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**Sisters in the Brotherhood:
Experiences and Strategies of Women Wildland Firefighters**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a feminist discursive theoretical framework, this research used qualitative interview methods to analyze the challenges of women wildland firefighters as they work disproportionately alongside their male coworkers, and the strategies they use to deal with those challenges. Data collection for this study involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews either face-to-face or via telephone. Findings revealed that women wildland firefighters experience an array of challenges due to traditional gender norms, gender stereotypes, and the culture of hegemonic masculinity; and they use various strategies to deal with those challenges. For instance, the data reveal that women in the fire community endure gender discrimination, sexual harassment, microaggressions, stigma, imposter syndrome, struggle with work-life management in contrast to their male coworkers, and often alter their behaviors based on the need to become accepted in the masculine dominated culture. Implications for the fire organization are discussed, and recommendations for future studies are explored.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my amazing family. Without all of you in my life to share this accomplishment with, the satisfaction of finally finishing this project would not exist. To my loving partner and best friend Adam, who has been by my side every step of the way. I cannot thank you enough for your encouragement and support. When I felt like I was never going to finish writing or meet my deadlines, these words kept me going: “You’ve just gotta keep working. I’ve seen you do some wild a\$\$ sh*t in a small window of time. You’re Kay F—ing Mitchell. You get sh*t done. You’re not a normal person when it comes to this stuff. You can make this happen.” I could not have accomplished this difficult period of my life without you. To my Mom, thank you for loving me, believing in me, and inspiring me to work so hard. You were always there to lend a helping hand when I needed it the most. Because of you, I am able to begin the rest of my life educated and debt free. I hope this proves that I was worth the investment. To my Dad, thank you for supporting me and always making me laugh every time we talked. Those short bursts of happiness kept me going. You were always asking, “When are you going to be done with school? You’ve been in school your entire life.” Now I’m finally done! To my Grama, you have no idea how much you mean to me. Thank you for constantly checking in on me and making me feel like I had everything under control. Your kinds words were always so uplifting. To my big sisters, Kendra and Cassidie, I hope I made you proud. You both inspire me and I’m excited to join you in the “real” world. To my puppy, Riggins, thank you for all the kisses and keeping a smile on my face. I worked hard so you could have a better life. To the rest of my family, your support means the world to me. I love you! This work is dedicated to all of you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Fire Protection Association, there were 1,056,200 career and volunteer firefighters in the United States in 2017 but sadly, only 7.3% of those firefighters were women. For permanent wildfire suppression jobs specifically, only 12% are occupied by women (National Fire Protection Association, 2017). These statistics give good insight into the disproportionate presence of women in the field. Firefighting is known to be associated with traditional values of hegemonic masculinity, including: physical strength, technical competence, leadership, teamwork, mateship, and authority, along with heterosexuality, courage and aggression (Maleta, 2009). Such values and stereotypes strengthen male cultural dominance in our society. Firefighting as an occupational culture shares many of these values. Thus, the fire service community serves as an important context to explore gender as it remains a heavily male dominated occupation and has a masculine dominant culture. This research project is designed to generate new insights into women's work-related experiences in a male-dominated, blue-collar work environment, specifically, wildland firefighting within the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Forest Service (USFS), which are known to be particularly gendered.

Wildland firefighting differs significantly from structural firefighting. According to the U.S. Forest Service, a general wildland firefighter description states that wildland firefighters may be required to work long hours in challenging and changing conditions, such as high temperatures and steep terrain to fight strictly wildland fires; whereas structural firefighters fight active fires or make emergency medical calls as a result of

accidental injury or disasters (Fire Science, 2018). Moreover, “Structural fire fighting involves rescue, fire suppression and/or property conservation in buildings, enclosed structures, vehicles, vessels or like properties [whereas] Wildland fire fighting is fire suppression actions in vegetative fuels such as forests, crops, plantations, grass, or farmland” (S&H Australia, 2018). Although challenging, a career in wildland fire also has many rewards, including the opportunity to work in some of the most beautiful places in the country and create friendships that last a lifetime (USFS, 2018).

The BLM, a leader in the nation’s management of wildland fire, carries out a broad range of actions to protect the public, natural landscapes, wildlife habitat, recreational areas, and other values and resources (BLM, 2018). The agency’s national Fire and Aviation Program, which focuses on public safety as its top priority, consists of fire suppression, preparedness, predictive services, vegetative fuels management, prescribed fire, community assistance and protection, and fire prevention through education (BLM, 2018). To meet its wildland fire-related challenges, the BLM fields highly trained professional firefighters and managers who are committed to managing fire in the most effective and efficient ways possible (BLM, 2018).

The USFS is a multi-faceted agency that manages and protects 154 national forests and 20 grasslands in 43 states and Puerto Rico. The agency’s mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations (USFS, 2018). It has an elite wildland firefighting team and the world’s largest forestry research organization (USFS, 2018). The USFS’s experts provide technical and financial help to state and local government agencies, businesses, private landowners and works government-to-government with tribes to help

protect and manage non-federal forest and associated range and watershed lands (USFS, 2018). The USFS augments their work through partnerships with public and private agencies that help us plant trees, improve trails, educate the public, and improve conditions in wildland/urban interfaces and rural areas, just to name a few (USFS, 2018).

The Forest Service employs approximately 10,000 wildland firefighters, with positions ranging from entry-level firefighter to senior fire management positions (USFS, 2018). Specifically, wildland firefighters are involved with wildland fire suppression, management and control working on an engine, a helitack module, or a hand crew with responsibility for the operation and maintenance of specialized tools or equipment. A helitack crew loads helicopter personnel and cargo, and are responsible for operation and maintenance of specialized equipment used to respond to wildland and prescribed fire situations (USFS, 2018). A hotshot or handcrew utilizes a variety of specialized tools, equipment, and techniques to actively suppress wildfires (USFS, 2018). Fire Suppression performs assignments to develop knowledge of fuels management and fire suppression techniques and practices such as fire line construction, use of pumps and engines, hose lays, foam and retardant, working around aircraft, safety rules, and fire and fuels terminology (USFS, 2018). An engine crew drives an engine to fire locations, frequently over unimproved roads and positions the engine in appropriate locations in consideration of the safety of crew and equipment and how the equipment can best be used in control and mop-up operations (USFS, 2018). Fuel management is responsible for gathering data on fuel types, weather conditions, fire behaviors, and informing visitors of fire hazards and prevention regulations. Other wildland fire related duties may involve fire prevention, patrol, detection, prescribed burning, or medical attention on the fire line

(USFS, 2018). Many of these required skills and responsibilities are strongly linked to tropes about masculinity and strength.

The overall goal and primary focus of this study is to better understand the lives of women wildland firefighters within the BLM and the USFS as they work disproportionately alongside men in a male-dominated field. Studying the experiences and perspectives of women wildland firefighters is important because women in non-traditional fields are known to be stigmatized and discriminated against by their male coworkers and society (Whittock, 2002). For instance, women attempting to challenge gender stereotypes commonly hear others say things like, ‘girls shouldn’t lift weights,’ ‘she’s strong for a girl,’ ‘she’s a tough girl,’ and ‘women can’t be firefighters.’ In the past and to this day, gender is dictating women’s competency in the workplace and in society (Smith, 2013; Whittock, 2002). Furthermore, women working in non-traditional occupations, such as wildland firefighting, have to overcompensate and work extra hard just to try and prove that they are justly there (Smith, 2013).

As a result of this study, I hope to add more awareness within organizations, employers, the coworkers of women in male-dominated occupations, and our community in order to combat stigma against women in non-traditional occupations, reduce gender discrimination in the workplace, and challenge hegemonic masculinity. I find it important to raise awareness of these issues because stigma, gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, and hegemonic masculinity should not dictate women’s aspirations—women should be free to aspire to be whomever or whatever they want to be.

This study will add to the body of research on women in nontraditional occupations, specifically blue-collar occupations. Research has examined gender

inequalities in the workplace, such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and stigma, but the literature is lacking concerning women wildland firefighters. What follows this section is a review of the literature concerning gender constructs in the workplace, women in nontraditional occupations, stigma and stigmatized occupations, double binds that work to constrain women in their occupations, the power hegemonic masculinity holds over women, a brief historical overview of women's entry into firefighting, and the framework of feminist discursive theory. Next, the methodology is discussed, and the findings are presented. Finally, the findings are discussed and the significance, implications, limitations, and directions for future research are provided.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter first describes my conceptual framework, summarizing what is known about gender, stigma, and hegemonic masculinity, and how these constructs function in the non-traditional occupation of wildland firefighting. This effort includes an examination of the dominant masculine norm in our society and how traditional gender roles impact woman wildland firefighters. This literature review begins by exploring the ways in which gender functions in the workplace. Next, the review of literature moves more specifically toward the constructs of gender as seen in nontraditional occupations for women. Following, this literature review provides a historical overview of stigma and occupational stigma, particularly in relation to gender, women, and women firefighters. Then, this literature review examines the concept of the double bind, with particular attention to how the term applies to women wildland firefighters. Following, a brief discussion of hegemonic masculinity is explored in order to better understand the ways in which women firefighters experience stigma and gender discrimination in trying to identify within their occupation. Next, this review provides a historical overview of women's entry into firefighting. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of the theoretical framework that I use to approach the deconstruction of women wildland firefighters' experiences in a male-dominated occupation and answer my research questions. Specifically, a feminist discursive lens is used for this analysis.

Gender Constructs in the Workplace

In order to better understand women wildland firefighters' experiences as they work disproportionately alongside their male coworkers, it is useful to explore the ways

in which gender functions in the workplace, and how it is constructed and reconstructed in workplace structures. Wright (2008) explains that to be a “good firefighter” is not just about proving that one can meet the demands of the job, but also how one “fits in” with the “macho” and “laddish” culture. She argues that a firefighter’s masculinity is a social and historical construction. In fact, Wright (2008) explored gender in the workplace through differences in experiences of heterosexual and lesbian women and compared their experiences as women in a male-dominated occupation and culture. She found that women recruits to the fire service are constructed in terms of their sexuality and found that lesbianism is present in the discourse within the fire service unlike most occupations where heterosexuality is the norm and homosexuality is marginalized. In fact, lesbians found that it was easier for them to fit in rather than for heterosexual women because the men were able to put aside gender and saw lesbians as more able to do the job. According to the men, there were only two reasons women would want the job: either they were “masculine” and therefore lesbians, or they were “fire tarts” and therefore heterosexual and sexually predatory (Wright, 2008). These statements both stigmatize women and constrain them. For instance, women wildland firefighters who are seen as masculine are labeled as lesbians, or they are seen as heterosexual and only in the job to hunt for a sexual partner. In the case that the woman is a lesbian, she is no longer assumed to be there as a sexual predator, and thus is viewed as more competent in the job. In either case, all women are disadvantaged.

In a similar study, Schilt (2006) argues that cultural beliefs about gender difference embedded in workplace structures and interactions create and reproduce workplace disparities that disadvantage women and advantage men. Because these beliefs

are so deeply embedded, they become invisible to both men and women, who then continue to reinforce them. Schilt (2006) explored the experiences of women who transitioned to men and argues that the positive and negative changes they experience when they transition can illuminate how gender discrimination and gender advantage are created and maintained through workplace interactions. Therefore, they inherit a new perspective that is commonly referred to as the “outsider-within” that allows them to clearly see the advantages associated with being men at work while still maintaining a critical view to how this advantage operates, is reproduced, and how it disadvantages women (Schilt, 2006). They experienced many new advantages as a result of being socially gendered as men compared to their experiences as women. For instance, Schilt (2006) found that transmen received more respect for their thoughts and opinions posttransition, they were aware of having more authority simply because they were men, and were evaluated as more competent than when they were working the same jobs as women, especially in careers that are stereotyped requiring “masculine” skills.

Masculine and feminine roles have been, and still are, unequal, socialized from a young age toward different axes of power. Forbes (2002) refers to this process of gender-socialization as a culture-trap in which women are ill-prepared for organizational life and men are relatively ill-prepared to accept them. Jenkins and Finneman (2018) would agree with Forbes, as they use Judith Butler’s theory of performativity originally introduced in her foundational feminist work, *Gender Trouble* to suggest that gender is constituted and reconstituted through ritualized performances of gender norms. For instance, Butler (2002) states:

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. (p. 179)

As Butler argues, gender is produced and reproduced in our society through social processes.

