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A journey into understanding gendered experiences of outdoor adventure education

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ABSTRACT

Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) is traditionally depicted as a hegemonic masculine domain. Thus, fundamental to any dialogue on gender in OAE is whether the outdoor experience reifies or disputes stereotypical gender roles. This study explores the influence of gender on the psychosocial outcomes and descriptions of gender-related influences on the experiences of *Journey*, a South African school-based OAE programme. Employing a mixed methods quasi-experimental design, a purposive sample of 74 male and 70 female Grade 10 learners was recruited for this study. Gender comparisons reveal a significant difference for post-*Journey* scores of Resilience but not for Life Effectiveness and Emotional Literacy. The qualitative findings suggest that individual differences, rather than gender, account for much of the variation in outcomes and meaning for the learners. It is imperative that we recognise that gender identities are inextricably intertwined with our understanding of sexual orientation, sex and issues of privilege and oppression.

KEYWORDS

Gender; outdoor adventure education; hegemonic masculinity; psychosocial constructs

Introduction

This article reports part of a bigger mixed methods study, investigating the efficacy of *Journey*, an Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) programme for South African learners (Blaine & Akhurst, 2020). Exploring gender differences quantitatively and qualitatively, this article aims to understand how gender¹ influenced the learners' experiences and their perceptions of *Journey*. Despite an attempt by educators today to be more cognisant of the dynamic and evolving field of gender studies (Rushton, Gray, Canty, & Blanchard, 2019), gender discussions in OAE have traditionally conformed to a gender binary, with dichotomous references to male and female. The social systems of power that mirror the patriarchal dominance still evident in South Africa (SA) and by extension its schools, reinforce these binaries and cisnormativity (i.e. the assumption that all people are cisgender; that their gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth).

Internationally, there is evidence of increased female OAE participation over the past three decades, although researchers argue that women and ethnic groups (other than white people of European origin) are still under-represented (Gray, Allen-Craig, & Carpenter, 2017; Humberstone, 2000), with scant reference to gender diversity beyond the binary (Mitten, 2012; Warren, 2016). Even

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¹It should be noted that the construct of gender in this study refers to the biological sex of 'male' and 'female', whereby a learner is defined according to genetics, anatomy and physiology. It is not the intention of the researcher to overlook those LGBTQIX+ who do not identify with either 'male' or 'female', but it is beyond the scope of this study to examine gender constructs beyond these two dominant categories.

today, policy-makers and OAE programme providers appear to be predominantly white males (Gray, 2016), resulting in programmes that may not take into account the more nuanced roles of gender in society (Warren, Roberts, Breunig, & Alvarez, 2014).

Historically, OAE has been depicted as a masculine domain reserved for (white) men and boys (Dooley, 2016; Warren, Mitten, D'Amore, & Lotz, 2019), with the wilderness portrayed as an environment to be 'tamed' or 'conquered' by men (Kling, Margaryan, & Fuchs, 2020). This is evident from programmes such as Outward Bound (OB), which were originally designed to make 'men out of boys' (Humberstone, 2000). *Journey*, the OAE programme to be described, is arguably imbued with hegemonic masculinity, harking back to colonial and postcolonial histories. Kennedy and Russell (2020) maintain that by adhering to this hegemonic masculinity, the most prized performances of maleness (e.g. bravery, toughness, emotional stoicism, physical strength, rationality), uphold patriarchy and gender inequity. In SA, despite its progressive democratic constitution, entrenching equal rights, patriarchy remains a dominant force across social categories including race, class and culture (Frenkel, 2008). Schools, and by extension the OAE programmes within schools, are a microcosm of the community and society in which they exist and seem to mimic the associated underlying power differentials (Haupt, 2010).

