth century, women moved from observer to activists for nature. Some women explorers set out to discover the wonders of the parks for themselves, while others sought to improve the tourist trade in early parks. One

primary role for women in the NPS was as naturalists, as the position of naturalists was a more accepted role women to fill professionally. Their intention was to provide an educational service to national park visitors. Many women had the potential to become naturalists; as they already had experience leading nature walks and conducting field research (Kaufman, 1996). Creating naturalist positions gave women an opportunity to use their experiences as teachers, botanists, ornithologists, among other skills to become active in park services and involved on a professional level.

This newer position in national parks fell under the leadership of Horace Albright, the second National Park Service Director. Although the military culture was still prevalent throughout the parks, he was committed to providing services and developing positive communication with the public and hired one of Yellowstone's first female naturalist, Isabel Bassett (Figure 5) (Kaufman, 1996).



Figure 5: Herma Albertson, 1929, the first official ranger-naturalist, Yellowstone National Park. She was also the one of the first women to wear the complete male uniform. Photo courtesy of *National Park Service Archives*.

Over time more women took positions within the NPS, even as superintendents. Women eventually began to enter career fields of architecture and engineering within the NPS in the 1990's. However, this gain in employment also caused situations of discrimination, harassment, and assault to become widespread issues throughout the Park Service.

### **Women's current challenges in the NPS**

While women have made substantial headway to be seen as equal contributors, a number of challenges and barriers still remain for women employees. With issues ranging from professional to personal, they stem from gender discrimination in the workplace, and from the NPS's deep-seated masculine culture.

#### Sexual assault

A disturbing issue which made national news in recent years is sexual harassment accusations from women employees against their male colleagues. Several female-bodied employees have encountered unwanted or unsolicited attention from their male coworkers, inappropriate remarks, touching, and advances-- which only skim the surface. In 2016 and 2017, a survey was administered to NPS employees to assess issues of sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the National Park System; roughly 50% of the Park Service's permanent employees responded. Results showed that 40% of NPS employees experienced some form of harassment: 19% of respondents reported gender-based harassment, 10% said they encountered sexual harassment, and less than 1% said

they experienced sexual assault (Gilpin, 2017). While almost 1 and every 10 women experienced sexual harassment of some form in the Parks Service (Gilpin, 2017), this behavior was tolerated for decades. Only recently has the Park Service “been forced to acknowledge that sexual misconduct may be part of the culture of the sprawling, male-dominated system of the national parks” (Rein, 2016).

Many women and other minority groups experience harassment, uncomfortable work situations, and toxic working environments as employees of the NPS. As of 2015, the National Parks Service employees over 60% men, and under 40% being women. Although the NPS has come a long way to include more women, it remains a “boy’s club” (Figure 6).

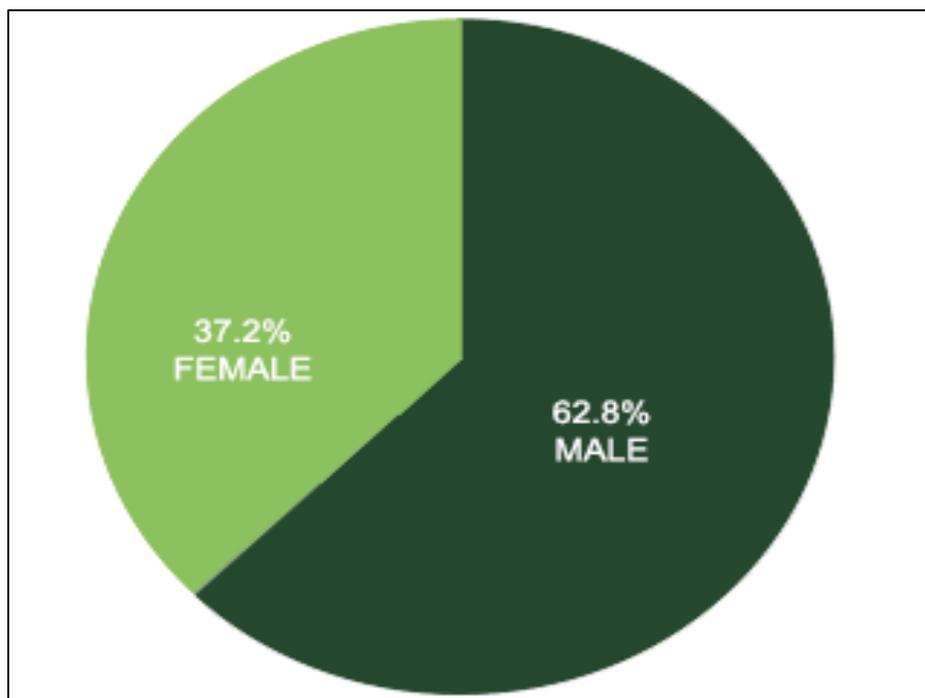


Figure 6: Men hold the majority of jobs in the NPS, especially in higher management positions. Women hold about 37% of employment as of 2015. Source: *National Park Service, 2016*.

Women employees face discrimination and sexual harassment daily. Hostility against women in a male-dominated workplace causes many problems. For example, at Grand Canyon National Park in 2014, inappropriate behavior from male employees surfaced, and were accused of making sexual advances towards women workers. Women who rebuffed such sexual propositions risked consequences like being denied food or access to work sites (Kaplan, 2016).

