



**IN OUR ELEMENT: OUTDOOR RECREATION AS A TOOL FOR FEMALE
EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**
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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the meanings of outdoor recreation in the lives of college-aged female-identified and non-binary individuals. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 16 current students and recent graduates of the University of Utah generated rich narratives on the themes of challenges to involvement, benefits of participation, and negotiation of gender identity through communication. The participants in this research displayed a high level of awareness for how their intersecting identities affect their experiences outside. The findings from this study suggest multiple directions for future research and strategies for advocating the outdoors to diverse audiences.