

A Guide to Gender Equity for Outdoorsy Dudes

Formerly, A #MeToo Guide for Outdoorsy Dudes (January 2018)

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A #MeToo Guide for Outdoorsy Dudes, originally published in January 2018, started as a text thread between me and a friend. In late 2017, #MeToo, the hashtag created by activist Tarana Burke and popularized by actress Alyssa Milano, grabbed the attention of, well, nearly everyone. This included, to our surprise, many of the cisgender men in our outdoor and conservation community. Yet many of these same men denouncing sexual harassment and violence were clearly missing, despite their good intentions, how their own actions perpetuated or excused gender inequity, harassment, and violence. Using a voice I intended as humorous and kind enough to call men in, I formed the texts into a blog post and unexpectedly, it went viral too. Over 80,000 people viewed the blog on the now archived Emerald Lens.

Re-reading the blog post now, I have mixed feelings about it's success. In some ways the post is too focused on individual actions, too forgiving of men's obliviousness to their own privilege in

the outdoors, and borders on a #girlboss energy that has since rightfully been critiqued. In the last few years I've learned to spend less time tiptoeing around the needs of the cisgender men dedicated to misunderstanding me. Instead, I build community and resilience within groups of folks fully dedicated to dismantling systems of oppression of all kinds. In the words of Audre Lorde, "...the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."

My understanding of gender equity and the intersectional nature of systems of oppression has grown exponentially since 2018. Knowing this blog is still used as an educational tool in outdoor spaces and beyond, a thorough edit was overdue. The evolving nature of this writing can represent what we strive for in our journeys toward equity, justice and inclusion in outdoor spaces: that we should always be learning, growing, taking accountability for our mistakes, and welcoming change.

Some limitations and disclaimers: In this blog, I use the term "women", which includes both cisgender women and trans women, yet of course, their experience in the outdoors and beyond is often very different. Similarly, I say "men" recognizing that in the outdoors and beyond, trans men often do not enjoy the same privileges as cisgender men. I am a cisgender woman and write from that experience only. I encourage you to seek out non-binary and trans perspectives of the outdoors too.

In an effort to be succinct, this piece speaks only to creating a culture of gender equity. If your education doesn't also include considerations of the outdoors through the lens of race, ethnicity, class, sexual identity and expression, ability, age, colonialism, and more, it is an incomplete education. Please e-mail me if you are struggling to find leaders and educators in these spaces, and don't forget to compensate fairly when you do learn from someone's work.

Best wishes in your outdoor career and beyond,

- Emerald LaFortune (www.emeraldlafortune.com, [@emeraldensmedia](https://twitter.com/emeraldensmedia))

A Gender Equity Guide for Outdoorsy Dudes

Sexual harassment and violence is a regular part of most women and non-binary folk's lives. Including those who guide, recreate, and work in the outdoors. With you. Yeah, even her and them.

Do you harass or violate those around you? No, hopefully not, outdoorsy dude. You are progressive men raised by badass mothers. You kayak, ski, hike, climb, and fish with women and non-binary outdoors partners whom you respect. You don't catcall women. You don't question non-binary identity. You aren't a rapist, or rapist apologist. You support the folks in your life who said #MeToo and you vote with gender equity in mind. You genuinely care about making the outdoor space available to everyone. Yet harassment and violence ultimately stem from a culture of sexism and disregard for women and non-binary folk's experiences. You want to know what you can do to support the women and non-binary folks you love and respect, beyond just the basics. You're ready to not just denounce harassment and violence, but help dismantle cultures of misogyny and sexism altogether. Here are some ideas to start:

Elevate our voices. If you're scouting a big alpine line with a group and your partner thinks you should drop it, has good reasons, but no one seems to hear her input? All it takes is, "Hey, Julia has a good point!" to bring her idea front and center. When a woman calls out a group for ignoring her voice, she is often seen as aggressive or obnoxious. When you elevate a woman's voice, you're seen as a team player concerned with all the opinions involved. Point being, you have everything to gain and she often has a lot to lose. Speak up.

Talk about your paycheck. Ugh, talking about money. Awkward, right? But as we all know, the chairlift or an after-work paddle is when we work through some of our most awkward life moments with the people we trust. Women and non-binary folks, yes, even in the outdoor industry, earn less than their male counterparts. Sharing the numbers helps your women and non-binary coworkers ensure their wage matches their experience level and contribution. **EVEN MORE IMPORTANT:** If you are a supervisor, make sure employees of all genders with similar experience are making the same amount. Period. It's the right thing to do and will save you an awkward call-out (or even litigation) later.

Edit your outdoor role models. These days there are women and non-binary folks in every outdoor sport and more than ever, their stories are being told. Find a person who is sharing their story in a public way and learn as much as you can about their training regimen, goals, expeditions, and lived experience.