### **Lower pay**

Throughout most careers, women in the United States generally make less than men when it comes to salary, and the NPS is no exception. Generally, women receive 79 cents for every dollar paid to men—regardless that millions of women have joined the workforce over several decades and made huge gains in their educational attainment (Gould, Schieder, 2016). Despite holding college and advanced level degrees, women continue to be compensated less than their male colleagues. However some effort has been made to fill the gender wage gap over the years. For instance, the Equal Pay Act was signed into law by President John F. Kennedy in June of 1963, as one of the first federal anti-discrimination laws that addressed wage differences based on gender. The Act made it illegal to pay men and women working in the same place different salaries for similar work (Spiggle, 2019). While this was an important first step, much more action, attention, and regulation is needed to uphold this law in order to continue supporting women's role in equal salaries and opportunities, and in this case, within the NPS.

## **Fewer leadership opportunities**

For decades women fought to become equal contributors in the NPS, however, their roles have been limited to clerical work or less high ranking positions, as male administrators found it more comfortable with women as secretaries than colleagues (Kauffman, 1996). The lack of opportunities for women employees have prevented many from moving into management positions and enhancing their careers with the Park Service. Women were granted ranger training in the early 1970's, but it wasn't until the 1990's that women started to take leadership roles that moved beyond office duties. Currently, around 44% of supervisors and 37% of superintendents are women. However, only two agency directors have been women (Gilpin, 2017). While these numbers continue to grow each year, the struggle for women to fill leadership positions remains challenging in the NPS.

Women in the environmental field as a whole have faced challenges over the decades. The struggle to be seen as equal contributors and professionals has had successes, but barriers of sexual assault and discrimination, lower pay, and fewer opportunities to move up professionally have created an impact and continue to affect working women, and specifically those that work for the NPS. One way to create a better working environment for women is to acknowledge the connection between women and nature.

Like nature, women have been seen as inferior to men and viewed as something to control for hundreds of years. The philosophical approach to understanding the links drawn between women and nature is known as

ecofeminism, and it could be used to help counter the current role of masculinity in the Parks Service.

### **Section 3: What fosters Ecofeminism?**

#### **What is Feminism?**

From the country's creation, governing documents and policies that have molded U.S. society were conceptualized by wealthy, white males, with little representation of women, which still dominates today's society. Recognizing the importance of equality for any substantial change to occur led to the development of the feminist movement. As such, feminism is a key principal of this research.

Women's rights and advocacy for equality began as early as the 1900's, the Civil Rights era highlighted the interconnection between environmental concerns and feminism. While 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's saw a dramatic escalation in the race toward female empowerment (Hall, 2003).

Feminism takes different forms in different places, with diverse priorities and strategies; but all types share a number of key features (Walby, 2011). While feminism is interpreted differently across the world, essentially, feminism strives for equality among men and women. At its core, feminism is the belief in fundamental principles of social, economic, political, and judicial equality (Paludi, 2010).

Women have made significant social, academic, and occupational gains in the past 50 years. However, women have still not ultimately achieved true equity with men for a variety of reasons, one of which stems from the idea that women

somehow possess different or inferior skills when compared to men. Which can lead to diminished expectations for women— in terms of how they view themselves and how others view them (Paludi, 2010). Even through a scientific lens women have been viewed inferior. Biological factors played a role in the claim that men allegedly held higher intelligence, specifically due to brain size. Over time, some theorists suggested that women are naturally less competent in math and science-related fields as a direct consequence of their smaller brain. For example, there were “attempts by nineteenth-century craniologists to prove that the female brain was too small for scientific reasoning” (Ceci, Williams, 2010), indicating they couldn’t hold jobs or professions in these fields as their brains would not comprehend scientific information.

Women in America must work harder for the same basic rights as their male counterparts, and even worse, they have been taught to think less of themselves. In order to be successful, women have to overcome more obstacles simply by virtue of their gender (Paludi, 2010). Integrating feminism into current working environments and recognizing its significance is necessary to support and maintain women’s roles as professional workers, since many challenges remain for women in the workplace. Continuing to strive for equality among the genders is as important now as it was in the 19th century when the term feminism was first recognized.

### **A Brief history of Feminism**

Not until the 1880’s – almost 100 years after the America was founded-- did the term “feminism” actually appear (Friedan, Quindlen, Collins, 2013). At

the time, the focus was on women rights, including the right to own property, to keep wages when married, receive education, and divorce on the same grounds as men (Benaszak, McCammon, 2018); this was considered the first wave of feminism, focused on political justice (Walby, 2011). Eventually, two more waves of feminism surfaced. The 1960's and 1970's focused on social and economic justice, and the third wave gained momentum in the mid-1990s, which aimed to become all-encompassing, including women of color and those that were once considered "lower class". Separate feminist waves created an ideology and philosophy which gradually shifted over time. More recently, "postmodern feminism" has aimed to encompass those that identify as gender-queer, non-binary or fall outside the traditional gender norms, in addition to those born female at birth (Salleh, Shiva, Clark, 2017).

Women's rights and feminism have, over time, influenced the equality and treatment of women and other minority groups within modern society while addressing social injustices, and highlighting the intersection of gender, race, class, culture, sexual orientation, and disability. Feminism also greatly influenced policies over the years. One victory was in the mid 1980's with the recognition of sexual harassment as a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Before 1986, the only recourse for a woman whose boss was sexually harassing her was to quit and find new employment. The year 1994 found another victory for women when the Violence Against Women Act was enacted, providing services for survivors of rape and domestic violence and allowing women to pursue legal action for gender-related crimes.