Much of the published research corroborates the positive effects of OAE, however, the impact of gender is complex and more difficult to evaluate (Leupp, 2007). Neill's (1997) review on the effect of gender on OAE experiences reports mixed results, with some studies showing greater changes in scores for males, some demonstrating greater 'change' scores for females and some where there were no gender differences or a mixture of gender differences. There have been a number of more recent studies that have examined the impact of gender on OAE experiences (e.g. Dooley, 2016), outcomes of single-sex and co-educational programmes (Bloemhoff, 2006, 2012; Leupp, 2007; Overholt & Ewert, 2015; Whittington, Nixon, Mack, Budbill, & McKenney, 2011) and the psychological, social or physical processes for females and males during OAE experiences (Richmond, Sibthorp, Gookin, Annarella, & Ferri, 2018; Whittington & Aspelmeier, 2018). Although results from previous studies examining the gender differences in OAE are mixed, most researchers concur that the construct of gender may be a contributory factor to how learners experience their authenticity and belonging in OAE (Neill, 1997; Whittington et al., 2011; Wong, 2019). Explanations offered are that males and females often differ in the emphases they place on the desired outcomes of OAE; or that they may evaluate themselves differently, affecting their responses to the questionnaires (Overholt & Ewert, 2015).

Fundamental to any dialogue on gender in OAE is the question of whether the outdoor experience reifies or challenges stereotypical gender roles. Traditional gender stereotypes in the outdoors have been perpetuated by visual media, where women are often portrayed as passive participants, looking stylish while sitting or walking; while men are represented as actively participating in physically demanding activities like kayaking or rock-climbing (McNiel, Harris, & Fondren, 2012).

Warren and Loeffler (2006) maintain that societal gender norms are often reinforced within conventional OAE programmes, where expectations of ability and assumptions of skills are based on normative gender beliefs. For example, men are often assumed to be more technically skilled, while women demonstrate better communication and interpersonal skills; the former often being conferred a higher status (Davies, Potter, & Gray, 2019). Similarly, Warren et al. (2019) found pervasive gender-based issues in the hidden curriculum of OAE, including assumptions of outdoor identity, linguistic sexism and prioritizing traits and values supposed to be predominantly male. However, other researchers claim that the outdoors can be a great equalizer, providing a break from social conventions and oppressive gender roles (Overholt & Ewert, 2015; Whittington, 2006). Martín (2015) suggests that sport (including outdoor sport) disrupts societal hierarchies and blurs the boundaries of the distinct categories of male and female.

Leupp's (2007) small scale case study in California, involving males and females aged 9–14, found that despite an original hypothesis that males would show a more noticeable improvement in self-concept following an OAE programme, it was the females who reported greater changes. Employing two methods of quantitative evaluation, supplemented by qualitative data from interviews and written responses, the findings revealed almost equal rankings by males and females on programme evaluation and self-assessments. However, scores for self-concept showed greater change for females than for males. These results thus contradict the claims that OAE benefits males more than females; and proposes that when females successfully engage in what has been a traditional male domain, OAE may have a greater impact.

Similarly, Overholt and Ewert (2015) suggest that the outdoors could provide an environment where women can express themselves more freely and break from traditional gender roles. Their study in Indiana on resilience development in youth after participation in an OAE programme, found that males reported decreased levels of resilience after participation, while females' self-reported levels of resilience increased. The authors suggest that these findings could be attributed to males being taught that they can achieve at a high level and being perhaps humbled by the experience, whereas females are conditioned by society to anticipate low expectations of their abilities until being revealed otherwise. This suggests that males and females might experience resilience differently, but also perhaps that the influencing processes differ for males and females.

Other research advocates that men and women look for different things from the outdoors (Humberstone, 2000). For example, men concentrate on the activity itself, seeking challenge and power, while women focus more on relationships and seek activities based on trust and collaboration (Warren, 2016). Due to differences in acculturation, women often bring other strengths, with diverging outlooks on OAE (Mitten, 2012). What is apparent from the literature is that where they are distinguished from each other, males and females differ in their expectations of OAE experiences, which could affect the outcomes of programmes (Gray, 2016; Gustafsson et al. 2011; Neill, 2002). Although increased individual agency encourages more women to participate in OAE, wider social assumptions continue to be influential. The hegemonic model of gender in the outdoors therefore needs to be examined, to interrogate the social meanings and constructs to promote OAE as a place of social justice and equality (Rogers & Rose, 2019).

Despite an increase in international studies of gender and OAE, there is a dearth of published studies emerging from SA. In the study to be described below, males and females took part in the same *Journey*, thus the researchers were able to conduct a direct comparison of the quantitative measurements between the two genders. Additionally, there is limited research that examines the experiences of the learners themselves. The qualitative component of this study thus aims to deepen our understandings of the perceptions of meaning-making for both males and females.