Highlight strength, strategy, and intelligence, not appearance. Don't expect us to be cute or well-groomed, particularly in the outdoors where looking cute and well-groomed is a shit-pile of work. If a woman or non-binary person, however, enjoys looking cute and well-groomed in the outdoors, let them do so and don't assume it means they are only there due to their appearance. In the instance of certain outdoor spaces such as guiding, grooming may be an aspect of

professionalism. In these settings, ensure folks of all genders are held to similar standards involving similar levels of effort.

Support affinity days. Most women and non-binary outdoor athletes spend a lot of time with cisgender men. Even if I had an outdoors day with my girlfriends once a week for the rest of my life I likely wouldn't balance out 50/50. We're not creating affinity spaces because we don't like hanging out with you. We create these opportunities because not being in the minority is a special, freeing thing. If you're feeling FOMO because our affinity days look like a ton of fun, ask yourself, "What do women and non-binary folks bring to the table that my dude friends don't?" ...and then think about how you can bring that energy to your own groups.

Include us in your creative projects and let us have equal say. Always, but *especially* if your creative project is telling the story of another woman or non-binary person. Also, don't expect one woman's story to be all women's story any more than you would expect Alex Honnold to represent all male climbers. Ditto for non-binary folks.

Notice gender roles... and then ignore them. This whole equity thing isn't just about supporting women and non-binary folks. It's also about letting cisgender men be who they are outside the typical masculine roles. So if a woman trip leader delegates you loading the truck when you'd really prefer to pack the food coolers? Speak up and let her know you're more of a chef guy. The point is to let everyone be exactly who they are, regardless of the gendered expectation around tasks and responsibilities. It's also important to notice if typically gendered tasks are valued in different ways in your outdoor space, either in compensation or badassery points.

Know that it's still not fair. Was a woman or non-binary person who is not as strong of a skier as you chosen to take part in a film? Please don't complain about it. What feels to you like WOMEN AND NON-BINARY FOLKS TAKING OVER OUTDOOR MEDIA is actually a slow crawl toward equal representation. Imagine what it feels like to grow up a little girl watching Warren Miller and TGR films and never seeing yourself in any of the clips. Ever. And then understand why it means so much to get us in front of the lens.

Understand that women and non-binary folks don't always feel safe in the places you feel safe, and it has everything to do with other people and nothing to do with grizzly bears.

Let us be wrong. One of the most frustrating aspects of being a woman in the outdoors is the pressure to be perfect. Part of learning is messing up or falling short. And as a woman, especially as a token woman, I often feel pressure to represent ALL WOMEN IN WHITEWATER BOATING FOREVER rather than just my own skill set.

Let us be experts. Ask yourself, "Am I actually the expert in this situation?" If you're an expert, great. If a woman is an expert, don't get all weird about letting her be in charge. My favorite way that this is addressed is when I'm leading a whitewater rafting trip. Inevitably, guests will ask the biggest, bearded dude all their questions, even if that biggest, bearded dude is a trainee. Inevitably, the bearded dude in question will say, "That's a great trip leader question, talk to

Emerald.” We know that YOU see our skills but especially in guiding or professional situations, often our guests or clients do not. Backing up our expertise is a huge help.

Don’t assume a ski date is a date. For women and non-binary athletes and guides at the top of their game it can be hard to find outdoor partners that keep up. If a woman or non-binary person asks you to go paddling... they are just asking you to go paddling. Not to say as consenting adults that those feelings won't eventually grow between you. If they do, ask them on a real date and make sure they know it's one. Also, remember that if you in any way hold influence over someone's schedule or opportunity in an outdoor profession or opportunity, they may likely feel pressured to say yes to that date offer whether they want to or not. Don't be that dude.

Pack tampons in your medical kit. Bleeding out your crotch in the middle of the wilderness is a simple medical situation, not some gross “you have a uterus” thing. Remember that people of all genders have periods. Be prepared, ESPECIALLY if you are a guide.

Understand what intersectionality is and consider how it applies to your community and experience of the outdoors for you and those around you.

Vote your values. The women and non-binary folks in your life notice that you can't stop yammering on about a public lands grab, yet are silent on social justice legislation. While individual change can help shift the culture that devalues women and non-binary folks, we also need policy-level protection and support. “Voting” happens everywhere from making hiring decisions at your company, to deciding what outdoor brand to support, to casting your ballot for US legislators and presidents.

Commit to learning and growth. Chances are, women and non-binary folks in your life probably have something to add to this list. Maybe they disagree with this list altogether. The important thing is to create space to listen and value their perspectives. Say, “What's it like to be a woman or non-binary person in the outdoors right now?” Then, grab a big bite of bagel and just listen. On the flip side, it shouldn't be our job to teach you why this all matters and it can be pretty darn exhausting to be an educator. If you work with, recreate with, build families with women and non-binary people - this is your work too. There are extensive resources that already exist that describe these experiences.

Thanks for having our back, outdoorsy dudes. We look forward to building a more just, equitable, and diverse outdoors alongside you.