In addition, Lucas and Steimel (2009) introduce the idea of the gen(d)eralized other in stating that people come to understand themselves and learn how to interact with other members of the society by doing just that, engaging with members of the community. This is how identity is constructed, and it has a strong influence on how women behave in the community in that it helps shape the way women come to understand societal expectations, their sense of self, and their place in the world. For example, women in blue collar jobs, such as firefighters, are stigmatized by both their coworkers who view them as not “man enough to perform blue-collar work, and by society who views their career choice as not “feminine” enough (Lucas & Steimel, 2009).

All of this work demonstrates the hardships women often face at work, especially those working in blue-collar jobs such as firefighting, mining, construction, and many others. Many of these hardships are results of cultural beliefs that have been embedded in workplace structures and interactions between employers and workers and their coworkers. For instance, Schilt (2006) points out that our society has cultural beliefs which associate masculinity with authority and prestige, while stereotypes about femininity disadvantage women as they are assumed to be less capable and less likely to succeed.

Non-traditional Occupations for Women

As a result of gender constructs embedded in workplace structures that advantage masculinity, women working in male-dominated occupations experience unique challenges and hardships as compared to other “traditional” occupations because they are a marginalized group. For example, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report indicates that women are largely under-represented among male-dominated occupations. For instance, the BLS report revealed that only 20 percent of all protective service occupations are women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Protective service occupations include occupations such as life guards, crossing guards, detectives, police, sheriff’s patrol officers, railroad police, fish and game workers, bailiffs, correctional officers, animal control, fire inspectors, firefighters, and the supervisors of those occupations. According to O’Farrell (1999), “Equality in the workplace, has, by and large, eluded women in blue collar and related occupations, including protective services, even more than in other occupations” (p. 717). Firefighting, as a blue-collar protective service, is dominated by males and women are disadvantaged because they are greatly underrepresented in the occupation.

In addition, firefighting occupations made the list of jobs that have become less male-dominated in the past couple decades (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Although encouraging, this statistic is somewhat misleading as women still only constitute approximately 7% of all career and volunteer firefighters within the United States (National Fire Protection Association, 2017). With women contributing to such a small percentage of the overall work group, their gender is very visible and they are often seen as different from the rest of the group. This visibility is a constitutive part of doing the

work for women (Denissen, 2010). For instance, Smith (2013) argues that women often feel like they need to prove themselves, and work harder, more precisely, and more accountably as a result of being hypersurveilled by traditional workers and/or supervisors who assumed incompetence or held a disbelief that women could do technical, physical, heavy, or mechanical aspects of the job. In traditional male-dominated occupations, women have been, and remain the minority gender as the masculinity of the work culture is tied to the body (Smith, 2013).

Over 40 years ago, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) introduced the term “token” to note a subgroup, which represents less than 15 percent of the overall work group, and is perceived as different from the rest of the group (“dominants”) within the same occupation. Kanter (1977) concluded that as a result of their low numerical representation, “tokens” are likely to have negative experiences in the workplace. However, factors besides numerical representation could play a role in negative treatment, such as their own perceptions of social inferiority (Zimmer, 1988) because tokenism in the workplace is very complex and should be explored outside of numerical representation (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010). Research shows that gender plays an important role in tokenism (Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010; Williams, 1992; Zimmer, 1988) and tokens working within an organization are likely to experience three perceptual tendencies as identified by Kanter (1977): assimilation, visibility, and contrast. During the process of assimilation, tokens’ characteristics are distorted to fit a stereotypical role perceived to be appropriate by dominant members of the group, while visibility occurs due to differences that are obvious and visible to other members, and contrast happens when members of the

dominant group exaggerate those differences (Kanter, 1977; Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010). Thus, as a result of women firefighters entering a male-dominated occupation, their gender difference forces them to fit their stereotypical gender role. Women firefighters' gender is a visible and obvious difference that is exaggerated by the dominant group of male firefighters, which often makes the token group of women feel like they have to work twice as hard or have to prove themselves to their peers (Kanter, 1977; Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010).

In addition to the challenges and obstacles of tokenism that have impeded or deterred women's non-traditional career aspirations, women entering male-dominated occupations also experience gender role socialization, stereotyping, significantly more adverse working conditions than their traditional counterparts, less satisfaction and more stress at work, and more experiences of sexual harassment and sex discrimination (Ericksen & Schultheiss, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Mansfield et al., 1991; Stringer & Duncan, 1985). According to Yount (1991), "...women entering these occupations frequently encounter debilitating forms of resistance from male colleagues. Among these, sexual harassment has been identified as a problem that causes women emotional distress, interferes with their job performance, and leads some women to resign" (p. 397). Women who enter male-dominated occupations commonly experience forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which often interfere with their job performance and can even result in resignations.

Smith (2013) suggests that women have to negotiate a contradiction between their gender being highly visible and the effects of gendering practices, such as those listed above, being highly invisible in a masculine culture. To negotiate this contradiction,

women engage in various forms of gendered labor. For instance, women remove themselves from gendering practices by accepting isolation at work to hide themselves and their femininity, desexualizing their bodies, learning “masculine” language and the basic topics of male conversation while avoiding female topics around relationships and personal life, acting like the boys, acquiring a way of speaking about and to other women, or by learning to be in the presence of talk about women (Smith, 2013). In addition, token women also respond to heightened visibility with either overachievement or underachievement, each of which can present barriers to further advancement (Whittock, 2002; Zimmer, 1988). Moreover, sexual/jocular behaviors (Yount, 1991) and the most durable barriers to women in the workplace are “largely symbolic and embedded in the gendered cultures of organizations” (Miller, 2002, p. 146). When women would encounter these offensive behaviors or barriers, they would physically withdraw from the situation if possible, or they would distance themselves mentally and emotionally by constructing a social and psychological shield around themselves (Yount, 1991). This type of mental detachment can jeopardize a women’s work performance, affect their aspirations or chances for a promotion, and determine her ability to establish an identity as a competent worker (Yount, 1991). On the off-chance that a woman used a confrontational strategy rather than withdrawing from the situation, she was often subjected to larger doses of the behaviors that bothered her in the first place (Yount, 1991). For instance, if a woman were to ask a male coworker not to use vulgar language, she might receive verbal abuse constantly thereafter.

Rather than trying to change the masculine culture in some way by withdrawing or using confrontation, a more common choice women make when working in a male-

dominated occupation is to accept male values and hide their femininity. For example, Miller (2002) states, "...the women learned both during their professional training and in their work context what types of behaviors were rewarded and they became exceptionally skillful at their practice" (p. 157). In other words, the women learned the masculine norms that were accepted and adapted to the dominant, masculine culture in order to survive, thrive, and be successful in their occupation (Miller, 2002). However, Acker (1992) argues that in adapting their personas and behaviors to the gender-appropriate ones, women are reinforcing the gendered system. Moreover, "discursive practice positions women within an organization by producing implicit and explicit rules, which regulate their behavior and attitudes, and thus create and recreate the predominant gender culture of the organization" (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001, p. 249). On the other hand, when women actively resisted conforming their behaviors to the gender-appropriate ones, they still face isolation and exclusion because "men have the numerical and normative advantage on the jobsite and in the industry" (Denissen, 2010, p. 1066).

Denissen (2010) argues that one way to mobilize masculinities and make gender boundaries less distinct is by 'doing femininity' and demonstrating that women *as women* can do masculine defined work. However, the male sense of superiority is effectively punctured and men may feel threatened if women can do the job (O'Farrell, 1999), especially within jobs dominated by men that are seen as requiring traits that distinguish men as superior to women in strength, such as blue-collar jobs (Fiske & Glick, 1995). To reinforce their male sense of superiority and reproduce masculinity as the normative standard, men working in blue collar occupations define their work as 'men's work' and

engage in borderwork such as reinforcing the masculine definition of the work and defining women as feminine ‘other’ (Denissen, 2010).

Moreover, regardless of women’s efforts to challenge the traditional masculine culture, “the gendering system is resistant to change as it always seems to fall back into an unconscious assumptional framework that devalues the feminine” (Miller, 2002, p. 147). Gherardi and Poggio (2001) suggest that this framework which enforces masculinity and devalues the feminine “contains specific rules, values, and meanings expressed in social situations which gender-positioning processes are realized as interpersonal relations in public process whereby gender meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved, transformed, and institutionalized (p. 248). In other words, men and women create and recreate a culture that reproduces a dichotomous symbolic order of gender keeping women in ‘their place’ in their everyday work interactions and discourses (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). Also keeping women in ‘their place’ and making them feel like they don’t belong are training instructors who reinforce negative stereotypes about women’s inability to do non-traditional work and training materials that have been written for and about men, using only male images and examples (O’Farrell, 1999). Bergmann (2011) argues that “the training opportunities for women in the blue-collar occupations are just about what they were in 1960—very poor” (p. 90). Because the training and assignments that women receive ultimately determine their abilities to establish identities as competent workers, women entering blue-collar occupations are set-up for failure and are more likely to experience hostile harassment commonly given to outsiders, deviants, minority groups, and tokens in the workplace (Yount, 1991).

Stigma

As previously mentioned, women are likely to have negative experiences in the workplace due to their low numerical representation, stereotyping, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. Another negative experience women firefighters experience in the workplace is stigmatization. According to Goffman (1963), the Greeks “originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier” (p. 1). Today, the term is widely used in the original sense, but rather than applying to term to bodily evidence, it is applied more to the disgrace itself (Goffman, 1963). To help readers better understand the term, Goffman (1963) uses an example of a stranger standing before us, at which point evidence may arise of their possessing an attribute that makes them different from others, a less desirable kind of different. Automatically, they are “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (p. 3). In addition to using the term stigma itself, it is also common to identify those who are seen as different, as deviators. For instance, Goffman (1963) explains that any individual who does not adhere to the set of social norms regarding conduct and personal attributes can be referred to as a deviator. Furthermore, within large groups and communities it is possible to have members within the group that are seen as, or labeled as, deviators. For example, Goffman (1963) states:

In many close-knit groups and communities there are instances of a member who deviates, whether in deed or in the attributes he possesses, or both, and in consequence comes to play a social role, becoming a symbol of the group and a performer of certain clownish functions, even while he is denied the respect accorded full-fledged members. (p. 141)

Being a deviant within a group can strip that person of their status as a member within that group, although they are qualified to actually be a member. In other words, this

person is treated as an in-group deviant, which serves to remind one that they are deviant in relation to the concrete group (Goffman, 1963). This can be the case for women wildland firefighters, who can be labeled as deviants due to their gender in a male-dominated occupation. A woman's gender in and of itself, can serve as an attribute that makes them different from the majority group of men. Prokos and Padavic (2002) discuss a similar phenomena, but refer to it as treating women as outsiders. For instance, in a police academy, men used gendered language in the classroom and excluded women from bonding experiences which taught women that they were not considered members of the 'in-group' (Prokos & Padavic, 2002).

Link and Phelan (2001) add to the research on stigma by applying the term stigma when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold. Furthermore, in their conceptualization of stigma, Link and Phelan (2001) argue:

...stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination. (p. 367)

Here, Link and Phelan (2001) are adding to Goffman's (1963) original observation that stigma can be seen as a relationship between an attribute and a stereotype, and the Jones et al. (1984) definition of stigma as a mark that links a person to an undesirable characteristic, such as a stereotype. Specifically, Link and Phelan (2001) introduce a component of discrimination to the definition. In addition to their work on discrimination, Link and Phelan (2001) discuss the dependence of stigma on power, suggesting that it takes power to stigmatize. However, they suggest that "the role of power in stigma is

frequently overlooked because in many instances power differences are so taken for granted as to seem unproblematic” (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 375). In other words, power differences between men and women in the workplace, especially a male-dominated workplace, might be overlooked or normalized, and therefore seem unproblematic to everyone besides the women who are being stigmatized. Moreover, McCordic (2012) adds that power is an essential requisite for the formation of enacted stigma as there must be some power differential between the stigmatizer and the stigmatized in order for discrimination to occur. Although we are beginning to see more women in non-traditional occupations, we also see these women constrained, to varying degrees, by traditional gender norms and the culture of hegemonic masculinity. As suggested by Link and Phelan (2001), stigma, stereotypes, and gender discrimination often go unnoticed as stigmatizing, stereotyping, and discriminating against women in the workplace has become normalized.

