Introduction

Muddy glee (Bracken and Mawdsley, 2003) was published nearly twenty years ago and sought to explore and discuss women's experiences of physical geography fieldwork. The paper reimagined the established narrative centred on a feminist critique of prevalent gender discrimination within fieldwork - a largely masculine endeavour - and reclaimed a set of positive perspectives of fieldwork for women in physical geography. When we were asked to revisit this paper, it was apparent that many of the challenges explored and discussed within the paper were a reflection of normalised societal perceptions, implicitly ingrained within us from birth. This gendering of childhoods is a widely studied area across a range of disciplines that intersect a suite of issues facing girls as they take their journey through to womanhood.

I (Katie) am a researcher and practitioner who has worked with children and young people for over 25 years, and I have witnessed at close hand how gendering can impact development and life trajectories. My research addresses children and young people's relationship with the outdoors, most pertinently the impact this connection can have on children and young people and their engagement with issues associated with addressing climate change. Additionally, I (Florence) address childhood, gender and climate change from an international perspective, and together we have explored how the narratives within Bracken and Mawdsley (2003) interconnect with our work and our lived experiences. Below we outline how our reflections raise three key provocations, identified within our own work, and as rooted in the extended literature. These reflections have enabled us to think about the various barriers faced when gendered childhoods intersect with *accessing* the outdoors; specifically, how gender inequities, as routed in early childhood, governs access to these natural, and what should be open, spaces throughout life journeys. We take a very wide view of what constitutes as fieldwork, wrapping this into a broader outdoors context and leaning on our backgrounds and experiences that extend from engaging children, youth and communities in outdoor and indoor environmental education in the UK through to remote fieldwork in SE Asia.

Childhood and Gatekeepers

Gender is one of the first labels that a child learns about themselves (e.g., Zosuls et al., 2009). Even before a child is born, these gender stereotypes are assigned by society, with Rothman (1986) finding the language pregnant women use to describe within womb baby movements to be biased by sex. Those women who knew they were carrying a girl described their child as "gentle", "quiet", and "reassuring". Whereas those carrying a boy described the movements as "jabs", "punches", and "kicks". Within the study and as a control, those who were unaware of the sex of the unborn child did not use this gendered descriptive language, highlighting how gendered norms are being used even

before birth. These gendered social norms are projected all around us from an early age, from gendered child clothing (Mallen, 2019) to the gendering of toys (Fulcher and Hayes, 2018).

While gender biases have existed long throughout human evolution (Zhu and Chang, 2019), the gendering of products was largely a consequence of capitalism, with companies realising they could sell twice as many products if girls and boys were socially conditioned to play, want and wear different toys and clothes (Parsons, 2021). In proving this as a social construction, Hines, et al. (2010) demonstrated that for those under the age of 2, there existed no colour preference when choosing toys, suggesting the social construction of gender colour preference. Additionally, they also identified no preference for the type of toys under the age of 12 months, with both boys and girls playing with cars and dolls equally. Later in childhood however, there was a clear separation in choice, again reinforcing society's role in the construction of gendered childhoods. Pertinent research has shown how this gendering of children's toys has become more extreme over the past 50 years (Sweet, 2013) helping to communicate and evolve gendered narratives that simultaneously justify and sustain the unequal distribution of access to opportunities. Indeed, Sweet (2013) highlights how gender-differentiated toys effectively set a suite of narrow preferences, attributes, and expectations of children. Girls' toys are pink, dominated by domestic, indoor focused toys, dolls, houses, crafts and beauty kits, with the boy's aisles filled with action figures, outdoor adventure, building sets and vehicles (Blakemore and Centers, 2005). This reflects and lays the foundations for gender inequity into adulthood. These early influences, we argue herein, are the very first constrains and barriers that women face in accessing the outdoors and fieldwork.

Reinforcing these overt and subliminal messages, are gatekeepers – those who manage and control children and young people's access to and participation in the outdoors (i.e., parents, carers, extended family, teachers, community members and group leaders), and who span throughout a child's micro, meso and exosystem over their life course (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Most children and young people must pass through one of these gatekeepers in order to access outdoors and, depending on the gatekeeper's own relationship with the outdoors (along with their gendered views), additionally impacts outdoor access with an embedded gender inequity. In 2017, I (Katie) undertook a study exploring the perceptions of parents in children accessing the outdoors in the foundation stage of a primary school (Parsons and Traunter, 2018). Within the study, parents expressed views that suggested their daughters "preferred to stay indoors" and "didn't like it when it was cold or wet or muddy". However, responses concerning sons expressed their interactions with the outdoors as "a haven for them", and "a place where they could run off steam and just be themselves". The teachers added that the boys "concentrate more after being outside," whereas the girls "just like staying inside

colouring or writing most of the time". The question we should be asking here, in our view is, are these choices independently made, or are they instead being constructed by those around them? We argue that these dynamics likely reinforce a gender bias on access to the outdoors and ultimately result in a lack of exposure to the outdoor environments for girls from an early age. The impacts are likely profound, as Engwicht (1992) highlighted: denying children of a chance to encounter nature, no matter how small, "robs them of the very essence of life" and will undoubtedly impact engagement and affinity with the outdoors.