Study purposes and objectives

As in other examples of OAE research, this study adopted a social constructivist paradigm, incorporating the complementary theories of Dewey's (1938) pragmatic and experiential learning philosophy, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecosystemic approach. Founded on principles of knowledge as actively and socially constructed through interaction with others, social constructivism emphasises the importance of culture and context as influences (Raskin, 2002). Social and psychological experiences occur within the realm of relations and interactions; they are embedded, delivered and meanings are co-constructed within contexts. To address the limitations mentioned earlier, and to ground the research in the local context, two research questions were posed as follows:

- (1) What are the differences in self-reported measures of life effectiveness skills, emotional literacy and resilience of male and female high school adolescent learners after participation in *Journey*?

(2) How does gender affect learners' experiences and perceptions of *Journey*?

Methodology

Research setting

Journey, a 21-day OAE programme, begins at the source of the Fish River in the Eastern Cape of SA and ends after 600 km, at the river mouth. *Journey* has been designed to challenge the learners, extend their boundaries and build strength and resourcefulness. It aims to promote personal development including self-awareness, leadership, social development and community engagement. Learners are divided into five groups of about 40 learners (comprising both male and female), with four leaders each. Groups journeyed down the Fish River Valley simultaneously, alternating activities including hiking, running, cycling and canoeing. Days were allocated for community outreach, a solo experience and 'rest & create'. Learners were expected to carry their own equipment and food for 3–4 days, to the next food drop location. It should be noted that the authors of this article are neither employed by nor in any way contracted to promote this programme. Table 1 depicts a typical programme for one *Journey* group.

Table 1. Example of *Journey* programme.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Sunday	Hike	Rest & Create	Hike
Monday	Hike	Hike	Activity Day
Tuesday	Hike	Hike	Hike
Wednesday	Canoe	Solo day	Community Service
Thursday	Bike	Hike	Hike
Friday	Bike	Run	Hike
Saturday	Bike	Run	Hike to River Mouth

Research design

We employed a quasi-experimental research design with qualitative inquiry, combining quantitative and qualitative methods for triangulation of the data, to strengthen the validity of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Participants

Participants were recruited via purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013) of learners attending two single-sex independent schools in the Eastern Cape Province, SA, where *Journey* was part of the OAE curriculum. Of the 184 Grade 10 learners, a sample of 74 male and 70 female participants (mean age = 16.5; SD = 3.45) met the inclusion criteria and agreed to be part of the study. It is assumed that the learners attending these schools are likely to have identified as cisgender, either male or female in their conservative environments.

Although participants in this study were from diverse racial categories, detailed demographic details are not provided since this was not the purpose of the research (please see Table 2). The majority were from a middle or upper socio-economic status, which is typical of independent schools. The schools do offer scholarships to learners from lower socio-economic groups, however due to the sensitive nature of this information, the researcher did not access these details, thus socio-economic status is not included in the demographics. The pre- and post-*Journey* focus groups (N = 20), which generated the bulk of the qualitative data were selected from the same pool of participants, enabling direct comparisons between the samples.

Table 2. Demographics of learners participating in the study.

Demographic Groups	N	%
White	126	69.2
Black African	50	27.5
Coloured	4	2.2
Indian/Asian	2	1.1
Male	98	53.8
Female	84	46.2

It should be noted that this school population is not proportionally representative of the SA demographics which, based on the Census 2011, were 79.2% Black Africans, 8.9% * Coloured (of mixed race) 8.9% White, 2.5% Indian or Asian and 0.2% who identified as another race group.

* In the SA context, this term is not interpreted as derogatory, but rather is still used officially to signify a distinct ethnic group of mixed race.

Procedure

The Rhodes University ethics committee approved the study (reference no. 7663598). The school principals granted permission and parents or guardians of the learners provided consent. The learners assented to the study and were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the data, with pseudonyms used. The researcher worked respectfully, responsibly within the limits of confidence and ensured that integrity was maintained throughout the process (Smith, 2003). Raw data will be stored securely for 5 years (as required) and only the researchers will have access to it.

Four phases of data collection took place between September 2017 and April 2018: Phase 1 (pre-*Journey*), Phase 2 (during *Journey*), Phase 3 (on the final day) and Phase 4 (four months post- *Journey*), as noted in Table 3.