Stigmatized Occupations

Some occupations, more so than others, are stigmatized; firefighting as a blue-collar occupation being one of them. In fact, over 50 years ago, Everett Hughes (1951) invoked the term *dirty work* to refer to tasks and occupations that are likely to be perceived as disgusting or degrading in a sense of tasks that are either physically, socially, or morally tainted. Adding to Hughes’ (1951) terms describing dirty work, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) offer two criteria for each of the three forms of taint: physical taint occurs where an occupation is either directly associated with garbage, death, effluent, etc., or is thought to be performed under particularly noxious or dangerous conditions; social taint occurs where an occupation involves regular contact

with people or groups that are themselves regarded as stigmatized, or where the worker appears to have a servile relationship with others; and moral taint occurs where an occupation is generally regarded as somewhat sinful or of dubious virtue, or where the worker is thought to employ methods that are deceptive, intrusive, confrontational, or that otherwise defy norms of civility. Due solely to the fact that dirty workers handle the unappealing tasks that are necessary for our society to function effectively, others are able to continue regarding themselves as clean and therefore, superior, regardless if they applaud certain dirty work as noble (Hughes, 1962; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Based on these definitions and concepts, wildland firefighting would fall under physically tainted dirty work as it is thought to be performed under particularly noxious or dangerous conditions (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Even though firefighting is also viewed as noble and heroic, it is stigmatized as people “generally remain psychologically and behaviorally distanced from that work and those who do it, glad that it is someone else” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p. 416). Therefore, the taint affects how people interact with the dirty workers, even while they may appreciate, admire, and applaud them (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). However, when we focus in on women firefighters specifically, wildland firefighting could also fall under morally tainted dirty work as women in this case are thought to employ methods that defy norms of civility by participating in a non-traditional occupation that puts their femininity into question.

Adding to the discussion of physical, social, and moral taint, recent scholars have also studied emotional taint, which refers to emotional displays and emotional labor that are perceived as distasteful or unpleasant (Lucas, 2011; Rivera, 2015; Rivera, 2018; Tracy & Scott, 2006). Malvini Redden and Scarduzio (2018) expand upon the concept of

emotional taint and illustrate how “identity differences can contribute to marginalized groups experiencing more taint than privileged counterparts in the same role (p. 225). In looking at two bureaucratic organizations to investigate how gender, race, and class are (re)produced through communication and influence emotion management, Malvini Redden and Scarduzio (2018) name and explore a new type of dirty work called hidden taint, which is “a larger, encompassing category of dirty work that involves the experience and dynamic co-construction of taint” (p. 226). This work could be applicable to women firefighters as masculine emotion expectations protect male employees from the same expectations as women (Malvini Redden & Scarduzio, 2018). When emotional neutrality is gendered, women wildland firefighters’ work can become unexpectedly dirty when their behaviors conflict with society’s or their male coworkers’ expectations of how wildland firefighters should communicate (Malvini Redden & Scarduzio, 2018). When women firefighters fulfill their job requirements, they are viewed as acting outside of gender norms and therefore, experience another form of stigmatization—hidden taint. In contrast, if women wildland firefighters act feminine, they are also stigmatized by their male coworkers as femininity is not the “correct” behavior for a wildland firefighter. Women are often the targets of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination at work because of gender stereotypes that influence expectations for women, gender inequality, and persistent sex segregation in the workplace (Dozier, 2017). Lucas and Steimel (2009) discuss discrimination against women miners and explain the belief among society and male miners that women are not physically strong enough to mine, they are at risk of falling prey to sexual harassment, and they are unfit to handle the crude atmosphere of the mines. Here, we see how women are stigmatized for being ‘too’ feminine (not

physically strong enough), yet also stigmatized for not being ‘man enough’ (at risk of sexual harassment and unable to handle the crude atmosphere that men create).

Double Binds

In addition to the stigma and the unique organizational and career challenges women face in working in non-traditional professions, they are also often placed in situations where they are given a competing set of demands without any clarification as to which demands to pursue. These situations are referred to as double binds. According to Crosby (2016), “Double binds, or what some label as catch-22s, are dilemmas uniquely faced by women that arise from seemingly any choice a woman makes” (p. 231). In other words, the woman firefighter will be placed in situations where her woman identity demonstrates that she will behave in one way, yet receiving recognition and gaining success in her job requires that she behave in another, contrasting way. In the case of wildland firefighting specifically, the woman firefighter is given two, and only two rules as to how to behave, and these rules conflict, making it impossible for her to fulfill both of them (Bateson, 1972; Jamieson, 1995; Jenkins, 2014). In fact, their social identities as women stand in sharp contrast to the very nature of their gendered occupations and organizations as women are expected to be feminine, yet expected to be masculine in order to “do firefighting correctly,” and are criticized either way. Jenkins (2014) continues with this discussion in explaining that failure to comply with one or more of these rules has negative consequences and leaves the woman within the double bind with no way out of that double bind. Regardless of the approach chosen, the woman will face the same unwanted outcome (Jenkins, 2014).

The five gendered double binds (womb/brain, silence/shame, sameness/difference, femininity/competence, and aging/invisibility) that Jamieson (1995) erected in *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* serve as a guide for many scholars in looking at double binds: “women are complimented more on their bodies than brains; women have the choice to speak out and be shamed or be silent and invisible; women are subordinated, whether they define themselves as similar to or different from men; femininity is perceived as incompetence, and competence is unfeminine; and aging women are seen as less relevant and valuable, whereas aging men are seen as distinguished” (Curnalia & Mermer, 2014, p.27).

Highlighting the ambiguity of women’s constrained identity in wildland firefighting, Jamieson (1995) adds that “words commonly associated with the femininity/competency bind are ‘too’ and ‘not...enough,’” (p. 121). Particularly in blue-collar professions, women have to distance themselves from femininity in order to establish credibility among their male coworkers, yet have to spotlight their femininity in order avoid the risk of harsh criticism from their male coworkers and other community members as traditional gender roles and expectations are still highly valued in our society (Lucas & Steimel, 2009). Specifically among wildland firefighters, women are viewed as ‘too feminine’ and ‘not man enough’ to be competent in their profession. Moreover, the femininity/competency and womb/brain binds that Jamieson identifies are especially problematic for women who are expected to demonstrate their competency and intellect in their professions, as such is the case for women firefighters (Harp, Loke, & Bachmann, 2016; Jamieson, 1995). As the binds suggest, to be a woman is to have a womb and to perform feminine qualities, both of which conflict with the perceptions of competence.

According to Jenkins (2014), “...The concept of a double bind offers a way of interpreting a situation; to frame a situation as a double bind is to pay attention to particular structural features that it possesses” (p. 269). Thus, the concept of double bind can be applied to situations in which women firefighters are constrained in their experiences in the workplace.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The constructs of gender, stigma, and double binds mentioned in this review are, in part, repercussions of the culture of hegemonic masculinity that dominates society and workplaces. When the term hegemonic masculinity was first introduced by Connell (1987), it was best understood as “the pattern of practice that allows men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). In addition, Jewkes and Morrell (2012) recognize hegemonic masculinity as:

a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men’s identity, men’s ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (p. 40)

In addition, hegemonic masculinity embodies the most honored way of being a man, ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), and involves the persuasion of the greater part of the population and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear normal (Donaldson, 1993). Since the origin of the term in 1987, hegemonic masculinity has evolved to a widely used framework for research and debate about men and masculinities. For instance, Anderson and McCormack (2016) suggest that hegemonic masculinity serves as a key theory in understanding the social problems of masculinity in terms of privilege gained by men and

through their gender. Thus, through looking at hegemonic masculinity and its presence within the organization of wildland firefighting, I am able to better understand women's experiences and perspectives of attempting to identify within the male-dominated occupation.

History of Women's Entry into Firefighting

To demonstrate the constructs of gender, stigma, and hegemonic masculinity, this section gives a brief historical overview of women's entry into firefighting. Originally, women were prohibited from joining the ranks of City Fire Departments prior to the passage of the 1972 Amendments to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Epstein, 1988). However, boundaries started to shift slightly with the help of Title VII. The purpose of Title VII is to eliminate hiring barriers that rest on discriminatory assumptions. In fact, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers and unions from discriminating on the basis of gender, from using entrance tests or job requirements that have of effect of excluding women, and protects women from sexual harassment on the job by affirmatively requiring employers to maintain a safe work place environment (Law, 1989). Although the absolute bar to hiring was eliminated, women seeking entry into firefighting were still facing a major barrier. For instance, many state and municipal employers instituted entry level rank-order written and physical examinations as well as minimum height and weight requirements, which had an adverse impact on women (Epstein, 1988). The women seeking entry into firefighting were tested on speed and strength—two attributes that women were unlikely to outperform the best men with. Thus, those women were generally not selected for hiring.

Brenda Berkman was among 410 unsuccessful women firefighting candidates to take the first New York City firefighter's test open to women in 1979 (Epstein, 1988). After five years and a victorious class-action suit for sex discrimination later, 42 women passed the new, court supervised tests and training and went on to become the first women firefighters in history (MacLean, 1999). Unfortunately, that was not the end of gender discrimination in the fire industry. Berkman and her colleagues experienced major backlash upon daring to cross gender boundaries by becoming firefighters. In fact, in 1993, the New York City Fire Department threw a shot against women who claimed the ability to do a 'man's job' by issuing an order that no pictures could be taken of Berkman, on or off duty, inside or outside a firehouse (MacLean, 1999). Other hostile male coworkers used many tactics to drive women out, including hate mail, telephoned death threats, slashed tires, and urinating in women's boots (MacLean, 1999). According to MacLean (1999), by harassing their women coworkers, men were trying to certify their own now-uncertain, threatened masculinity and put women in their "place," such as the home or in woman-dominated fields. In addition, Lucas and Steimel (2009) suggest that men protect their gendered identities and status by degrading women through a variety of tactics such as treating women as outsiders, exaggerating gender differences, objectifying women, and resisting women in authority. Therefore, it is often not what women do, but what men do around them that defines women's identities in the workplace.

As of September 11, 2001, Brenda Berkman of the New York City Fire Department had been working as a firefighter for 20 years. She was heart-broken by the loss of her friends and comrades following the terrorist attacks, but also dismayed by a sense that women in public-safety jobs were being slighted amid tributes to male bravery

(Dowler, 2002). For instance, a historically inaccurate, all-male rescue effort was pictured in the newspaper. Berkman claimed that it was frustrating and demeaning to have women's contributions ignored and that it threatened to discourage young women from considering careers in the emergency services (Dowler, 2002). She also expressed, "[women were] ignored at funerals and memorial services...The officials giving the eulogies would talk about 'firemen,' the 'brothers,' the 'men.' After 20 years it was hard to take" (qtd. in Dowler, 2002, p. 160). Moreover, Dowler (2002) suggests that there is a tendency to assume that the heroes of the attacks are all men and that the contributions of women firefighters who also risked their lives on 9/11 are ignored, which leads to an even deeper masculinization of City Fire Departments and revitalizes designations such as 'firemen' rather than 'firefighters.' Chetkovich (2004) adds that public leaders and the media contributed to the reinforcement of our cultural construction of the hero as masculine by reverting to that gendered language of an earlier era, paying little attention to woman workers, and lionizing male firefighters, paramedics, and police.

According to the Huffington Post, Berkman went on to become one of the highest-ranking women in the New York City Fire Department over the course of her 25-year career as the Department Captain. Although she retired in 2006, she is currently the founder of the United Women Firefighters organization and director of Women First Responders of 9/11—a group formed to publicize the stories of women who served at Ground Zero. With nobody standing by her side, Berkman demonstrated female agency by acting independently to challenge the culture of hegemonic masculinity. However, as much as occupational gender segregation has diminished, it has hardly disappeared, as any glance at a fire department will show. As mentioned prior, the National Fire

Protection Association calculated that women only occupied 12% of the permanent wildfire suppression jobs at the USFS, the BLM, and the National Park Service. Thus, I argue that the BLM and the USFS serve as an important context to explore gender as firefighting remains a heavily male dominated occupation and has a masculine dominant culture.

Theoretical Framework

In order to better understand the challenges women wildland firefighters experience working in a male-dominated occupation, and the strategies they use to deal with those challenges, I approach this research as “a feminist who believes women’s experiences need to be heard and privileged in a social system that structurally makes women’s worth subservient to men’s” (Mandell, 2015, p. 65) As such, I apply a feminist discursive lens to this analysis as feminist theories are rooted in and responsible to movements for freedom, equality, and justice (Ferguson, 2017). Thus, this framework also provides a framework for better understanding gender differences. Specifically, a feminist discursive theoretical lens is involved with negating the stigmatized, stereotypical, and discriminatory differences women in wildland firefighting face as opposed to their male coworkers.