Feminism theory has become intertwined in political, social, and economic concepts with the objective of creating a more equal and fair society for all. While there have been successes over the years, more attention on issues around women and equality must be addressed in order to reach justice for women. One area that demands more attention is viewing feminism through an environmental lens, better known as ecofeminism.

### **Ecofeminism**

While the term of feminism was created in the 19th century, French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne explored a specific connection between women and nature in the 1970's in her book, *Le féminisme ou la mort* (Feminism or Death). Connecting environmental challenges with challenges women also face gave birth to ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism has roots in feminism, but what makes it distinct from others is that it recognizes parallels between the domination of non-human nature and feminist issues (Warren, 1997). Prior to the 1960s, the ecological movement and the women's liberation movement had always been studied as two independent entities, until the appearance of d'Eaubonne's ecofeminism theory, embracing environmental issues and women's issues as part of one collective problem. The connection between the exploitation, degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women all root from the westernized culture dominated by masculinity. Men have viewed women through a similar lens as they've viewed nature and the environment for centuries.

Evidence of inferior treatment towards women is prevalent throughout global history. Examples span as far back as ancient history, when Roman senator Cato the Elder claimed that “Woman is a violent and uncontrolled animal, and it is useless to let go the reins and then expect her not to kick over the traces. You must keep her on a tight rein” (Sciarrino, 2011). Catholic priest and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century supported the claim that women were created for the sole purpose to be “men’s helpmate”, and to make use of women merely as “a necessary object, woman is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink” (CQ Researcher, 2010). The 18th century Anglo-Irish statesman Edmond Burke stated “a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order” (Rooks, 2005). Throughout periods of Western society, the deep-rooted concept that women are objects whose purpose is to serve men connects to notion that nature is for the same intentions. Just as women are viewed as serving men's needs, Nature is seen as existing for “man” to exploit at will. Within this patriarchal mentality, men all too often use and control women and Nature for their own short-term gain. This has led to the devastation of the natural environment and the further oppression women (Forsey, 2019).

In its present form, ecofeminism weaves together elements of the feminist and green or environmental movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the “green” movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women

(Mellor, 1997). Within Western society, parallels between nature and women are noticeable. Understanding ecofeminism theory helps underscore connections between women, modern societal structures, and nature, and sets the foundation for current issues women face today.

### **Ecofeminism and its significance to the NPS**

Ecofeminism aims to uproot the values of a patriarchal society: power, domination, exploitation, and control. At its core, it provides a critical analysis of ways in which primarily white, privileged men, maintain their superior status through the subordination and domination of women (Mallory, 35). Within Western culture, women have continuously been viewed as unequal, and assessed for what they can provide men, and seen as men's helpers for centuries. Recognizing the connection between women and nature is significant to understanding its relevance to the NPS.

Ecofeminists argue that a feminist perspective contributes to a deeper understanding of domination of nature by human beings (Warren, 1997). Historically, men were equated to culture, and viewed as dominating nature by creating their own cultural narratives (Kheel 2008). While in comparison, women were seen as insignificant in the eyes of culture, and thus their value reduced, just as the importance of nature is reduced. Essentially "men are the creators of culture while women are made to stand in the background of that created culture" (Saap 2018). This framework for viewing women has affected women's lives from the personal to their professional experience. Though ecofeminism is expansive and overlaps with other areas within environmentalism and feminism, as well as

gender roles and activism, the intersections between ecofeminism and professions – in the case the NPS--have yet to be deeply explored.

While both women and men have made contributions to the NPS, the old Park Service culture has continued to influence how men view women's roles in the service, as male park workers seem to resent women's "intrusion" into spaces they see theirs. The masculine ethos of the Park Service frequently impacts women and their professional experience as a park employees. Despite being capable personnel, women have to fight to be seen as equals and colleagues to their male colleagues.

Recognizing the connection between nature and women through an ecofeminist lens could not only help eradicate the masculine culture of the NPS and help support women, but in return could improve the philosophy and ideological foundation of which the parks service was originally built on. Overall, ecofeminism can help us understand the friction felt between women and men and identify issues within the parks service through a different perspective.

## **Summary**

The literature reviewed makes it clear that the culture of the NPS parallels with that of traditional Westernized views of women. Coupled with its military roots, the traditional values of the NPS favor those that are white and male, and it has not been without great difficulty that women break through its masculine "glass ceiling". While women have made their mark on the NPS over time, it

hasn't come without consequences of discrimination, harassment, lack of opportunities.

Just as the women in the NPS fought to be seen as equals in the eyes of men, the era of feminism was unfolding within the United States. Feminism and the fight for equality erupted in the 1960's and shaped policies and regulations around a number of issues, especially focused on women in the workplace. Acknowledging that women have been oppressed and seen as inferior by the same westernized society that dominates and controls nature is to understand why feminism, and specifically ecofeminism can change the way we think about women. By understanding ecofeminism and its relevance to the NPS, perhaps effective change could occur, breakdown the masculine nature of the Park Service, and foster people's passion for environmental preservation on an equal scale.

## **Chapter 2: Methods and Research Design**

This chapter outlines the methods used to obtain data from park employees, including sections detailing research objective, research design, participants, procedure, and data analysis.