Table 3. Four-phase approach to data collection.

Data Collection	Phase 1: Pre <i>Journey</i>	Phase 2: During <i>Journey</i>	Phase 3: Final Day of <i>Journey</i>	Phase 4: 4 months Post <i>Journey</i>
Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ)*	X		X	X
Emotional Literacy Questionnaire (Emotional Literacy Learner Checklist for Pupils) *	X		X	X
Resilience Questionnaire Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 25 (CD-RISC -25) *	X		X	X
Post Evaluation Questionnaire *			X	
Focus Group Semi-Structured interviews #	X			X
1:1 semi-structured interviews #		X		
Letter to School Principal *		X		

X—quantitative data X—qualitative data

*—all students #—focus group only

Quantitative data collection and analysis

Three valid and norm-referenced self-report measures were used to measure the psychosocial constructs as dependent variables, as outlined below.

Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ, Neill, 2008). This 24-item, 8-factor measure for determining changes associated with OAE programmes provides an overall composite measure and eight separate subscales: achievement motivation, active initiative, emotional control, intellectual flexibility, self-confidence, social competence, task leadership and time management. Items are scored on a scale of 1 (false, not like me) to 8 (true, like me); with higher overall scores suggesting better perceived life effectiveness skills. Sibthorp and Arthur-Banning (2004) reported a reliability coefficient of .92. The reliability of scores in the present sample was .89.

Emotional Literacy Student Checklist (ELSC, Faupel, 2003) comprises 25 items to measure self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale with the response options: 'very like me', 'quite like me', 'only a bit like me' or 'not at all like me'. Cronbach's alpha for reliability for scores from the overall ELSC in the Southampton Psychology Service (2003) study was .75, while the reliability of scores in the present sample was .86.

The *Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 25 (CD-RISC-25, Connor & Davidson, 2003)* is scored on a five-point Likert scale: not true at all (0), rarely true (1), sometimes true (2), often true (3), and true nearly all of the time (4). The full range for the CD-RISC-25 scores is 0–100, with higher scores reflecting greater self-reported resilience. The manual reports a test-retest reliability correlation coefficient of .87, with full-scale internal consistency of 0.89. The CD-RISC-25 reliability in the present sample was 0.86.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. A repeated measures 3×2 ANOVA was conducted. An alpha level (p-value) of .05 was used for all statistical tests (Coolican, 2014). Plots of mean scores with standard error (se) by gender across time were calculated, in addition to a set of supplementary analyses (independent *t*-tests), which assessed the effects of gender on all three self-report measures. In order to evaluate whether there was practical importance of the effect, Cohen's *d* was calculated and results compared against other studies (most of which use Cohen's *d* for effect size).

Qualitative data collection and analysis

While quantitative results indicate changes in scores on self-report questionnaires, the nature of these changes can only be understood through qualitative descriptions. These data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with twenty members of focus groups, one-to-one interviews with these same participants on solo day, as well as letters to the principals and post-Journey surveys collected from all participants. Post-analysis debriefing sessions and learners' validations of transcripts ensured data credibility and trustworthiness. Recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim and Template Analysis (TA) was used to guide the data analysis. Implementing King's (2012) procedural steps, coding was undertaken in a hierarchical method: defining a priori themes; familiarisation with the data; initial coding; initial template development; application of template to data; interpretation of findings; quality and reflexivity checks and producing the report.

Quantitative results

Overall scores of males and females were compared to quantify any gender differences. The results indicated that there were no significant gender differences in scores for either the LEQ or EL, although there was a significant difference in the male and female resilience scores, as measured on the final day of Journey (Time 2).

Life effectiveness skills

The LEQ scores were statistically significant for overall main effect for time: $F(2, 141) = 12.93$, $p < 0.001$, multivariate partial eta squared (η_p^2) = .16. These results were qualified by a non-significant interaction between gender and time, $F(2, 141) = 2.96$, $p = 0.55$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$ (Figure 1).