According to Wetherell, Yates, and Taylor (2001), discourse, in general, refers to the use of language as part of a social practice. Accordingly, a feminist discursive theory is significant in looking at the construction of meaning in the work-related experiences of women firefighters as it centers on women’s diverse situations and the social systems that frame those situations (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Additionally, perspectives within this theory are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed

on them by race, class, and gender (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Fay, 1987). Using a feminist theoretical lens, I am able to postulate a world that could be something other than a place where socially constructed gender hierarchies function to privilege men and masculinity (Pruitt, 2016). To do so requires “seeking out different experiences and voices that diverge from the norm of hegemonic masculinity,” such as women wildland firefighters (Pruitt, 2016, p. 6).

Taken together this information about women wildland firefighters, gender constructs, and stigma, in light of existing knowledge about women working in nontraditional occupations, I ask the following research questions:

- (1) What are some challenges women wildland firefighters experience as they disproportionately work alongside their male coworkers?
- (2) What (if any) strategies do women wildland firefighters use to mitigate and/or overcome those challenges?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the method and procedures used to conduct the current study, which aims at examining the challenges of women wildland firefighters and the strategies they use to deal with those challenges. This methodology represents a qualitative approach, and the design of study involves qualitative interviews.

This study investigates the experiences of women wildland firefighters, while analyzing the challenges they face and the strategies they use to deal with those challenges. To understand the goals of this study, a qualitative method was chosen. Creswell and Poth (2017) state:

We conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. (p. 45)

Qualitative research can help people understand the world because it allows me, as the researcher, to interpret participant viewpoints and stories, document what events lead to what consequences while explaining why this chronology may have occurred, and it illustrates how a multitude of interpretations are possible, but how some are more theoretically compelling, morally significant, or practically important than others (Tracy, 2013). This approach is beneficial to this study as women firefighters—a marginalized population—will be able to fully disclose their stories that outsiders know very little about. As such, I will encompass a holistic understanding by attempting to view the

world from the participants' eyes. Interview data derived from the qualitative design will provide insight into the lived experiences and perspectives of women wildland firefighters of working in a male-dominated profession.

Researcher Positionality

I have experience with scholarship in the fields of Communication Studies and Community Health Sciences. As a female college student who has worked in a male-dominated organization, I am drawn to research that examines the experiences and perspectives of women in the workplace. For instance, I worked at Coeur Rochester mine, located in Pershing County, Nevada, seasonally over the course of two seasons. In my time at the mine, I frequently experienced gender discrimination and sexual harassment, such as having a shovel taken out of my hands by a male coworker when the crew was short one shovel, was told that I was the hardest working *girl* they've had out there and that I kept up with the boys, and I also had to pretend to ignore catcalls and obscenities from the construction workers on site by looking the other way and acting un-intimidated.

My interest in the field of wildland fire came about through personal relationships with men and women in the field of wildland fire, including my male partner, who is a fifth-year lead wildland firefighter. Moreover, being a woman has provided me with a profound appreciation for the experiences of women, and my experiences both in a male-dominated field and with sexual harassment will undoubtedly shape how I approach my research. For instance, Tracy (2013) states:

...your own background, values, and beliefs fundamentally shape the way you approach and conduct research. The mind and body of a qualitative researcher literally serve as research instrument – absorbing, sifting through, and interpreting

the world through observation, participation, and interviewing. These are analytical resources of our own “subjectivity.” (p. 3)

Although I acknowledge that my background shapes the way I approach my research and the way I see the world, I use self-reflexivity by taking careful consideration in the ways my past experiences impact my interpretations of this research (Tracy, 2013).

Data Collection

“[Data collection] means anticipating ethical issues involved in gaining permissions, conducting a good qualitative sampling strategy, developing a means for recording information, responding to issues as they arise in the field, and storing data securely” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 147). Data collection for this study involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via telephone at a time and/or place most convenient for the participant. Before the interview began, participants read the informed consent document that explained the purpose of the study, issues surrounding confidentiality, and the possibility to opt out. Upon beginning the interview, participants acknowledged reading the informed consent form and gave verbal consent to participate in the study. I then gave participants the opportunity to select their own pseudonym and explained how the pseudonym would be used to protect their identity. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All recordings and transcriptions were anonymized and only used for research purposes. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A. The informed consent document is included in Appendix B.

Setting

The study took place within the United States. The participants of the study came from different geographic locations to work for the same division. They represent various wildland firefighting jobs among either the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which can include being members of a helitack crew, a hotshot crew, a handcrew, an engine crew, an initial attack crew, a prescribed burn crew, fire suppression, fuel management, smoke jumpers, repellers, or fire line paramedics (U.S. Forest Service, 2018). Additionally, one participant of this study represents structural firefighting jobs, which include city firefighters within City Fire Departments.

Recruitment

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study, I recruited participants using purposeful sampling, which Tracy (2013) explains as purposefully choosing data that fits the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes. The specific sampling plan I used for this study was snowball sampling, which is a method for reaching difficult-to-access or hidden populations, such as women wildland firefighters, as they represent only a small percentage of the overall occupational group (Tracy, 2013). Researchers using snowball sampling begin by, "identifying several participants who fit the study's criteria and then ask those people to suggest a colleague, a friend, or a family member" (Tracy, 2013, p. 136). I was able to identify several women firefighters because of my personal relationships with men and women in a rural setting. From there, I was put in contact with more women firefighters through those relationships. I also utilized personal networks through social media to identify additional women firefighters, as I posted a research call-out on Facebook,

asking my friends and family to either share the post or direct message any women firefighters they knew. The Facebook call-out yielded 13 comments and 14 shares. Participants were required to contact me via email or direct message. The Facebook call-out is included in Appendix C.

Criteria

I interviewed 25 women firefighters using criterion sampling, which involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002). The participants for this study met the following requirements: (1) were 18 years or older, (2) self-identified as a woman, and (3) have at least one year of firefighting experience with the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Forest Service, or a City Fire Department. I required participants to be 18 years or older because I do not have IRB approval to research a vulnerable population, such as children. I required participants to self-identify as women as I conducted this study on women wildland firefighters' experiences and perspectives. I also found it important that participants had at least one year of wildland firefighting experience so they were able to thoroughly discuss their experiences and perspectives as women within their respective organization.

Participants

I conducted interviews with a total of 25 women firefighters, working either with the BLM, the USFS, or with a City Fire Department. Some women had experience in both the BLM and the USFS, but at the time of the interview, 14 participants identified with the BLM, ten participants identified with the USFS, and one participant identified with a City Fire Department. Taken together, their experiences ranged from one year in the organization, up to 27 years in the organization. Five women had over ten years of

experience on the job, and the other 20 ranged between one and eight seasons. The average of their time and experience on the job was six-and-a-half years.

All participants volunteered to speak with me and consented to participate after being told at the beginning of the interview that these interactions would be audio recorded and used for research purposes. An interview protocol loosely guided all interviews, which ranged from 24 minutes to one hour and twenty-nine minutes, with an average time of about 42 minutes. I audio recorded and transcribed all of the interviews verbatim, which produced 282 pages of single-spaced text covering 17 hours and 40 minutes of recorded interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began at the very moment I began collecting interviews, when I began making a descriptive record of the interview discourses (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Once data collection ended, I began a more formal analysis, coding the interview transcripts. Analysis proceeded inductively, after I had thoughtfully considered the meaning of many “chunks” of data and discovered that many textual units related to each other in ways that suggested a new code (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Analysis happened through iterative waves, as I visited and revisited the data, connected them to emerging insights, and progressively refined my focus and understandings (Tracy, 2013). I first formed first-level codes, looking for broad themes, and then codes were expanded, collapsed, condensed, and refined during three waves of analysis. A few themes emerged specific to gender discrimination and sexual harassment. After refining the data, some themes emerged as significant through frequency of similar comments. In the remainder of this study, I discuss the results of my analysis. Specifically, I explain: (1) various aspects of

the job, (2) the most common challenges women firefighters experienced, and (3) the strategies they used to deal with those challenges.

CHAPTER 4

ABOUT THE JOB

In this chapter I will present components of firefighting as an occupation from the lens of the women who participated in this study. This will include parts of the job that the women like, their job duties, physical fitness, and qualities needed to find success as a firefighter. Thus, this chapter will give readers a visualization of the realities these women experience on a daily basis in this occupation.

What I Like

During their interviews, each woman was given the opportunity to express aspects of the job that she liked. Often times, their enjoyment did not come from actually putting fires out, but rather they found happiness in the relationships they built along the way, from being challenged both mentally and physically, spending time outdoors and traveling, the uncertainty of what they might end up doing each day, and many other reasons. Regardless of what each woman said she liked, I noticed the excitement and passion in her voice as she talked about firefighting. I hope my readers recognize their passion as well.

According to the participants in this study, there are many facets to firefighting that are appealing, enjoyable, and meaningful. One woman, Anna, said she could talk for hours about what she loved. She expressed:

... there's, I mean so many things that I like in fire...I love the camaraderie. Just like the teamwork, and the people that I work with, and the bonds that are formed are pretty incredible and strong. I love being challenged physically and mentally and really I just feel like I have to be the absolute best person I can possibly be, in like almost every sense of that word. And so I really love that challenge. And I love being outside every day. It just feels like, feels like what humans should be doing, what we don't do enough of. And learning a lot of practical skills...I've

just learned so much about myself and like team structure and incident management and just being efficient. And then also, it just feels really important to be taking care of the land in a way that is productive and responding to disasters and like helping take care of people too sometimes...and getting to travel, getting to see beautiful places, and then sometimes it's just getting to play with toys. Like chainsaws and helicopters. That's definitely a thrill. That too.

Anna found enjoyment in various aspects of the job, such as camaraderie, being challenged, working outside and protecting the land, and learning new, practical skills.

Whereas Anna could go on and on, Sammie had a difficult time pinpointing her love for the job into words. She said:

I love being outdoors. I love the people that I work with and how smart and passionate they are. I love the fact that the job really holds people accountable and it's just, it's so hard to put into words like how badass it is, seriously. And I just really enjoy being part of something that's like bigger than myself.

For Sammie, feeling like the job is “bigger than myself” was an important reason she went into firefighting. Another woman who loves the people she works with and feels that the job is bigger than herself, Stacey, expressed how meaningful firefighting is to her. She said:

I like the atmosphere that comes along with it. I like a lot of people I work with. I don't know if I actually like the job, but it's more about people and relationships and...I like working hard for a purpose and feeling like my job has a meaning. But for the most part I think I like the friendships the most.

Stacey disclosed that she did not necessarily enjoy the job, but rather her passion came about through the friendships she built within the organization. Also feeling like this job has meaning, Sammie expressed how proud she is to be a firefighter. She stated:

Something that I would like just people to know is that I love this job from the bottom of my heart to the top of my head to the bottom of my toes...and it's something that I'm like so proud to be a part of. And I've met amazing people, and I've got to do like such cool things...and it's something that people need to be aware of what we go through and what we do, you know? It shouldn't take the California fires for people to realize that people die because of this job...

Sammie added how proud she is to be a part of the fire organization and expressed the importance of public awareness around the purpose of wildland firefighting.

Many women also expressed the meaningfulness and purpose of this job. One woman, Brooke, described the purpose of her job as protecting property and public land. She said:

Oh man, I like traveling. I grew up traveling in the military my whole life. So it just kind of fed into my love for moving, traveling, seeing different things that most people will never see in their lifetime. I love the camaraderie. I like the feel of when you go to work with your family members and that you would do anything for those people and it's definitely a good feeling to have going to work. So, and I like the bigger purpose. I mean we're there to protect property and take care of the public land that we love so much so, I love it.

For Brooke, the camaraderie and traveling were bonuses to protecting property and the public land that she loves. Another participant, Candi, mentioned how she liked learning about eco systems that firefighters improve through fire prevention. She conveyed:

I like being outside and learning about the ecosystems that I'm trying to improve by either preventing or amending the forest and stuff like that, especially with fire. I think fire is a natural part of forest, or desert is a natural part of the earth's setting and needs to be reintroduced...I like helping implement that and I also like working with a lot of these people that we get to interact with. I like working hard. I like work, period.

Candi expressed her passion for learning about earth's ecosystems and her contribution to improving those ecosystems. Similarly, Ella explained the reasons she enjoys protecting the environment through fighting fire. She said:

I enjoy all of it. I enjoy the crew cohesion. Why we fight fire to protect the environment. And so we have clean water. To have people able to recreate in it...taking care of our universe. That's a much higher purpose than just what people perceive. And so there's a deep connection to the land and being out there. You're just like in one, you're like in your element.