### **Research Objectives**

The objective of this thesis was to gain a better sense of National Park Service (NPS) employees' working experiences, and to assess how the concept of gender impacts their employment within a NPS job. Perceptions of the culture within the NPS have come a long way since its establishment in 1916; however,

many NPS employees still face adversities. A Work Environment Survey conducted in September 2017 at the National Park Service found that 38.7% of respondents had experienced some form of harassment in the past year, among which gender harassment was the most prevalent (Burr, 2017). My research aimed to understand the perception of the culture within the park system from a worker's viewpoint.

I chose a qualitative approach to collect data, and focused specifically individual's narratives. With the span of the 50 national parks across the United States, I wanted to connect with people across the country, rather than focus in one region. Due to the time constraints of this thesis project, the research does not capture the entirety of the parks within the NPS, but narrative data collected will help researchers understand the perceived culture within the NPS and further recognize gender discrepancies in the park system.

### **Research Design**

In keeping with the narrative nature of this thesis, I utilized open-ended interviews to allow participants to fully detail their experiences while working for the NPS. I wanted participants to take the lead during the interview and tell their story in a way they found most fitting. Each participant brought a new set of stories, insight, and perspectives to this thesis, provided me with a richer understanding of the culture within the NPS, and gave me an understanding into how gender plays a role in their experience.

I conducted interviews both in person and over the phone. I provided the same eight questions to each person for consistency; however, I allowed leeway for them to expand on their experiences or to opt out of questions asked if any discomfort arose. I also encouraged participants to speak about other issues or topics not covered by the eight written questions.

I sought out participants who currently work for the NPS, or had former experience, in temporary, seasonal, or permanent jobs. Along with word of mouth, I used two widely known social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, to reach potential participants. Using social media was crucial for gaining a wide sample of participants from across the country, rather than one particular region.

Through networking on a personal level along with social media level, I wanted my participants to represent those that work for the NPS, and followed the Federal policies for Equal Employment Opportunity Policy:

“...race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, genetic information, age, membership in an employee organization, retaliation, parental status, military service, or other non-merit factor”(U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2019).

Essentially anyone with NPS experience was welcome to participate.

Although I left my scope broad, I also recognized that the data may have been biased due to individuals' differing access to and usage of the internet and other social media outlets.

Initial information gathered included participant's names, age, NPS job position, and park where they worked. I kept the identity of each participant confidential to ensure answers remained authentic and to diminish any discomfort participants could have encountered as being part of a study. Once interviews were completed, participants were given access to a working draft of the thesis if requested.

### **Participants**

As noted above, I sought out participants through social media and word of mouth. I cast a wide net to obtain the broadest sample in order to gather various answers and experiences. I reached out to participants using the following message on Facebook and Instagram:

Hello Facebook/Instagram Friends!

I'm a graduate student in The Evergreen State College's Master of Environmental Studies Program. I'm currently working on my thesis which is focused on National Park Service employees. I'm looking to conduct interviews with past or present NPS workers to collect data of their experiences while working in the park system. Information gathered during this project will be used for my master's thesis and presentation.

I NEED YOUR HELP! Do you or someone you know have experience working for the National Parks Service? Anyone with experience is welcome to participate! Please send me a personal message if you are interested."

For those I was connected with through peers, colleagues, and others, I used the following email message:

Dear (Potential Participant),

My name is Deedee Orr and I am a graduate student working on my Masters of Environmental Studies degree at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA. (colleague, peer, or other) provided me your email address recently regarding a possible interview set up for my thesis. My thesis is on gender equality in the

National Parks Service, and I was hoping to connect with you over the phone if that's convenient for you. I have about 10 questions.

Please let me know if you are interested in being interviewed, thank you!

Best,

Deedee Orr

I reached out to both former and current park employees to increase the range of experiences. As noted in the literature review, the NPS has changed considerably over the last few decades, and I wanted to capture previous experiences as well. Gaining data from various individuals was necessary to feel the scope of my research had a solid foundation. In the end, I reached out to 32 potential participants, and conducted 19 interviews total, 13 of which were women, and 6 were men, ranging from ages 20 – 60.

### **Procedure**

I used a handheld recording device to capture interviews with participants (after obtaining their consent). I recorded both in person and over the phone interviews for future playback purposes. To those who wanted to participate but were not available for an in person or phone interview, I sent a document of the eight drafted questions for them to fill out and send back.

I kept interview questions general in order to gather participants' full experience as a NPS employee. Although the crux of this thesis revolves around gender experiences, I did not want to bias or skew their responses, or guide the way they answered questions. Thus, questions focused on each participant's individual experiences, rather than on the subject of gender itself. Participants were encouraged to speak about experiences or stories that went beyond the list of

questions provided. Interviews lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to over an hour.

Each interview began with written or verbal consent from the participant that I could use their responses for my thesis, and were told that questions could be skipped, and they were encouraged to speak of experiences or content they thought was relevant to this thesis.

Question 1: Please describe your experience working for the National Parks Service.

- a. Please describe your job in the Parks Service, what was your role, what were your primary responsibilities?
- b. Did you work solo or with a crew?
- c. If you were on a crew describe a little bit about the crew.

The first question asked participants to describe their general experience working for the NPS. Initial reactions revealed how the participant genuinely felt about their time in the Park Service, and would frame the way the rest of the interview went. I anticipated answers varying in detail and length, and considered that NPS employees could have experience working on various crews or other jobs, and responsibilities regarding lead or crew member may have also shaped their time in the NPS.