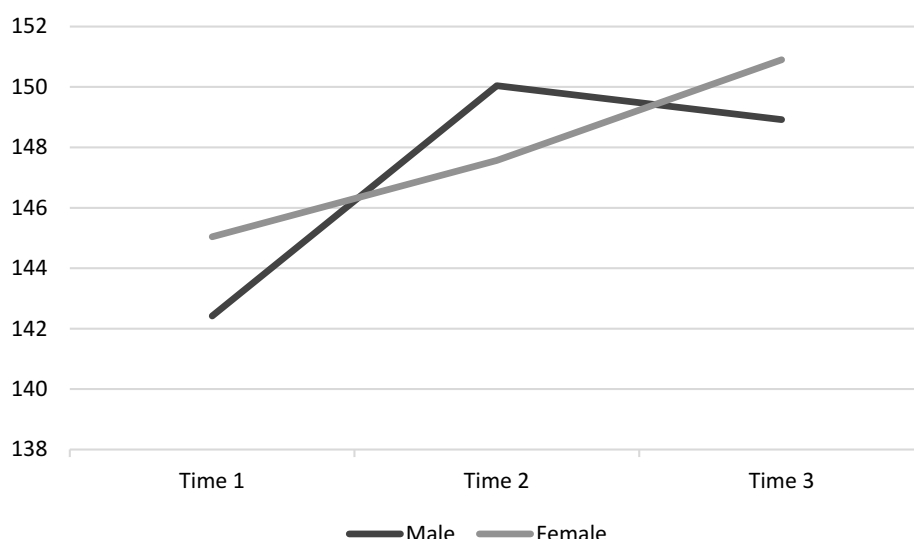


Figure 1. Mean scores for male and female composite LEQ scores.

Table 4. Results of independent t-test of LEQ per Gender.

Time	<i>t-value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p value</i>	95% confidence interval	Decision
T 1	−0.88	142	0.38	(−8.55, 3.30)	ns
T 2	0.73	142	0.47	(−4.23, 9.17)	ns
T 3	−0.56	142	0.57	(−4.27, 4.96)	ns

No significant difference between LEQ scores by gender at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3 because the *p-value* > 0.05.

A set of supplementary analyses (independent *t*-tests) assessed the effects of gender on self-reported life effectiveness skills. Table 4 illustrates the differences between males and females on the LEQ scores.

The overall effect size from Time 1—Time 2 for the LEQ was $d = .26$; males demonstrated a higher effect ($d = .41$) than females ($d = .13$). This overall effect was maintained at Time 3 ($d = .30$) with males dipping slightly lower than Time 2 with $d = .34$ and females increasing slightly with $d = .29$. These calculations suggest that whilst the benefits of participating in *Journey* seem small, there was a positive effect on learners' overall life effectiveness skills.

Emotional literacy

There was no significant difference between Emotional Literacy scores by gender at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3, because the *p-value* > 0.05. $F(2, 141) = 0.202$, $p = 0.82$, $\eta^2 = .003$. These results were qualified by a non-significant interaction between gender and time, $F(2, 141) = 2.19$, $p = 0.12$, $\eta^2 = .03$. A graphical illustration of the non-significant interaction can be seen in Figure 2.

An independent *t*-test was conducted to ascertain if there were differences between males and females self-reported EL scores (Table 5).

As with LEQ, the effect sizes were calculated from Time 1 and Time 2 to establish any practical differences in the scores and again from Time 1 to Time 3, to ascertain if the effect had been maintained after 4 months. Overall, EL from Time 1 to Time 2 showed an insignificant gain ($d = .02$) with males at $d = .16$ and females $d = .08$. Interestingly, Time 1 to Time 3 actually showed a slight decrease in overall effect size, $d = -.02$ (males $d = -.03$ and females $d = -.02$).