For Ella, being “in your element” while taking care of the universe through fighting fire is one reason she enjoys her occupation. Another interviewee, Laura, expressed her love for being outside in the dirt, learning different aspects of the occupation, and making a difference. She conveyed:

I loved, loved being in the dirt. I miss being in the field. I've had so many opportunities as a wildland firefighter to do so many things. Not just fight fire, but to learn the management aspect of it to lead a crew, to supervise a lot of people. It's just been a ton of fun and I worked very, very hard to get where I'm at. And The operational aspect of it is definitely the most physically challenging as well as mentally challenging, but there's so much reward in seeing what you do that makes a difference.

Laura’s passion for firefighting came about through working outside and the rewarding feeling she gets when she sees the difference she makes as a wildland firefighter.

Also feeling passionate about the land, many women expressed their love for the outdoors as an intriguing aspect of the job. One retired wildland firefighter, Tehachapi Doe, disclosed her love for fighting fire on the countryside, alongside the mountains. She stated, “What did I like about my job? I think the main thing for me was, I was in love with the idea of fighting fire. I was in love with the country, with the mountains. I was, and still am that kind of person. And I loved my job.” Similarly, Jackie expressed her passion for being outside. She said, “I love being outside. Hands down that is probably why I do it. I love being outside, I love sleeping in the dirt. I love camping.” For Jackie, camping outside in the dirt just off the fire line was the reason she loved her occupation. Another participant, Amanda, described how she loved going off the grid to fight fire near beautiful locations. She said:

...for me it was just being around fire and like the behavior of it, and also just like dropping off the earth for god knows how much time, just, “Ok, bye. I might not talk to you for a week” and then you just get to go to the middle of nowhere and

just to some really cool locations and just like see the backcountry, pretty much just like camping and stuff...and having an excuse to be absolutely filthy and dirty with no expectation.

Amanda enjoyed unplugging from reality and having an excuse to be dirty while she was out on the fire line. Similarly, Hannah liked working outside. She stated:

From the beginning of my job, what I liked was being outdoors and the physical aspect of it...one of my primary reasons for really engaging with the job was we got to work out outside and we get paid to work out. Every day.

For Hannah, her primary reason for engaging with wildland firefighting was the ability to work outside and get paid to workout.

On top of their love for the outdoors, many women also commented on the camaraderie of the job as admirable. For example, Alyssa expressed that she loved being outside and building relationships with her crew members. She said:

...I just love being outside, I love sleeping outside, I love the camaraderie that comes with fighting fire and like with kind of suffering with people, with this group of people for months at a time. Like I just feel like it creates relationships with these people that I have never experienced in other realms or in other careers.

For Alyssa, creating special bonds through shared suffering was a reason she loved firefighting. Similarly, Sarah mentioned how she like the friendships she built among her crew. She said, "I like that we get to be outside all the time and that it's a pretty physical job. I also love the teamwork. Like the friendships you build on a crew are, like that's going to be with you for life." Another woman, Randi, also expressed how she loved the camaraderie that evolved through firefighting. She stated, "...I think my favorite part when I was working with the BLM was probably the saw work I did...and I really loved the camaraderie and how hard you have to work. And just being outside was my favorite part..." Along with the camaraderie, Randi also enjoyed working with the saw, working

hard, and working outside. Another participant, Daisy, also mentioned that she loved the people she worked with. She expressed:

I love that you got to work out as part of your PT in the morning. Haha! And stay active. I love the people that I worked with because we were all like-minded. We were all there just to have fun and learn and go out for an adventure.

For Daisy, staying active through on-the-job physical training and having fun with her coworkers were reasons she loved her occupation.

Pointing out another desirable feature of the job, some women touched on the spontaneity of firefighting. For example, a structural firefighter, Shelly, explained the diversity of her job requirements as a reason she loves firefighting. She said:

I think what I like about my job the most is the diversity of what I get to do on a daily basis. I'm not sitting in an office doing the same old, same old. And every call, even if it's the same thing like maybe it's for difficulty breathing or a structure fire, it's still going to be different within itself. We have different obstacles we have to accomplish every single time.

For Shelly, having different obstacles to accomplish every time she got a fire call was what she loved most about her job as a firefighter. Similarly, Chris conveyed how she enjoyed having a different routine every single day. She expressed:

What I like is that it's different every day. Like you go to work, and I had an office job before where you go to work and you know exactly what you're going to do up until the moment you leave, every single day. And I hated that routine. But this job, you go to work, and for the most part it can be similar; you work out, you do chores around the station and what not, but you never know when you're going to get a call and you don't know how long you're going to be on that fire or where you're even going. Which I like how spontaneous it is.

Chris suggested the excitement of not knowing when she would get a fire call or where she would get called to was what attracted her to the job. Another participant, Megan, explained how firefighting did not feel like work. She said, 'I like it because I never wake up and feel like, "Oh, I have to work today." Or I never dread going to work really. And

every night when I lay my head down, even though it was the worst day or the hardest day ever, I'm glad I did it.' Megan described the satisfaction of laying down every night knowing she worked hard as a reason she loved firefighting. Similarly, Adrianna expressed how having variety and getting to travel to unique places is what attracted her to firefighting. She conveyed:

I'd say there are several reasons why I like the job. One, we get to travel a lot and see a lot of different places. For me it's hard to sit in the office all day, you know? Day after day, 365 days a year, looking at the same computer screen, doing the same things. We have a lot of variety. We get to go to cool places and most folks don't get that opportunity...where work is paying for you to travel somewhere cool. I don't take that for granted. I think it's a huge attraction to most people in this field of work.

For Adrianna, a few reasons she loves firefighting is being able to get out of the office, travel, and see different places.

In talking about what they enjoy, some women focused in on some of the skills they apply in this occupation. For instance, Carrie indicated that she enjoyed out-manipulating fires. She said:

I kind of like that it's, it is a struggle...I've done structured firefighting too and that's more like high intensity but short duration where it's like wildland firefighting is long duration, but low intensity. So, I like that it's like very challenging and it's pretty much like man versus wild. You have to like out-manipulate the fire.

Carrie suggested that she enjoyed the struggle and challenge that comes with fighting wildland fires. Another woman, Adrianna, revealed that she liked the hierarchy for growth within the organization and having to use critical thinking skills. She explained:

...if you handle your career the right way and you're dedicated to it you can move up in the ranks and as you move up...you get more responsibility and more challenge. I like the fact that there's, you know, a set hierarchy for growth. A lot of people I hear get into a job and they feel stunted. There's nowhere for them to move up in the system. That's not the case in fire. We take it from military so like

I said, if you're dedicated and prove yourself, you can move up. I like being challenged. I like using my brain. It's different here than what most people would think of using their brain...more thinking on your feet or managing people and personalities and problem solving in the field with limited resources. And I appreciate that. It's very different from anything you learn in school. It's critical thinking. And I like that a lot.

Both Carrie and Adrianna touched on the idea that they love the challenge and struggle of the job, and even more so that they are able to use their brains to quickly problem solve and “out-manipulate the fire.”

According to the women firefighters in their interviews, there are countless reasons to love firefighting as an occupation. Despite the hardships that firefighters might face, they love their job at the end of the day and they are proud of the work they contributed. Listening to these women talk about their love for fighting fire and hearing the passion in their voices made me feel so safe and proud to have these women protecting our lives, property, and environment.

Job Duties

“Depending on where you are in your profession, like when first coming into fire, that expectation to be able to obviously carry your pack and your tool and to be able to work well as a team whether it's on an engine crew, or a hand crew, or hotshot crew, or jumper...And to be looking out for each other. And that's the biggest take home message is like, it's not just about you, it's about the ‘we.’ It's all of us.”

-Ella

To understand the experiences of women in this occupation, including the challenges they face and the strategies they use to combat those challenges, I find it important to first illuminate the requirements these women meet as they perform this job. Although their duties vary depending the position they hold, their overall requirements have many similarities. For instance, the women’s experiences range from engine crew members, to lead engine operators, to helitack members, to hand crews and hotshot

crews, to medics, to squad bosses and captains. Due to the unpredictability of fire, many of these women explained that their job duties varied depending on the scenario. Thus, it is not easy to define a wildland firefighter as the job itself consists of various positions, each with an array of duties that change as quickly as a fire in the wind. However, according to Laura, in the beginning it's the same for everyone regardless of the type of crew you're on. She explained:

In the beginning, it's learning, its training, it's asking questions...when you first start out, obviously you're at the bottom of the list. So you're going to do whatever your boss tells you. You're going to drag hose. You're going to put in hose lays. You're going to carry a tool. You're going to dig line. You're going to chop down trees. You're going to eat, sleep, drink, fire until it's over and you go back and as you gain knowledge and you're able to move up into different positions.

Laura explained some of the duties a rookie firefighter performs, while noting the amount of knowledge and training a wildland firefighter is required to gain in order to move up into a higher position. Also describing an array of duties, Anna stated:

I'm expected to have all of my personal gear accounted for. That's sort of the main thing, just being ready. And then when we get there, it's really just depends on what's going on...we're usually doing initial attack of a fire. So we get there and we're expected to dig line around to contain the fire...It's really being able to do whatever is needed. Digging line, or prepping an area to do a burn, maybe we're actually lighting fire, or maybe we're putting in a hose lay, we're helping engines, we're running a pump, yeah. And then mopping up, that's always a huge thing...I was sometimes expected to do things on my own, so like being a look-out, taking weather and making sure the crew is safe, and talking to a helicopter and directing a bucket drop...So kind of all sorts of things.

As a crew member, Anna has developed a range of responsibilities, including digging line, performing initial attack, prepping an area to burn, putting in a hose lay, or mopping up. A hotshot crew member, Alyssa, described similar duties. She said:

...it's like a lot of burning out, a lot of big firing operations that are really resource intensive or digging hot line or just sort of securing a lower intensity part of the fire's perimeter. So we'll go through and dig on the really hot spots but

then...we're just securing the perimeter. So we aren't necessarily maybe digging a line around that entire perimeter, but we're making sure that the stuff that's actually burning and hot is out and then kind of moving on and then like letting another crew come through later on in the day or the next couple days to make sure that it's fully out. We're just kind of there to like stop things and stop things while they're progressing in whatever way is deemed appropriate I guess.

Alyssa described an array of duties her crew uses to stop the fire while it is progressing, such as burning out, digging hot line, or securing the fire perimeter. Giving us another insight into what is required of a hotshot crew member, Anne explained:

Just being radio contact and then sometimes I'll be lookout. So I'll be perched somewhere, like above and away from the fire where I have a good view and then I'm watching fire activity, keeping an eye on where everyone is. If I see fire popping up somewhere, I can let them know or if like we need a helicopter drop, I can call it in. So you're kind of just like being everybody's eyes in the sky.

As a member of a hotshot crew, Anne hikes to the fire with her crew, and often times she mentioned that she would continue hiking to a higher point so she could look down and keep an eye on everyone and everything. Whereas Anne hikes to a fire and works her way to a higher point, some women start at a high point and fly directly to the fire via helicopter. This position is known as helitack, as the women are attacking the fire from helicopter. For instance, Sammie explained her role on the helitack crew. She said:

...we're so versatile being on a helitack crew that we can either fly in and we IA [initial attack] the fire...[it] depends on who's on the load and...who's going to IC [incident command], but usually it kind of just falls into line and what we're expected to do is get the bucket on the helicopter and start fighting fire. And usually I'll grab the radio and direct the helicopter to where we want them to put buckets and cut line and what we need to do.

For Sammie, she is expected to get the water bucket on the helicopter and then use her radio to direct the helicopter where to drop the bucket. Another participant who has also been on a helitack crew described both her leadership role on the crew as well as her duties when she is on the fire line. Megan stated:

With helitack there are lots of different roles, it kind of just depends. I am HECM [helicopter crew member] qualified now so I'd be like managing other people who are working around the aircraft...Making sure everyone is using their safety, their right PPE [personal protective equipment] and following proper safety protocols and things like that. And then like if I was out on the line, like you're just expected to do...I guess whatever you're told. I'm not the boss. Whatever we're told. And you do it with like hustle, and heart, and effort. You don't slack.

Megan started out on her helitack crew doing whatever she was told, and she did it without slacking. Also speaking on behalf of doing their work with effort are members of hand crews and engine crews. For example, Amanda described mopping up fires on her hand crew. She said:

...hand crew basically you just like mop up fires. So a fire will sweep through and hand crews are usually like three crews of like eight people each, and you just line up, you're about so many feet apart, and you literally just sweep back and forth looking for hot spots and stuff like that. We pretty much just make sure the fire is dead. So all you do is just walk and hike all day, making sure the fire is dead on that side.