The first sub-question asked participants to elaborate on the specific job they had while working for the Parks Service. In order to frame each participant's story, I needed to know the type of job, where the participant worked, and the

kinds of people they came into contact with, since these variables shaped the experience they had.

The second sub-question asked the participant to expand on their experiences with colleagues, and their interactions among them. Those that worked more independently may have different experiences and opinions compared to those that worked in a team setting.

If the participant had worked in a crew setting or with multiple crews, they were asked to briefly describe the crew. This third sub-question helped to establish the kind of relationship and dynamic participants had with their colleagues - crucial for retention and job stability for employees to remain satisfied in their work.

Question 2: Please tell me a little more about how you started working for the Parks Service?

The second focused on their journey to their Park Service job. The intent behind this question was to gain a sense of how their work started in the NPS, if something or someone influenced their choice to become a NPS employee, or if they had personal goals or specific desires led them there. A person's journey to working for the NPS may have established their initial thoughts or feelings working for the Park Service, which I wanted to note and see if that influenced the content of the interview. Due to the range of jobs offered at the NPS, I wanted to get a better idea of type of job participants sought in coming to work for the Park Service, such as an entry-level position or as a seasoned professional, which a correlation with attitudes and experiences may have been present.

Question 3: Did you have other mentors while working in the Parks Service? Who were they? How did they help support you and your professional development?

NPS employees who had mentors who supported their work likely impacted individuals, both professionally and personally. Mentorship in a professional career establishes relationships that influence employees' professional growth, next career move, and the overall well-being of an individual and personal level. While mentorship typically relates to supervisors or managers, I was looking to seek out other kinds of mentorship, such as peer mentorship, mentorship from former employees or someone who worked in another department.

Question 4. Were you given or approached with other professional development or job opportunities while working for the NPS? If so, can you expand on them?

- a. What were/are some services or systems in place in the NPS that you use(d)?

These questions pertained to equity and access to resources for NPS employees. Those that felt support from mentors may have also taken advantage of other services while working for the NPS. I left the term "services" rather vague to be able to incorporate learning, professional, or support services participants utilized. My objective was to gain an understanding if participants had the opportunity to apply NPS services to their professional or personal development. Finding correlations and themes between mentors, services, and accessibility was important for understanding how their time spent in the NPS was influenced.

Question 5: What were/are some of the challenges or barriers you faced or saw while working for the NPS?

A number of factors might contribute to a participant's response to this question. I expected reactions would vary greatly since each participant's answers directly correlated with the kind of experience they had. The purpose of this question was to see where the participant led me in the response. Answers centered on the specific job participants had and how it impacted their experience, or challenges may have gone beyond the job itself and centered on a deeper level. Would participants report personal challenges or challenges with others? Barriers and challenges mean different things to people, and I wanted to capture what that meant for the participants.

Question 6: If any, do you have recommendations that could improve the experiences of NPS employees?

Like Question 5, Question 6's responses varied depending on the participant's time employed in the NPS. I anticipated recommendations varying from a professional to individual basis. I wanted to capture the depth in detail that participants went if they had suggestions. I also wanted to observe if recommendations were general and pertained to the park system as a whole, or if responses focused on a specific park or type of job.

Question 7: Has working for the NPS influenced your career trajectory? If so, how? If not, why?

This question was asked to tease out information about retention of employment in the NPS. If a participant had a positive experience while employed for the Park Service, perhaps their next job would still be within the NPS, or in a department closely related to their work with the NPS. If a participant had an experience that was negative or indifferent, it could lead to

those wanting to leave the Park System entirely, and moving in a different direction with their professional career. Gathering this information was crucial to understanding if or how that experience influenced their career paths for future professional employment. I anticipated answers reflecting either very positively or negatively.

Question 8: Do you have anything else you'd like to add or include we haven't discussed?

I added this last question to allow participants to include anything they felt crucial or necessary for the project's development; it allowed space for them to discuss other experiences not raised by the interview questions. I hoped it would help participants to feel completely heard and represented in a way they felt was appropriate. In turn, this question helped me as a researcher understand if I was meeting participants' with a level of knowledge and understanding of the Park System with the questions I produced.

Participants had the opportunity to reach out if they thought of anything else important for the project's development. I asked participants if I could contact them again for follow up. They were provided both a phone number and an email address to use for their convenience. Participants were also encouraged to contact me if they had anything more to add after the interview was over.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Before analyzing the completed interviews, I uploaded the recordings electronically and saved the content, then deleted the interview off the recorder, keeping track of each participant's story and continuing to ensure their records

were secure. Due to the personal nature of these interviews, I continued to keep participants names off any written notes or documentation to ensure confidentiality, and labeled each file numerically.

Examining each story and experience was the core for my research analysis and required several listening and note-taking sessions before I felt confident I had extracted the key information to include in my Results Section. I examined the content of each interview and took notes of personal experiences, opinions, challenges, and outlooks on the Park Service, and how each person's time spent in the system influenced their professional and personal lives.

Initially, I assessed each interview on its own. The primary categories I examined for were experiences, stories, unique situations, challenges, and recommendations, along with an "other" category, capturing anything that fell beyond the listed groupings. As I examined interviews, I grouped portions of the dialogue to represent these categories.