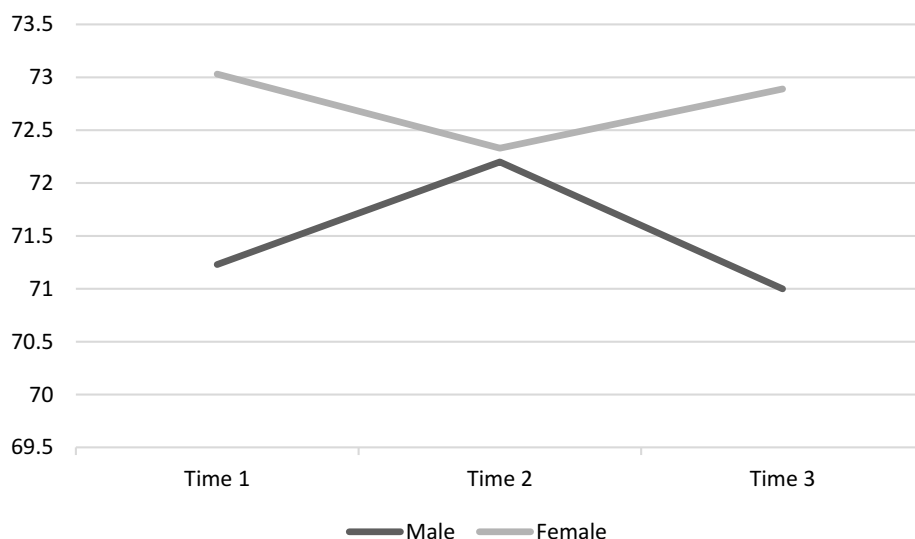


Figure 2. Mean overall emotional literacy scores.

Table 5. Results of independent t-test for Emotional Literacy per gender.

Time	<i>t-value</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p value</i>	95% confidence interval	Decision
T 1	-1.53	142	0.13	(-4.12, 0.52)	ns
T 2	-0.10	142	0.92	(-2.64, 2.39)	ns
T 3	-1.35	142	0.18	(-4.64, 0.87)	ns

No significant difference between Emotional Literacy scores by gender at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3 was found because the *p-value* > 0.05.

Resilience

There was a main statistically significant effect for time: $F(2, 1279) = 6.15$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = 0.010$. These results were qualified by a significant interaction between gender and time, $F(2, 141) = 4.86$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = .064$ (Figure 3).

While the graph below illustrates the differences in the mean self-reported resilience scores of males and females at the three points in time, an independent *t*-test was conducted to ascertain if these were significant differences between male and female scores. These are reported in Table 6 below.

Resilience scores demonstrated the biggest effect size of all the scales, with the overall effect size between Time 1 and Time 2 ($d = .33$), increasing after 4 months to $d = .39$. The effect size for males' Time 1 to Time 2 was $d = .56$, with the females showing an increase in the longitudinal scores (Time 1 to Time 2, $d = .1$ and T1-T3, $d = .22$).

To deepen our understandings of the above results, in this study various forms of qualitative data were collected to explore possible gender differences in experiences and perceived benefits.

Qualitative findings

Stereotypical ideas were evident in comments that males are stronger physically than females and thus better able to cope in the outdoor environment. Such gender differences were mentioned by a number of learners:

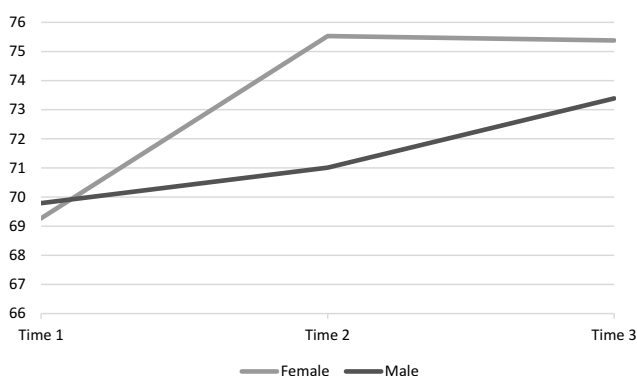


Figure 3. Mean overall resilience scores.

Table 6. Results of independent t-test for Resilience per Gender.

Time	<i>t-value</i>	df	<i>p value</i>	95% confidence interval	Decision
T 1	-0.28	142	0.79	(-4.12, 3.09)	ns
T 2	2.309	142	0.02	(-0.65, 8.38)	sig
T 3	1.55	142	0.12	(-0.83, 6.81)	ns

There is no significant difference between Resilience scores by gender at Time 1 and Time 3 because the *p-value* > 0.05, however, there was a significant difference at Time 2 where the *p-value* < 0.05.