Aside from mopping up, members of hand crews have an assortment of tasks and responsibilities. For instance, Daisy described her role on a hand crew. She stated:

So on the hand crew it all depended upon what you were given at that time...everyone would have an opportunity to rotate to learn about different jobs...one time I was chain sawing, one time I had to carry the gasoline, one time I was doing the shovel, one time I was doing the plow, one time I had the rake, and sometimes you're carrying all the water because you have to carry the water in sometimes.

For Daisy, her job requirement as a hand crew member included being able to manage an array of tasks. All of the women in these various roles and positions use many different approaches when it comes to fighting a fire.

An additional approach to fighting fire is using a hose from an engine. For example, Chris, an engine member, explained her role on the crew. She stated:

So it kind of depends like what the fire is doing. But being in an engine, we'll usually, like if it's a growing grass fire, we'll get up on the side of it and hop out, and someone turns the pump on and you grab the hose line and if [the fire is] going off the side or going off the front, you charge it and someone holds the nozzle, and then the other seasonal will be behind me and they're just kind of like making sure the hose doesn't get run over or picking up the back part of it...we've got to do that really quick. You get your gear on, and then we just start walking along the edge of the fire, spraying it. Just until we run out of water or until someone tells us to stop...

Chris is a seasonal engine crew member, and her main task is charging the fire head on with hose. Sometimes her crew does mobile attack and she is 'running and gunning,' so to speak. While the lead engine operator continues to drive along the fire, Chris is out on the ground running alongside the fire with hose in hand. A lead engine operator is licensed to operate the fire engine and manage their crew. For instance, Brooke and Stacey both described their roles as lead engine operators:

Brooke: So as an engine operator, mainly making sure the engine's running. If I need to pump water, do a hose lay, I'm expected to stay with the truck and make sure that hose lay is pumping as much water needed at the end. And doing those calculations and being able to know what the crew needs down below, run equipment down the line.

Stacey: I have to navigate the engine, like at different positions or different scenarios for different fires. So say we have to do a hose lay up a mountain, I have to figure out how to position the truck, get the pump running, make sure the pump stays running during this hose lay, and communicate all at the same time.

As lead engine operators, Brooke and Stacey are in charge of navigating the engine, ensuring that the engine is running, and ensuring that pump is running during hose lays, all while communicating with all of their crew members. Operating an engine and managing a crew at the same time is not a menial task. A wildland firefighter, Candi, with a similar lead position described her role:

I'm expected to have a range of responsibilities from being an incident commander to a crew member. But I am definitely expected to perform, physically get there, size up the fire, report hazards to dispatch and other incoming units, and maintain safety for the crew. As a lead, I will break off from the squad and I will go maintain an interior project, [or] something like that. I will be a quality control. And also cut line and all that stuff too.

As a lead, Candi is required to communicate with her crew as well as with dispatch and other units while keeping an eye on her crew and the safety of that crew. Also in a lead role, Adrianna explained her experience as a crew member, as well as her experience as an assistant engine captain:

It really just depends on what your title and position are. If you're a crew member, you're really taking orders from your many supervisors and that could be anything from digging a hand line to using the engine to put a hose lay for a fire, to cutting down trees, or anything of that sort. In my position now where it's more supervisory, I do do those things, but it's more I have to step back from those paths so that I can properly and safely manage and direct the people. Don't get me wrong, I still do physical work. It's just that I can't be engaged in that 24/7 because I need to make sure I am looking out for the safety of my crew and I am planning ahead to get them provisions and items like that.

As Brooke, Stacey, Candi, and Adrianna worked their way in to higher positions, they started addressing the importance of maintaining the safety of their crews. Rather than taking orders and physically fighting fires like many of the woman on crews, the women in leadership roles were giving orders that were in the best interest of their crews, including the approach best suited for fighting the fire.

Another participant with prior experience wildland firefighting, Randi, is now a medic for wildland firefighters and also holds a leadership role. Although she is no longer fighting fires, she is working alongside wildland firefighters, is still required to pass the same tests as wildland firefighters, and be in the same physical shape as a wildland

firefighter in order to quickly and efficiently get to an injured firefighter if need be. She explained her job description as a medic:

...so I'm like expected to be ready for any medical. I'm constantly monitoring the radio. We'll also get used for like a human repeater when there's like a dead radio area, you know, we're kind of like moving around so that other people can relay messages to us to relay to the command post. But my main job and what is expected of me is to be there for any kind of emergency medical.

A large part of Randi's job is to stay in communication with people out on the field and to be alert and ready at all times so she can pick up her gear and hike up a hill to the medical emergency on the fire line.

A lot of the women expressed their desire for more people in the general population to understand what they do, especially the women who fight wildland fire versus structural fire. One reason for this might be the fact that television shows focus largely on structural firefighting with zero emphasis on wildland fires. In fact, one participant even mentioned that after fighting fires for almost 15 years, her own parents still don't fully understand what she does.

Another reason the general population is unaware of the firefighters' roles could be their actual job title. For instance, while the women refer to themselves as "wildland firefighters," "lead engine operators," or "captains," officially they are referred to as Forestry Technicians, Lead Forestry Technicians, or Supervisory Forestry Technicians.

For example, Laura expressed her frustration with her job title:

...if there was one thing that could miraculously go forward for the Wildland Fire Organization...Congress really, really, really needs to give wildland firefighters their own series and they actually need to be called wildland firefighters... We are either range techs or we're forestry technicians and we fall under all of these other position descriptions that...they've conformed them to make them work for us. But if you go to a city fire department, they are firefighters and for federal wildland firefighters, we are not firefighters...and I think that's really unfair and I

think if we had our own series and our own pay, I think that would make the profession like actually professional and the federal employees would potentially be paid more equally to other firefighters in other places, other communities, or municipalities if you will...we call ourselves wildland firefighters but according to OPM [Office of Personnel Management] and all the people that do our human resources paperwork and stuff like that, we're not really firefighters, we're Range Technicians that go out and do whatever we're told, which is very frustrating...So it's very interesting that instead of taking the time to classify us for what we are and make it known of who we are, they're continuing to just go and look at all these other positions and say, "Well, it kind of fits into that, so we're making it that."

For reasons such as friends, family and the public not understanding what a wildland firefighter does, or wildland firefighters not actually being referred to as wildland firefighters, the women who participated in this study feel unrecognized and undervalued. Therefore, I found it very important to share what exactly these women do when they step out onto the field, from their own words—including referring to themselves as the wildland firefighters that they are.

Physical Fitness

Physical fitness and physical training are requirements for being a firefighter. Depending on the type of crew they are on, firefighters have various fitness tests that they are required to pass each season. Being in physical shape is important for a firefighter, as they spend hours upon hours each season hiking, digging line, carrying heavy equipment, felling trees, fighting flames in the heat of the day, and working more overtime than one deems possible. These skills are not possible without being in shape, which is why firefighting is known as a physically-demanding occupation. Some of the most physically demanding skills mentioned in the interviews were hiking and working long hours. Also, when asked about their physical training, the women firefighters often mentioned pull-ups and push-ups, staying in shape in the off-season, and intense daily training. One

interviewee, Anne, described her experiences working a 14-hour shift on top of hiking uphill for over an hour. She said, “We usually hike everywhere...the hikes can be...an hour and a half of uphill pain and then...you still have to work your full like 14-hour shift...it's just a very physical job.” Similarly, another woman firefighter also spoke about working long shifts on fires. Jackie stated:

We got our ass handed to us day after day after day after day...16-hour shifts. And it's like you're working, and working, and working, and working and to watch that entire line that you did that day go up in flames...and then to just wake up and do it all over again and have the same thing happen.

Jackie elaborated on the difficulty of fighting fires, especially those that continue growing in acreage quicker than the firefighters can contain them. Considering how quickly fires do grow, it is crucial for the firefighters to arrive on scene as fast as humanly possible. One interviewee, Daisy, discussed how challenging it is to get to a fire fast enough to contain it. She expressed:

...the physical challenge was getting to that point fast enough...you're on foot and so you're walking and we'd have to sometimes walk for [up to] four miles to get there...you had to carry all your equipment and depending upon what job you had, meant how much weight you were carrying on top of your backpack that you had to carry.

Daisy suggested that not only do firefighters hike for miles, but they carry weight on their backs the entire day. Similarly, Anna shared that her crews hikes with weight all day, every day. She said, “...hiking with weight is the main thing that we do. It's what we're doing all day, every day.” Hiking all day, every day is a common task for firefighters.

Also common among wildland firefighters is a form of anxiety that sets in as the firefighters are gearing up to hike up a mountain. For example, Megan suggested that many wildland firefighters get “before-a-hike anxiety.” She stated:

I think a lot of wildland firefighters, even guys, get this like anxiety of like, before-a-hike anxiety. I find that really challenging cause I definitely get that. And then I get in my head...we're hiking and someone's like, 'Keep up,' or 'You got this.' And it makes me even more in my own head. And I want to cry but like you can't stop...but it's super rewarding.

Megan described how rewarding it is to accomplish a difficult task, such as hiking uphill in pace with your crew. According to the women firefighters in the interviews, another rewarding task is improving their fitness during the off-season. Typically, a fire season lasts between the months of April or May through October, while the rest of the year is considered the off-season. Some of the women firefighters discussed the importance of continuing to train in the off-season, and the gratification they felt starting the new season in better shape than when they left the previous season. For example, Chris explained the confidence in herself that she gained from training in the off-season. She stated, "I was really worried about the pack test last year, just not having done it before. But now this year like, I haven't even thought about it. I just know that the training I've been doing in the off-season, I'll be fine for it." The pack test consists of a three-mile hike with a 45-pound pack over level terrain, testing firefighters' overall work capacity, specifically muscular strength and aerobic endurance (WildfireX, 2017). Chris revealed that the training she did in the off-season helped her get ready for the pack test. Another woman firefighter, Brooke, discussed how detrimental it is to the crew if a crew member does not train in the off-season. She expressed:

...I see a lot of people not be able to [meet physical expectations] because they don't take this as, "you train all year." They take the off-season as, "I don't have to do anything" and that's not the way...this is a career...you know what's expected of you and it's on you to be physically able to do the job. And I don't want to ever make my like team members, crew members, engine crew not feel like I'm able to do something...I train so hard in the offseason, but I love it.

Brooke strongly felt that training in the off-season is a requirement of the job. Also speaking to the importance of training in the off-season, Anna and Sabrina explained how empowering it was to see results after putting in the time and effort required:

Sabrina: Obviously with this line of work, we do a lot of running and a lot of sit-ups, and pull-ups, and push-ups. And so that's been not only challenging but super exciting to try to push myself to excel in all of those areas. Every year we do the physical fitness challenge for the Bureau of Land Management, which kind of gives us something to prepare for and to kind of compete against one another and so that's really super fun to train for even in the off-season. Trying to get my times down and my pull-ups, up. The running is my favorite.

Anna: ...a large thing that everyone has to do every winter is just physically train to be ready for the next year. So I put in the time and I trained really hard...and I came back and I was in the top third of people on our first hike. And so that was incredibly gratifying...to go from being the last person or one of the last people to like doing really well. It was really empowering. Like okay, I can put in the time and then I can do things I didn't think I'd be able to. Like before just over a year ago I couldn't do a single pull-up, and now I can do like nine pull-ups in a row. It's definitely something I've been wanting to get better at and I've been putting in time and effort and I feel like I'm getting so much stronger.

Both Anna and Sabrina mentioned their desire to improve their pull-ups, as they both want to excel in all aspects of this job. However, two other interviewees, Adrianna and Rhonda, mentioned the difficulty of pull-ups and expressed that pull-ups were not a good measurement for overall physical fitness capacity in this occupation:

Adrianna: There's just some things that many females are not physically built to do. I cannot rep out 40 pull-ups like some males. But on the other hand, there are some females who are able to. Though I would say our physical limitations are the rule, not the exception. But it doesn't have to be limiting...just because I can't do 40 pull-ups doesn't mean I am not as physically fit as somebody else.

Rhonda: The hiking was fine for me, but the running was hard [and] the pull-ups were hard. But like the normal work that you need to put in to get to a job

and to be able to like do the job for your 16-hour shift, that was fine for me. I really appreciate like a good hard day where you go to bed and you can sleep on top of rocks because you've worked so hard.

Although pull-ups can be a good activity for physical training, many of the women firefighters mentioned how they struggled with that specific activity and had to work exceptionally hard during the off-season to improve on them.