Once I evaluated and grouped all interviews to the best of my ability, I created even broader categories that allowed me to visualize the patterns, themes, similarities, and differences I overserved. After this process was finished, the next step was examining my categories and synthesizing the information I saw in order to draw the most appropriate results and conclusions.

## Chapter 3: Results and Conclusion

### Interview Results Sections

As expected, I found a diverse range of responses and experiences from each participant interviewed. Some experiences and stories had similarities, and many interviewees had comparable issues while working for the NPS. Along with common themes, I also discovered variation among participants, including their tone, challenges they faced, and their overall outlook of the Park Service (Figure 7).

Participants	Did you have mentors?	Professional Development opportunities	Did you experience challenges?	Did NPS Influence your careers?	Gender issues brought up
Participant 3					
Participant 4					
Participant 5					
Participant 8					
Participant 9					
Participant 10					
Participant 11					
Participant 12					
Participant 13					
Participant 14					
Participant 16					
Participant 17					
Participant 18					
Participant 1					
Participant 2					
Participant 6					
Participant 7					
Participant 15					
Participant 19					

Figure 7:  
Responses from 19 interviewed participants

Women
Men

Not at all
A little
so-so
Somewhat did
Yes very much so

This table reflects responses from participants. The last column labeled “gender issues brought up” reflects if gender naturally came up as a component of participants’ experience in the NPS.

This section outlines my interpretations of the interviews conducted, and highlights key findings including themes, challenges, and experiences. It also offers recommendations for the Park Service that could enhance the experiences of employees and positively influence the Park Service's current culture.

### **Undertones**

Nineteen participants with a range of experiences offered insight into working for the Park Service, each with their own stories. With repeated listening and note taking sessions, unique undertones emerged from interviews.

Many participants experienced both negatives and positives while working for the Park Service. While speaking with the participants, many appeared neither excited nor indifferent, but rather very matter of fact. However, while questions were answered through a businesslike approach, I noticed other undertones specific to women and men.

Some undercurrents I observed reflected a tone of defeat and frustration; women, in particular, paused in their responses to certain questions, as when asked about challenges they had faced while working for the NPS. They paused only for a moment, but it was enough to take notice of the extra time they needed. This seemed to be in correlation with issues they had faced with male colleagues. Pauses, long exhales, responses beginning with "um" or "yeah", and tone change was noticeable while answering questions.

One specific story that highlights this undertone was from a participant with over thirty years of experience working for the NPS, one who eventually

made her way up into a leadership position. As she described her time in her current role, she paused and drew a long breath before explaining how the lack of female representation in her work felt isolating, and went on to describe the challenges she faced working with primarily men. Even with her number of years of experience working for the NPS, she still faces adversity as a female employee.

While some participants seemed frustrated or defeated from their tone combined with time they took to respond to questions, others took a more aggressive, overconfident approach, stating their experiences in a more pointed fashion. This reaction to questions came particularly from some of the male participants I interviewed. These respondents interrupted, spoke over, and cut short questions I asked. For example, when asked if a participant had had time to review questions I had sent in advance, he interrupted by responding “Um yeah, I had time to review your questions, I chose not to take it though”. This response early in the conversation was followed by condescending answers to other questions and an overall air of arrogance.

Undertones set the mood for the interviews, and while some interviewees appeared disappointed or discouraged to bring up some of their negative NPS experiences, others displayed superiority and confidence and highlighted the specific work they accomplished. This in itself reflects the spectrum of feelings and attitudes employees experienced while working for the NPS. The complexity of gender also played a role in how interviews proceeded, and was reflected in experiences and stories participants disclosed.

### **Themes and Similarities**

Within the 19 interviews conducted, the intersection of topics discussed was evident. Common themes surfaced among many participants, the most prevalent including a lack of support, feeling undervalued, and the competitive nature of securing full time employment. These are discussed below.

### **Lack of Formal Support Systems**

The majority of participants experienced lack of formal mentorship. Participants felt that guidance and support was missing from their overall experience. Although official mentorship was lacking most did find some form of informal mentorship, such as peer to peer support, to which they turned guidance and perspective. While some were fortunate to experience this informal mentorship, about 68% of participants felt fairly isolated and had little to no mentorship. “I felt like my time working for the Park Service I navigated on my own,” one participant noted, “if I had a question about my job or something, I could ask one of the workers who’d been there longer than me, but I didn’t feel supported in what I was doing”.

The lack of support felt by most participants appeared to correlate with their outlook of the Park Service. Most that lacked support and mentorship seemed disconnected and unattached to their work, and expressed indifference in pursuing a NPS career further.

### **Undervalued**

Feeling undervalued was a second strong theme which surfaced in during the interview process. Many participants felt the work they produced went

unnoticed and found it exceptionally hard to be recognized for their efforts. Some participant's overall feelings about the Park Service seemed negative without feeling valued.

Feeling underappreciated also led employees to leave the Park Service and find work elsewhere. During interviews I asked participants if their time working for the NPS influenced their career trajectory in any way, and many noted their experience influenced them to look beyond the NPS and find careers outside the Service, in hopes that their skills and knowledge would be more appreciated. One participant expressed "Honestly I think my time in the Park Service influenced me NOT (emphasis theirs) to stay in the job forever, it just feels sometimes like it chews you up and spits you out, it wears on you after a while. I didn't really care at first, but after three seasons, I just sort of felt done".