Schools and decline of opportunities

As girls negotiate their way through school life, their growing maturity and puberty changes their bodies in very visible ways. Societal and peer opinions increasingly shape behaviours, with girls needing to negotiate a physical sense of themselves within a culture in which their bodies, and physical experiences, play an evolving role (c.f. Garrett, 2010). Being physically active and being outdoors go hand in hand with a healthy childhood, however research has indicated that girls as young as seven give up sports because they lack confidence, also expressing a dislike with being outside in the cold (Reimers et al., 2018). Indeed, Williams and Bedward (2002) highlight what they refer to as clear inadequacies in contemporary physical education in relation to the needs and interests of girls. Moreover, Karsten (2003) showed how playground participation, activities and micro-geographies are structured by gender, identifying how girls' physical activity is found to be suppressed in the presence of boys. A range of research has identified that girls are significantly less active than boys during school lunchtimes. Watson et al. (2015) highlighted that this is driven by a complex set of explicit barriers, including that some activities are considered "gender inappropriate", with the added influences of maturation, bullying and teasing. Other important barriers identified by Watson et al. (2015) included that girls' school uniforms are often not considered conducive to participation in physical activity. Stories emerge each year with young people being reprimanded for wanting change over their school uniforms and gain access to equal clothing, with some schools now choosing to embrace a gender-neutral uniform policy (e.g. Ferguson, 2017). Nonetheless, many have not, and these are very real barriers to participation in girls being active in the outdoors, which both uphold and re-enforce, societal stereotypes and cultural norms.

Staying safe: girlhood to womanhood

We could not leave this discussion without addressing a major concern for many girls and women in accessing the outdoors: safety. As girls we are taught not to go out in the dark, not to go out alone, and not to put ourselves in what society considers vulnerable positions. From these fears, the safety and comfort of the indoors becomes a respite, and a place where we must stay in order to be safe

(Wesely and Gaarder, 2004). Krenichyn (2006) highlights these issues in an analysis of women's access to outdoor activities, finding via their qualitative interviews that safety was the overriding barrier to access. Respondents largely referenced issues such as crime, traffic, and harassment from others, with culprits of these acts largely being identified as men and boys. Valentine (1997) identifies how this "stranger-danger" discourse plays an important part in constructing children as "vulnerable" and "at risk" in public spaces from an early age, shaping girls' behaviours when this is layered with a gender dimension. For example, McMillan et al. (2006) identifies gendered differences in children's active travel to school in their paper titled "Johnny walks to school – does Jane?". These limits effectively impact and limit the geographical mobilities of girls from an early age. When questioned, female respondents concluded that their aversion to walk to school was largely down to the fear of violence and infringement, with many being hesitant to go outdoors alone or with only female companions (McNeil et al, 2012; Wesely and Gaarder, 2004).

This gender divide, particularly in the UK, has become the focus of many in the wake of Sarah Everard's murder in 2021. Sarah was murdered by an off-duty police officer, despite following the many precautions that many women are told to take when going outside. In an outpouring of grief, people took to social media to share the measures they take in order to feel safe in the outdoors, from calling a male friend whilst walking alone, to holding keys in their hand as a defence weapon. Following the hashtags #*reclaimthenight and #textmewhenyougethome,* the posts all too commonly cited not going outside alone as women's primary way to feel safe and avoid gender-based violence. Victim blaming narratives are ubiquitous in these cases, largely perpetuated by mass and social media (Halliday, 2021) which assure readers that the victim should have worn appropriate clothing, or not gone out at night, to stay safe. Dooley (2016) found that some women even act out masculine stereotypes in the presence of males to try and assert their power, or capability, in a male dominated space. But why should women have to change their behaviours, or prove they deserve to belong in a space just because they are female? These narratives ensure women are the ones to manage and mitigate their behaviours to avoid gender-based violence, and thus largely negotiate how girls and women use and access the outdoors.