Fortunately for the women, pull-ups are not a task used to fight fires, whereas other forms of physical training translate to the overall work capacity needed in the field. For instance, Amanda discussed how she was in the best shape of her entire life during her time as a wildland firefighter. She said:

I actually like miss being in firefighting because I was in the best shape of my life...you have to work out every day. Like your job is to be in shape. Like you have to be prepared, you have to be ready...my cardio was just prime, and hiking. And I love stuff like that, like I love going to the gym, I love sweating, I love burning, and love being like sore.

Amanda explained that she was in the best shape of her life because she was working out every single day. However, throughout the fire season, firefighters frequently go on rolls (also referred to as details), which can last anywhere between 14 and 21 days. A roll is an off-district fire assignment that crews are ordered to when more resources are needed on a specific fire. Firefighters are often asked to work 16+ hours a day when on an assignment. When asked how often she does PT (physical training), Megan mentioned how challenging it is to stay in shape throughout the season while she is constantly working 16-hour shifts for 14 days straight. She expressed:

[We PT] every day. Unless we're on a fire. They actually say that you get more out of shape as like fire season goes on because we're doing less PT as we're on rolls and stuff. We're sitting in cars all day...driving to the fire and stuff. But at the beginning of the season, the first two weeks of the season, it's pretty intense PT.

Although firefighters are physically exerting themselves while on a fire, as Megan mentioned, they are not able to do PT while on a fire assignment and thus are not able to keep up with their fitness regimens like they do at the beginning of the fire season. Similarly, another woman firefighter, Jackie, mentioned the intensity of the first few weeks of the fire season and also explained the consequences for not keeping up with your PT while on an assignment. She conveyed:

...we go through a hell week, quote on quote week, but it's actually weeks. There's times where they'll put rocks in your pack, and they won't tell you...Our level of PT, we have to PT for at least two hours a day, every day. If you go off-district for two weeks, [when] you come back, we have to retake the fitness challenge. If we are not above a certain level, we can't go back out.

Even though it is difficult to find the time to PT while on a fire assignment, being in shape is still a consistent requirement for firefighters throughout the entire season. Jackie explained that her crew is required to retake the fitness challenge when they return from a roll to make sure the firefighters are still in prime shape and ready to fight another fire when called. The days when firefighters are at the station waiting to get called to a fire, they are required to PT. One interviewee, Anna, spoke about the type of activities her crew did to prepare for fighting fires. She said:

...we go on physical training hikes and you're expected to keep up and not gap out in the line. We're all hiking in line. It's really tough and you're going uphill for half-an-hour to 45 minutes or something...it's really challenging. And then we go on runs, running like between three and seven miles at a seven to eight minute-per-mile pace...

According to the women firefighters in the interviews, the activities Anna mentioned are very common PT activities in the fire community, along with doing bodyweight exercises such as pull-ups, sit-ups, push-ups, lunges, etc. and various exercises with weights.

I felt that sharing the physical requirements of the job is very important in regards to understanding the perspectives and experiences of women wildland firefighters. Moreover, illuminating the physical requirements that women endure demonstrates that women *as women* can do masculine defined work, such as firefighting. I also felt that sharing the physical challenges was necessary in order to provide background to the challenges women experience as a minority group in the occupation. On top of the physical challenges that both men and women firefighters endure, women are faced with even more challenges being “tokens” in the field.

Top Qualities

Although physical fitness is an important part of the job, the women mentioned many qualities besides being “physically fit” as skills necessary to be successful in this occupation. The most common qualities that were mentioned in the interviews were situational awareness, being mentally tough, bringing a good attitude to work, having good communication, and being adaptable or flexible. A few less common, but equally important, qualities mentioned were critical thinking or thinking on your feet, being organized, vulnerability and empathy, love for the outdoors, having heart and pride in all that you do, and being a selfless individual so you can work as a team. The relationship between mental strength and physical strength was the most prevalent finding. One woman, Stacey, explained that thinking ahead is a good quality for a firefighter. She said, “I think you are a good firefighter if you're smart and if you're thinking ahead and...you anticipate things. So for me it's more like making those mental decisions, rather than proving myself physically.” For Stacey, making mental decisions were more important than proving herself physically. Similarly, Alyssa expressed that push-ups, sit-ups, and

running did not actually translate well to the tasks required of them on the fire line. She stated:

...you're expected to be in certain physical shape but once you get there it's like, yeah you can do push-ups and sit-ups and pull-ups and run this distance in this amount of time and hike this distance in this amount of time. But none of it actually translates very well to like doing a burnout for 13 hours, and just like holding a drip torch in your hand for an entire day, and walking miles and miles...through brush and shit...none of [the physical training] really translates super well into that.

Alyssa conveyed that her physical training did not help her with having to hold a drip torch in her hand for her entire shift, suggesting that it takes more mental stamina than physical stamina to do a burnout for 13 hours. Similarly, Sabrina mentioned that without mental strength, a firefighter will fatigue quickly. She expressed, "You have to be mentally tough as well as physically, because you can be as physically tough as they come. But if you don't have mental strength, you're going to get really wore out, really fast." Another woman wildland firefighter, Megan, also pointed out how the job is mentally taxing. She stated:

It's definitely like a really mentally taxing job...the physical part can be like nerve racking for me, but at the end of the day I know I can do it and that's the easiest part, is the physical part. It's all mental. And it's how you walk into that first day, or into the room, or how you wake up every morning...and how your attitude is going to be. I think that goes for both men and women.

For Megan, the physical part of the job was the easiest for her, while having mental strength was more difficult to accomplish. Although being physically tough and being in good physical shape is a necessity to perform this job well, both of these women brought up the idea that a firefighter cannot rely on physical toughness alone, as physical fitness is no match to the long, grueling tasks and days required of them. In fact, according to these interviewees, the key to surviving in this field is being mentally tough.

One component of mental strength is bringing a positive attitude with you wherever you go and with every task you're assigned. For instance, one interviewee, Sarah, described the difference of having a good attitude versus have a bad attitude and how that plays into your success as a firefighter. She stated:

...it's also a huge attitude thing...Even if you don't have the physical energy to keep going, like let's say a guy could physically keep digging line all day but has a bad attitude about it. Like he is not going to earn respect from his peers and he's not going to be able to work as hard all day because he has a bad attitude. So if you realize like the mental game is a huge part of it, you can excel like more than your crew members because you're in control of your attitude...that's an area I tap in to when things get physically challenging. If you have that mental strength it makes a difference.

Sarah suggested that being in control of her attitude and having mental strength helped her push through when fighting fire was physically challenging. Similarly, a structural firefighter, Shelly, discussed the importance of never giving up. She said a top quality was having "...just a lot of heart and just the fact of never giving up. Having a positive attitude will go really far...they want someone who is going to keep trying and keep working. That's probably the biggest quality you can have as a fire fighter." For Shelly, having a positive attitude, continuous effort, and working hard were qualities she felt necessary for a firefighter to have. Also mentioning having a good attitude, a wildland firefighter, Ella, spoke about the power that positive energy can bring to an entire group of people. She said:

...I always say we're contagious with each other's energy we bring into the space. I really brought a lot of happiness and joy and love and kindness into who I am. And so there's always a lot of laughter. And just non-judging. And so it just makes everyone around you, it's contagious. You know? It's like inviting everybody to take both corners of their mouth and move them up. And what happens in your body? Haha! You can't help but laugh, right?

When working in an occupation that is physically demanding, wears and tears on your body, and requires grit, such as that of firefighting, it is paramount to bring a positive attitude to work.

Also paramount to being a firefighter is being vulnerable, having pride, and caring about the other people on your crew. For instance, three interviewees described how qualities such as compassion, empathy, and trust contribute greatly to working as team with your crew. Adrianna described empathy and being selfless as qualities necessary for a firefighter in a supervisory role. She stated:

I would definitely say empathy is one... You have to be able to connect to people's problems and what they're going through. And I also think selfless is the other one. When you get to be a supervisor it's not just about you anymore. It's about taking care of your people... their lives are literally in your hands. So you have to be able to put your selfish needs aside and realize that you need to... put other people's needs and wants first.

For Adrianna, being empathetic toward others and putting others' needs and wants before her own were qualities she found important. Another wildland firefighter, Ella, conveyed that being vulnerable is underrated, but greatly important in this occupation. She explained:

...always everyone can get kind of nervous about it, but like coming in with compassion and being vulnerable. Being able to be vulnerable is highly underrated. So being able to show your true self and if you don't know something, say you don't know something. Haha! Because we can uphold that for each other in such a profound way. And when you're transparent... I think that's an important thing and then being able to trust your own being, trust yourself so you can trust others.

In discussing the importance of compassion and vulnerability, Ella mentioned the importance of trusting herself so she can trust others. Similarly, Sabrina disclosed that she trusts and relies on her crew members. She said, "The qualities you need to have are

definitely teamwork. I don't know where I would be if I didn't trust any member of my crew, you have to rely on them a lot.”

While empathy, trust, and compassion bring out the best in other people, other qualities, such as pride, can bring out the best in oneself. For instance, a wildland firefighter, Alyssa, expressed how having pride in her work was enough to contribute to her crew.

She stated:

...I think just like taking anything that you're given, any task or chore or anything and just making sure that you do it well and fast and exactly how they want it. And just having pride in everything that you do is enough...I'm hoping to just keep working towards that and making sure that everything I do, everything I touch...I have pride in it...

Alyssa noted that taking pride in her work is a massively important role for a firefighter.

Even when nobody is looking, striving to do her best is a standard Alyssa holds herself to.

Another skill that many of the interviewees mentioned as an important quality for a firefighter to have is situational awareness, which includes being able to think hard and fast. For instance, Laura described her thought process while out on the fire line. She said:

Is it going to be calm and hot and dry? Or are we going to get a hundred mile-an-hour winds that are going to blow the fire out? ...situational awareness is big. I mean, you got to know what's going on now, but you got to be looking into the future of, if we don't get this tied off at this point, then it's going to go for another thousand acres or ten-thousand acres or...we're not going to catch it and we're going to be really, really tired and we need people out here to relieve us...

Laura explained that being aware of your current surroundings and thinking one step ahead is very necessary and helpful when it comes to fighting a wild fire. Another

interviewee, Stacey, mentioned the importance of thinking in the moment and also being aware of potential situations that could arise in the future. She stated:

I would say more like critical thinking is something that you need because it's...a fast-paced environment, most of the time, at least with our fires. So you have to have those critical thinking skills to not only think about what's happening in the moment, but also what could happen or what's going to happen in two days or three days.

For Stacey, using a clear, open-minded, and disciplined style of thinking, such as critical thinking, is an imperative skill to have out on the fire line. Similarly, Anne described the value of having the confidence to make quick decisions. She expressed:

Ability to work on your feet and make decisions, which...isn't always about who knows most sometimes. It's about making a decision and sticking with it so everyone's on the same page...Just think independently and...the confidence in yourself to make a call.

Anne described working on her feet as the ability to make decisions in the heat of the moment, which is essential for her in keeping the entire crew on the same page. Another participant also mentioned the importance of working on her feet, which she described as being pliable to situations. She stated:

You definitely have to be able to have good communication skills and get along with people. And also be able to be like pliable to situations. Because like every fire is different. Every team that's managing the fire is different. Every day is different. You don't know what's going to happen and it's really easy to get complacent out there...

Randi emphasized on the importance of being flexible while out on the fire line, because as many of the women have mentioned, every situation is different and not one fire is alike another.

Listening to the interviewees talk about qualities they feel are necessary to be successful in this occupation illuminated the fact that you do not have to be a big, strong

man to fight fires. In fact, the qualities mentioned above are not typical of qualities one tends to associate with male-dominated occupations. For instance, the traits often associated with male-dominated occupations are those that distinguish men as superior to women, such as strength (Fiske & Glick, 1995). In fact, the women firefighters in the interviews indicated that being physically fit was irrelevant if you were not also mentally tough and explained that their physical training did not necessarily translate to the work they had to endure on the fire line. Other qualities, like having a good attitude, being vulnerable and empathetic, and using critical thinking are also traits not typically associated with males; yet these qualities are essential to contributing to your crew, working as a team, and looking out for the safety of each other—all qualities necessary for this occupation.

CHAPTER 5

CHALLENGES

“Sometimes when I hear things that are potentially going on today and potentially even going on in the program that I currently work for, it pisses me off and appalls me that I’ve been in fire 20-something years and the same stuff that I had to go through when I started out as a firefighter that women are still dealing with that today. Like hello, we’re in the 21st century. Like men need to get over themselves.”