### **Establishing a career in the NPS takes too much time**

Another theme participants expressed universally was that establishing a career in the Park Service is not only complex but also takes time. Of the 19 participants I interviewed only two had permanent positions, and 17 participants were seasonal or temporary workers. Many stated it can take years of seasonal work to even be considered for a permanent position: "[I]f you want a full on career in the Park Service, you have to really want it, and like, you can't just expect opportunities to present themselves. You have to go out and hunt for it". This, in return, seemed to increase the competitive nature of the Park Service, resulting in some hostility among coworkers at times.

While some participants seemed willing to take their time moving from one park to another, gaining experience and know-how along the way, most others found that slow progression and way of living exhausting and overly competitive. Establishing a career in the NPS virtually takes too much time, and many tend to move on quickly after a few seasons.

### **Unique observations**

As participants responded to the drafted questions, unique responses surfaced in most interviews. Of which included colleagues and crews, generational differences, and the concept of gender itself.

### **Impact of Coworkers**

Participants' experiences were deeply impacted by their crew and colleagues they worked alongside. In fact, I quickly realized that a participant's time in the NPS was shaped based on not just the job they had, but the people with whom they worked. If a participant had a crew they liked and respected, their viewed their experience in a more positive light. I also noticed a great group of colleagues impacted a participant's desire to return, while those who had a particularly negative experience with co-workers seemed unlikely to do the same. One participant stated that during the multiple seasons she worked as a seasonal employee, she intentionally only applied to work at the same park with a similar crew, knowing her experience would be positive and enjoyable.

## **Generational Difference**

Age played a role in how participants responded to questions. In particular, polarized views regarding the treatment of women in the Park Service came to light with a number of participants. Participants who fell in their 50's and 60's response to gender discrimination in the Park Service was to tolerate and accept any bad behavior from their male coworkers. "That's just the way it was," one participant noted, "one of my coworkers noticed I was being harassed by one of my male colleagues and asked if I was going to say something to a supervisor about it, I didn't really want to make waves and felt like I just needed to ignore it and he would stop, eventually he did, but that kind of behavior was to be expected". Other women I interviewed in their 50's and 60's had similar responses, expressing that discrimination or harassment against women in the Park Service was allowed and "to be expected". Experiencing discrimination seemed so engrained in these participants' responses that it was "normal" during their work in Park Service.

While women of an older generation rationalized the masculine culture of the Park Service, women that fell in the 20's and 30's range expressed their feelings differently. Many not only acknowledged the behavior immediately, but some women tried to confront men about it:

One guy I worked with always talked to us women on the crew a lot differently than he would talk to the guys, like being disrespectful, it really bothered me. One day after work I tried to confront him in the office, but the conversation got heated and we ended up yelling at each other. It was kind of scary because we were the only ones in the office and he clearly was trying to intimidate me, it wasn't a great situation to be in.

These stories reveal the generational gap and different mindsets among women. Women of a younger generation vocalize issues of gender discrimination more frequently, and in doing so are creating avenues for conversation regarding gender in the Park Service.

### **Gender issues revealed**

One last observation involved the actual issue of gender within the Park Service. While the questions themselves did not explicitly involve gender, it naturally came up in many responses. Of the 13 female participants interviewed, nearly all of them brought up the masculine culture of the NPS in some capacity, and its impact on their employment experience. The masculine culture primarily surfaced when asked about challenges they experienced or ways to improve the Park Service.

In contrast, while nearly all women expressed gender discrepancies, none of men interviewed brought up gender-related issues. The challenges they faced seemed more individual and particular to their work, rather than to those with whom they worked. This unique observation highlights the differences women face in the NPS compared to men. Even within a broad set of questions, gender issues surfaced in most interviews.

By interviewing a range of individuals, differing in ages, genders, and experiences, unique aspects came to light. While other observations also stood out, these highlighted the ways how NPS experiences are shaped.

## **Diving Deeper in the Challenges**

In Question five, I probed the issue of challenges interviewees faced while working for the NPS. Challenges discussed spanned from personal to professional matters. Many participants had concerns regarding a living wage, some spoke about the intense hiring process and navigating the USAJOBS website, some raised concerns around stability and upward mobility came to light, and others were concerned with funding positions. It was clear through the interviews that NPS employees felt they had indeed encountered challenges during their experience, most pertaining to issues surrounding bureaucracy, lack of professional opportunities, and the masculine culture of the Park Service.

### **Bureaucracy issues – “learn how to play the game”**

Many participants stated that the bureaucracy of the Park Service was frustrating to work within, specifically in the application process. Navigating the system left participants feeling discouraged. Many expressed they felt like they had to “learn how to play the game” in order to become eligible for Park Service jobs, especially those with a slight increase in pay:

Once you get your foot in the door that makes the whole process a lot easier. But until that happens, you really have to navigate the whole USAJOBS website on your own. Making sure you include in key phrases, being aware of when jobs are open or even posted is key. I applied for a NPS job once that I was qualified for on the recommendation of one of my past supervisors I’d worked with. But because I didn’t include these like certain key words in my application I got passed over for an interview. It’s a pretty ridiculous process

Not only was the application process challenging for most participants, it discouraged their pursuit of careers in the Park Service. They left after multiple

seasons of navigating the application process and the bureaucracy behind it felt burnt out and unmotivated to continue working for the NPS, in return impacting retention and stability of experienced employees.