... being a boy in my group, I'm able to cope with most of the challenges that we have faced so far but the girls somewhat battle with all the walking and challenges we face. ... if someone can't cope, I like to help them in any way I can (Male, letter to Principal)

I think the boys push the girls in that aspect, that they are always in front of us, and they are quicker, and bigger, and stronger than us. But it keeps the girls going thinking that like it's also good to get support from the boys, coz they give really good support (Female, focus group)

... I think for the girls, there are obviously some girls that obviously excel and some girls that don't at all. And then there are girls, I am not sure if ... it's the same with the guys, but I think the girls struggle more (Male, interview, solo day)

In referring to similarities and differences between males and females, some suggested that while males may be physically stronger, females coped better with *Journey* from an emotional maturity viewpoint, as illustrated below:

I think there's a lot of similarities, but there are differences ... Where we know we should be physically stronger but I think they have the same mental powers as us, so the pushing forward isn't really the issue. It's more they have smaller issues that we don't face in the day (Male, interview solo day)

I feel like they find it more physical than emotional ... Seems like they're a bit more mature than we are. Umm, ja (Male, interview solo day)

... well my perspective of that is, ... they feel their emotions. They let it out and it's over. Guys sort of push it down and hide it, and then ja, it just comes out the wrong way. Ja, then nasty negative energy ... So I think girls are a bit more emotionally intelligent or have more emotional intelligence ... (Male, interview final focus group)

Males referred to ways that *Journey* helped them develop interpersonal skills and described this in terms of their actions, for example, looking for the positives in others and being less self-centred. Females alluded to being able to cultivate interpersonal relationships on *Journey*, since this environment allowed them to be more authentic and it seemed to bring out their 'true selves', as evident in the comments below:

It allows people who are not as social or interactive at school to open themselves up in a different environment (Female, post Journey survey)

When the social pressures of school are eradicated from the equation, people are more comfortable being themselves and others are more willing to accept this (Female, letter to Principal)

While males generally referred to gaining self-confidence in social contexts, females tended to refer more to personal aspects around authenticity, for example:

Umm, I think in myself, like I have become a lot more confident with my, like my actual personality because obviously when you are at school you have to like compromise so that you can get people to like you and stuff. But then here, like you obviously can't put up a façade the whole time, coz it gets tiring. So you just be yourself and then people like you for that. So it just kind of fills your self-confidence (Female, interview final day)

Whilst some of the above illustrate more stereotypical differences between males and females, as mentioned in previous studies (Davies et al., 2019; Warren et al., 2019), *Journey* also allowed learners to challenge some gender stereotypes, as noted below:

... Like the boys pick up very quickly who is good at setting up tents, and who isn't. And girls who aren't ... The boys come back and help them. And the boys who aren't, like the girls will do it and we figured out very quickly ... the boys said, "We'll make the fires, we'll do this," and the girls went, "No you won't! We'll do the fires. You guys can go cook food, or something like that." And often they sit there with our pasta and noodles, and we go and make the fire. (Female, focus group)

... I always feel like ... it was just very stereotypical, the boys kind of like have to look like, you know, sort of like macho ... they tried to not have emotions, so ... I think Journey ... kind of like was a, an opening for them to be able to have that like sensitive ... (Female, final focus group)

There was an appreciation that the physical aspect of *Journey* might have been more difficult for the females, however there was an acknowledgement that this depended largely upon individual differences, as illustrated by these comments:

Camping for me was easy as I have lived on a farm my entire life, making fires and all sorts of natural things (Male, focus group)

Well for me I look at it more as which environment I grew up in, and which environment certain boys grew up in, for example ... you see these boys like cycling through, thriving, living life. ... I talked to David and he was like, "Ja, this seriously looks just like home for you," and I'm like, "Oh ... I'm from like a big city," so being out like in farms just made zero sense to me at all (Female, focus group)

... we're not used to going outside into the environment where we're forced to now live in tents and all these things. We're, like out of our element. And adapting to that is a bit hard for us (Male, focus group)

The above selection of excerpts illustrate the diversity of attitudes and experiences related to gender differences, in coping with the demands and activities on *Journey*. Whilst some aspects are to be expected (such as males' greater physical strength), prior living circumstances, previous experiences with outdoor and adventure activities as well as socio-cultural factors, all influence individual differences.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine whether there were any differences between male and female self-reported measures of life effectiveness, resilience and emotional literacy of Grade 10 learners after participating in *Journey*. We also sought to explore descriptions of gender-related influences on the experience of *Journey*, striving to understand what *Journey* meant for the learners, in terms of its value and perceived benefits. The statistical analyses result in a mixture of non-significant gender differences for scores on life efficacy and emotional literacy measures. There were relatively substantial differences between males' and females' scores on self-reports of resilience, but

in the qualitative accounts the differences did not seem as evident. It does seem that adolescent males have a stronger physical self-concept and may thus adapt better to outdoor challenges than adolescent females (who generally may have a lower physical self-concept). It could also be that *Journey* is perceived by some to be designed for males and is thus less pertinent for females (Anthonissen, 2011).