This fear of the outdoors is taught to girls regardless of whether it is fully justified. Indeed, as Wesely and Gaarder (2004) argue the vast majority of crimes against women occur within private spaces. Taken together, these perceptions of safety ultimately impact the access and connectivity to the outdoors, with onward implications for career choices for girls, and thus longer-term engagement with a very broad range of fieldwork.

Returning to Muddy Glee and our final reflections. The wider view of the challenges and pleasures of fieldwork highlighted by Bracken and Mawdsley are as relevant today. However, those challenges, we argue, are best addressed throughout life journeys, beginning first with interventions at an early age. By connecting girls to their natural environment and the outdoors, acting as facilitators rather than gatekeepers, we can begin to foster girls' engagement with the outdoors in a way that may continue into womanhood and be expressed through broader engagement with fieldwork. Doing this effectively, however requires structural and systemic changes to the construction(s) of gendered childhoods that address access, equity and the conscious removal of barriers to participation, along with the promotion of strong role models within and across societies and communities. We need to tackle internalised gender stereotypes in the classroom, at home, and in day-to-day interactions within wider society. Only through actively making these changes will the opportunities and the real enjoyment and "glee" of fieldwork open up to many more women.

Finally, we also need to move beyond initiatives that work solely with girls and extend the conversation to fully incorporate boys and men in a way that enables them to adapt behaviours and become aware of their own and others' behaviours and (un)conscious biases. Finally, we also reflect that many of these barriers and inequities not only apply to girls and childhoods, but also other marginalised groups and ethnic minorities, who are also excluded via similar structural inequalities and the inhibiting social constructions that emanate from these. This makes the need for systemic change even more important.

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Gendered childhoods and the inequity of accessing the outdoors

Katie J. Parsons and Florence Halstead

Abstract

Understanding our beliefs and experiences means we must often explore our childhood experiences, and reflect on how, at certain points in our life a range of barriers, obstacles and societal or social constructs have resulted in shaping the opportunities we had and our behaviours in accessing them. Herein we consider and reflect on the paper "*Muddy Glee: rounding out the picture of women and physical geography fieldwork*" and take inspiration to reframe and discuss a broader context of childhood experiences in setting the background for the observations made within the paper. We highlight and discuss three key provocations which provide a framework to explore how social constructions of gender, from within the womb onwards, impact women's experiences, challenges, and pleasures of fieldwork in geography, and moreover link these experiences to the restrictions on access to the outdoors women experience in everyday life.

Introduction

Muddy glee (Bracken and Mawdsley, 2003) was published nearly twenty years ago and sought to explore and discuss women's experiences of physical geography fieldwork. The paper reimagined the established narrative centred on a feminist critique of prevalent gender discrimination within fieldwork - a largely masculine endeavour - and reclaimed a set of positive perspectives of fieldwork for women in physical geography. When we were asked to revisit this paper, it was apparent that many of the challenges explored and discussed within the paper were a reflection of normalised societal perceptions, implicitly ingrained within us from birth. This gendering of childhoods is a widely studied area across a range of disciplines that intersect a suite of issues facing girls as they take their journey through to womanhood.

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Reinforcing these overt and subliminal messages, are gatekeepers – those who manage and control children and young people's access to and participation in the outdoors (i.e., parents, carers, extended family, teachers, community members and group leaders), and who span throughout a child's micro, meso and exosystem over their life course (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Most children and young people must pass through one of these gatekeepers in order to access outdoors and, depending on the gatekeeper's own relationship with the outdoors (along with their gendered views), additionally impacts outdoor access with an embedded gender inequity. In 2017, I (Katie) undertook a study exploring the perceptions of parents in children accessing the outdoors in the foundation stage of a primary school (Parsons and Traunter, 2018). Within the study, parents expressed views that suggested their daughters "preferred to stay indoors" and "didn't like it when it was cold or wet or muddy". However, responses concerning sons expressed their interactions with the outdoors as "a haven for them", and "a place where they could run off steam and just be themselves". The teachers added that the boys "concentrate more after being outside," whereas the girls "just like staying inside colouring or writing most of the time". The question we should be asking here, in our view is, are these choices independently made, or are they instead being constructed by those around them? We argue that these dynamics likely reinforce a gender bias on access to the outdoors and ultimately result in a lack of exposure to the outdoor environments for girls from an early age. The impacts are likely profound, as Engwicht (1992) highlighted: denying children of a chance to encounter nature, no matter how small, "robs them of the very essence of life" and will undoubtedly impact engagement and affinity with the outdoors.

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Acknowledgements

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