### **Professional opportunities sought out independently**

Question three pertained to opportunities and professional development. I asked participants if they had chances to develop other skills in order to become a competitive applicant for other NPS jobs. Most bluntly stated they did not, or were not presented with any. Some indicated that they knew of trainings and professional development opportunities, but were not given the chance to pursue them.

I was there to do a job. If I wanted to try and take advantage of some of the trainings I heard about, my supervisor wouldn't let me take them, since it would cut into the work day. Even if I had a chance to go to trainings or something I was only a seasonal worker, so I didn't feel like they wanted to put the time or energy into giving me additional support, you know?

Overall, opportunities to develop a wider skill set or knowledge seemed few and far between. While some participants did express they took advantage of trainings, this was not the case for all. Most indicated this as a challenge they experienced working for the Park Service, and as an area that could be improved.

### **Masculine Culture**

A final challenge touched on by participants was the overall masculine atmosphere felt within the Park Service: “[T]oxic masculinity is rampant as all hell!” The challenge of working in a system where masculinity dominates made

working for the Park Service especially difficult primarily for female interview participants.

Some expressed their credibility was challenged because they were women. One female participant spoke of a male coworker doubling back on her work, wanting to make sure what she was tasked with was completed in the right way. Another female felt intimidated working on a crew of mostly men, expressing that the dynamics made her feel incompetent, and like she had to be a more submissive crew member and let the men take charge.

Other women stated that they felt like they needed to act like “one of the guys” to gain respect from their male coworkers, and needed to embody a macho façade as to not to appear weak or incapable. One female participant noted the specific department she works for is primarily run by men. As someone who holds a higher leadership role within a facilities department, being a woman in charge weighs heavily: “It can just be challenging to be a woman working for the Park Service hands down, especially when you’re one of only a few women working in Facilities. It’s something I’ve learned how to navigate but at times it can be challenging”.

The challenges participants expressed ranged, but the bureaucracy, professional development, and the masculine culture described here offer opportunities for growth and improvements within the Park Service.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

Based on the perspectives, stories, and experiences I noted in the 19 interviews conducted, improvements are necessary in order to create greater equity among female and male NPS workers. I present three recommendations for enhancing the experiences and employment of both women and men that work for the NPS.

### **Regional vs national focus**

It was clear through my interviews that conditions at each park location are distinct, resulting in different experiences and challenges participants faced. While the Park Service operates on a national level, with wide spanning regulations and policies, it seems that blanketing every unit in the NPS with the same policies and procedures is not effective. Focusing on regional rather than national policies could allow the NPS to hone in on unique challenges or dilemmas happening within a certain region, therefore catering to Park Service employees through a more specialized lens.

### **Prioritize women in higher leadership positions**

Because men currently hold the majority of jobs in the NPS, it's important to prioritize women in more leadership positions. Featuring women as directors, superintendents, and other leadership roles could help reduce the masculine presence in the Park Service, create role models for up and coming NPS employees, and lead to more balance between men and women workers. It could also offer different perspectives, insights, and approaches to managing the Park

Service, further showcasing equity of women's and men's capability as leaders.

### **Create formal mentorship opportunities**

One of the most common ideas brought up during the interviews was the concept of mentorship. Many participants felt unsupported and undervalued while working for the Park Service. One way to dismantle those feelings would be to create a formal mentorship program. Not only could it positively influence its workers, but it could also help stability of NPS personnel. If employees felt heard, supported, and valued, the Park Service could eventually see workers returning, and could find more eligible employees qualified for permanent positions, therefore increasing retention, and creating a positive feedback loop.

Although other recommendations could improve the experiences of NPS employees, I feel these could truly make an impact on the Park Service. By focusing efforts regionally, prioritizing women, and supporting formal mentorship, the Park Service can have a lasting impact on those who choose to work in the protected areas of the United States.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis explored gender equality in the National Park Service with an ecofeminist lens. Through the literature reviewed, it became clear women have faced challenges to be seen as equal contributors to the National Park Service while also navigating gender discrimination and its masculine culture. By conducting interviews with current and former NPS employees, I gained a sense

of individuals' experiences while working in the NPS, and the polarizing differences between men and women.

Changing the culture within the Park Service is not only necessary, it's critical. Women for too long have felt unwelcome, undervalued, and unsafe in their NPS work. Creating lasting change comes from dismantling a culture of masculinity, of dominance, and of male superiority. While these changes may not happen immediately, their impact will last. Supporting women in the NPS embodies an equitable working environment, not only supporting women working today, but empowering women working in the future.

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## Appendices

### Interview Questions

1. Please describe your experience working for the National Parks Service?
  - a. Please describe your job in the Parks Service, what was your role, what were your primary responsibilities? Did you work solo or with a crew? If you were on a crew describe a little but about the crew.
2. Please tell me a little more about how you started working for the Parks Service?
3. Did you have mentors while working in the Parks Service? Who were they? How did they help support you and your professional development?
4. Were you given or approached with other professional development or job opportunities while working for the NPS? If so, can you expand on them?
  - a. What were/are some support services or systems in place in the NPS that you use(d)?
5. What were/are some of the challenges or barriers you faced or saw while working for the NPS?
6. If any, do you have recommendations that could improve the experiences of NPS employees?
7. Has working for the NPS influenced your career trajectory? If so, how? If not, why?
8. Do you have anything else you'd like to add or include we haven't discussed?