Traditionally depicted as a hegemonic masculine domain, researchers argue that OAE programmes are often designed within a development-by-challenge paradigm (Humberstone, 2000); and this seems to be reflected in some aspects of *Journey*. However, as illustrated by the qualitative findings, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is possibly over-deterministic. We argue that it is the individual differences in physical strength, motivation, personal preferences and fitness, as well as previous experience with outdoor adventure activities that account for much of the variation in outcomes, meaning-making and perceived benefits for the learners, rather than gender per se. Consistent with the underlying social constructivist paradigm of this study, these findings illustrate the importance of taking into account such individual differences; since they will inevitably affect the learners' experiences of *Journey* and the variations in outcomes, meaning and perceived benefits reported by the learners. What is also clear is that a better understanding of the nuanced roles of gender in society and OAE research is required.

Strengths and limitations of the study

Although the theoretical basis and studies evaluating OAE outcomes predominately originate from Western contexts, this study offers a unique perspective from the 'global south', thus contributing to OAE literature. Additionally, the use of a mixed methods approach to address the research questions was a strength, in that the quantitative and qualitative findings provided a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of *Journey*. However, there are a number of aspects that could be considered as limitations. This study drew from learners in two independent single-gender schools from one region of SA, therefore results may not be generalisable to other settings and population groups. Additionally, although the gender binary is responsive to the school contexts, this could be viewed as a limitation, considering postmodern expansions of gender ascriptions. Indeed, the problem with using cisgender categories is that these overlook the fundamental point of externally defined parameters of self and felt/performed gender, by adhering to some kind of nodal points of 'maleness' and 'femaleness'. Furthermore, this study did not consider cross-cultural factors: an understanding of which could enrich the literature. It is also worth noting that the researchers are white middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender, which inherently influences the research approach and interpretations of the data (Langdridge, 2007).

Conclusion

While the quantitative results show some differences between the males and females on self-reported measures, the qualitative findings suggest that the differences were perhaps due to individual differences rather than to gender. We argue that despite gender being the most ubiquitous individual difference, the concept of hegemonic masculinity in OAE is somewhat over-determined.

There are diversities in ways that we use and employ ideas of gender in our social and educational systems (as illustrated in some of the qualitative comments). Notions of gender are rooted in our language, bound to linguistic categories that mirror sociocultural stereotypes, reflecting the dominant male and female dichotomy (Aikhenvald, 2016). It is imperative that we recognise that gender identities are inextricably intertwined in our understanding of sexual orientation, sex and issues of privilege and oppression. While studies on gender and OAE have, and continue to evolve, there

remain large notable gaps in the literature. Perhaps more textured experiential analysis, linked to life worlds and contexts of participants, may expand explorations of the benefits of OAE for all.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Professor Jacqui Akhurst is a Counselling Psychologist who qualified at the University of Natal, in 1991. She then completed a PhD in Psychotherapy at Rhodes University, studying peer group supervision, using grounded theory. As a former teacher, she trained school counsellors in the 1990s; and after completing an additional Educational Psychology registration, coordinated a Masters in Educational Psychology for 10 years. She moved to the United Kingdom in 2003, working first at the Higher Education Academy Psychology subject centre, University of York before moving back into lecturing at York St John University (YSJU). She led an initiative to launch a Community Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society, becoming its inaugural chair in 2010. She supervised her first psychology PhD at YSJU on the topic of wild-space experiences, linked to her passion for eco-psychology and the value of outdoor activities. Having progressed to Professor of Community Psychology in 2014, she returned to South Africa in 2015 to Rhodes University. Her research focuses on community-based interventions, often utilizing Action Research and Activity Theory.

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