-Laura

In this chapter I will present challenges the firefighters in the interviews expressed. This will include gender discrimination, sexual harassment, microaggressions, stigma, changes in behavior, imposter syndrome, and work-life management. This chapter will give readers a glimpse into the hardships and difficulties women firefighters endure while working disproportionately alongside their male-counterparts.

Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

“Someone actually told me, or asked me, do you realize that you get sexually harassed every single day? Yes, of course I realize that...it happens. Every single day, multiple times a day. It’s just to what extent, that varies.”

-Stacey

Women working in male-dominated professions often face gender discrimination and sexual harassment. During my interviews with the women firefighters, I asked them if they thought gender discrimination and harassment applied to women in firefighting. Their answers to this question were very disheartening, as their stories revealed the inequalities, impediments, and disadvantages women firefighters experience every day in the workplace. While the women in their interviews indicated both experiences with gender discrimination and sexual harassment, the most common inequality was in the form of gender discrimination; as women were treated unfavorably by their male supervisors and comrades on account of their gender and sex. For instance, many women

in their interviews discussed women being treated so poorly by their superiors that they transferred stations or left the career altogether. For example, Stacey said:

...[there] used to be a female captain at one of our out-stations...I think she faced a lot of challenges being a woman captain. And I think there just wasn't any respect, and there wasn't any trust and there wasn't any...all those things that should be there between people who work in wildland fire. It just wasn't there. And I think that probably held her back and she didn't have a future here because people didn't see her in a great light...I look back at that a lot and think like, wow that's really sad. Because you had someone that you really could have done something with, and we let people hate her because they perceived her as too feminist. And you know, you let someone go who could possibly have changed the environment at the office.

Stacey touched on the lack of trust and respect given to a female captain because she was a woman who was perceived as “too feminist.” Rather than being given the opportunity to change gender norms and values in the workplace, the female captain was pushed out of the organization completely. Another interviewee, Mikayla, also mentioned that she was driven away from firefighting for similar reasons. She stated:

...I feel like in a way I was treated poorly because I was a woman...you hear from different people that there's certain men on the crew that don't think women belong...and one of them happened to be my captain. And since I was an engine operator trainee, I had to drive the engine and he was just really hard on me and like screamed at me...So that was part of what kind of drew me out of fire...I don't think I would have gone much further with him as my supervisor...

Similar to the Stacey's female captain, Mikayla was also deterred from continuing her career in wildland firefighting. In her interview, Mikayla also mentioned that her captain treated two women who came in after her very poorly, but did not treat men badly.

Similarly, another woman firefighter, Amanda, commented on the unfavorable treatment from her boss. She explained:

My first year was a little bit hard...obviously [being] a girl in wildland firefighting is hard. But my boss was also really mean to me and he said it was his personal goal to make me cry and quit that year...he would give me like the

hardest tasks or make me carry the heaviest equipment at the same time because he said I made firefighting look too easy because I was like a blonde girl that was girly. So my first year I feel like that was the hardest...having someone against you the whole year.

Not only is wildland firefighting hard, but being a woman in wildland firefighting is even more difficult. According to Amanda, one reason for that difficulty is having an unsupportive or aggressive superior. Another interviewee, Dani, spoke about her female captain being degraded and doubted on account of her gender. She disclosed:

...I've had personally a female captain and I've seen her completely degraded to the point that I get upset and it pisses me off thinking about it, because she was a great captain and she just got railroaded and there was nothing you could do about it because people doubted her because she was female and she was young.

According to Brooke, it did not matter how great her captain was at her job. Rather than being judged on her job performance, she was judged on her gender. Also being judged unfairly on her job performance, Adrianna discussed being held to a different standard than her male equivalent. She said:

I have definitely had a male supervisor where he held me to a different standard than my male equivalent. And they would come out in obvious ways...you do an end of the year performance rating where you basically sit down, talk about how well you did your job and where you could improve etc., etc. And I would get the same performance evaluation rating as my male equivalents even though I knew I was going above and beyond in my job and putting in a lot more work and extra hours and they were not. But in the end, we were rated as equal and having done the exact same job.

In Adrianna's case, she put in more work than was required, but was seen as doing equal work as her male comrade who did less work. The women firefighters in the interviews were admittedly treated unfavorably because of the fact they are women.

On top of being treated poorly, the participants of this study also commonly discussed being directly told that they did not belong on the fire line, but should be at

home cooking and raising kids instead. For instance, multiple interviewees were approached by their coworkers or people of the public and were verbally harassed. For example, Ella shared a story about two men who told her that she did not have a right to be a firefighter. She explained:

...I was on a hotshot crew that year and we went to a local gas station and I was filling up the Dolmars, the fuel cans for the chain saws. And there was a couple gentlemen locals that had coveralls on and they kind of set the role, and their chew tobacco in their pocket. And they were like, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Well, I'm filling up the saw with gas." And they said, "Well out women are at home barefoot and pregnant. You have no right to be here. I'd go home if I was you." And you know, those kinds of things don't feel real well.

Ella was verbally harassed by people of the public while she was doing her job as a firefighter because then men felt that women belong in the home, taking care of the kids. Similarly, another woman firefighter, Jackie, was outcasted because her coworkers did not think she belonged on the fire line. She shared:

It's being a chick in the fire world...I think it's the hardest part. It's tough. We get reminded all the time...Because you have the guys that are like, "Oh my gosh, here I'll take that for you." And then you have other guys that are like, "No, you shouldn't even be out here. You should be pregnant and barefoot at home. Get off the line." Like they wouldn't even talk to me, wouldn't even look at me.

For Jackie, being a woman firefighter was the hardest part of her job because her coworkers were constantly chastising her because of her gender. Another participant, Sabrina, told an example about a stranger who suggested she make her male coworkers dinner. She said:

...there was a fire I was on this summer and I was at helibase, and I was just prepping the bucket on the helicopter and the male who owned the land that we had landed on drove over on his Ranger with his wife and he said, "Shouldn't you be cooking these men dinner?"

This story that Sabrina shared demonstrates gender stereotypes that are ascribed to women firefighters, as the idea of women staying at home, cooking, and raising kids has

been engrained into society. Another woman firefighter, Laura, commented on people with cultural and religious differences that have verbally harassed her. She shared:

...you have to become very aware quickly of the culture differences that are out there and what you're working with, and then I've also had some interesting conversations or happenings with different religions and how they feel what the woman's role is, and so that was a little hard to overcome sometimes because I've seriously been told, "You don't belong in fire, you should be home having babies, cooking dinner, and making a family."

Laura's example emphasized the beliefs about a woman's role that society holds, specifically, being an at-home caregiver.

Each of these women experienced negative gender stereotyping for doing a "man's job." In these situations, women are caught in double binds, as they are expected to be feminine and at home cooking and raising children, yet expected to be masculine in order to meet the requirements of fighting fires. In fact, women often have to hide their femininity from their male-counterparts to appear competent and avoid discrimination, yet have to appear feminine to avoid criticism from the public. However, even when modifying their level of femininity to fit the scenario, women are still chastised.

Along with being discriminated against, harassed, and chastised because of their gender, women firefighters are often constrained with making a choice between reporting sexual harassment or keeping quiet. Women firefighters in their interviews discuss the fear of retaliation for reporting sexual harassment, yet describe the terrible and uncomfortable feeling of working alongside the person who harasses them on a daily basis. For instance, one interviewee, Anna, spoke of sexual harassment as a whole and explained why women keep quiet. She said:

...[sexual harassment] is definitely there and it's definitely affected a lot of people...there are bad supervisors out there taking advantage of their position of

power and harass women, assault women, and like the fear of retaliation keeps people quiet and I know there are a lot of people who have suffered from that. I think on all, the whole spectrum of harassment and assault, I think has existed in the fire community.

Anna believes that sexual harassment has affected many women in the fire community and suggested that women do not report it because of the fear of retaliation. Another women firefighter, Ella, also believes that almost every woman in fire has been harassed or made uncomfortable by her male coworkers in some form or another. She said:

Yeah, [sexual harassment] definitely applies to women in fire...My boss harassed me...pretty short of like assault...That's why I moved to a different district...when I was there at the time I was like thinking it was just me and it was just this specific guy was a bad person and I think with a lot of harassment, people think like, "Oh, well this is probably me." But then through networking and other stuff, I basically found out that he had done this to so many other women. And that something similar to this or stuff way worse than this had happened to like...almost any woman in fire. If you ask her like, "Have you ever been harassed or like felt, made uncomfortable by your male coworkers?" They'll say, "Oh yeah."

In cases of sexual harassment, like Ella, the participants in this study mentioned that women often think they are the only person being harassed, but have started realizing through networking that there are other stories out there just like their own. For instance, another interviewee, Laura, shared a story about being harassed and discovered many other women who were also sexually harassed by the men on their crews. She elaborated:

...the summer before I was supposed to go be on the crew, the gentleman that was in charge...came down...he was very demeaning and very derogatory and just constantly telling me, "You don't know shit." ...and then it was like one of the last things he ever said to me was yeah, "We'll see how you work out when I get you [on my crew] so I can break you." ...and to this day, just thinking of that man makes my blood boil. Like he was so horrible and he never did anything physically to me. However, talking to the women that were on those crews, I can't say for 100% positive because they wouldn't outright say it...they had been coerced or forced to do things with the men in order to be able to continue their time on the crews...and they would just be bawling and then they would beg me to never do anything about it because it would just make it twelve times harder for

them when they got home, when the news got back that somebody had broken the silence about what was happening to them.

According to Laura, women truly are afraid to report sexual harassment in fear of retaliation and in fear of their lives becoming more difficult for speaking out. Similarly, Brooke, shared her story of being harassed by her engine captain and also decided not to report because of her fear for retaliation. She explained:

My first season, I had an engine Captain that did not think I should be there. He thought I was, as he called me, the “Fire Barbie” on my truck. He put stickers on my helmet that said “Fire Barbie...”and I never reported it because a lot of the times we do not report harassment because retaliation is huge. And if you're not getting retaliated against, do they believe you? And with that information, are they going to do anything to the person, the perpetrator? And historically, they don't. So why report it? I didn't report any of it.

Like Laura, Brooke discussed the power that retaliation holds over women, and also addressed another obstacle to reporting—inaction. According to Brooke, when women do choose to report, the perpetrator goes free and the woman who reported the harassment is hindered further. Another interviewee, Stacey, further elaborated on this point, suggesting that women firefighters have to establish a sense of trust with their male coworkers that they will not report harassment. She said:

...you don't want to be known as one of those females that takes everything to heart. Or, like it's really terrible, but you have to establish this trust that people trust you not to file a claim against them. Like that's terrible. Just don't do anything and I won't file a claim against you.

According to the stories and experiences of the women firefighters in the interviews, experiencing gender discrimination and sexual harassment is a harsh reality for most women in this organization, and the fear of retaliation keeps a lot of them quiet about it.

In trying to understand some of the challenges that women face while working in an organization dominated by men, I have noticed the ways in which gender norms and

values are created and recreated within the workplace, such as gender inequality. Dealing with gender discrimination and sexual harassment is a challenge for women firefighters that currently does not have a solution. The reality is that being a woman firefighter comes with being treated poorly and women are either forced to stay quiet and allow unfavorable treatment to continue to happen, or they can report harassment and be retaliated against to a point that forces them to leave the organization altogether.

Gender Microaggressions

In talking with the women firefighters of this study about situations where they have experienced their own gender as a barrier, or have seen other women's genders as barriers, two interesting dynamics began to appear. Many interviewees shared examples or told stories about situations which related to threat. The data revealed that men often feel threatened by women in the organization, which could be perceived as a threat to their masculinity. In addition, some stories and examples unveiled an interesting dynamic between women, in which women feel threatened by other women in the organization. According to the interviewees, the woman-to-woman threat often occurred as a result of the pressure women feel to prove their competency, which included competing against other women in the field.

The dynamics of women as a threat to men, and women as a threat to other women was most often seen through gender microaggressions, or subtle sexism. Gender microaggressions can occur in three different forms: gender microassaults, gender microinsults, and gender microinvalidations (Nadal, 2008; Sue, 2010). Microassaults include blatant attacks with discriminatory statements, such as calling a woman a "bitch" (Blithe, in press; Sue, 2010). Microinsults are usually unintentional behaviors or

statements that frame women negatively, such as picking a man for a certain task or position over a woman indicates that men are more competent than women (Sue, 2010). Lastly, microinvalidations are subtle acts or verbal statements that negate a woman's thoughts, experiences or feelings, such as interrupting or excluding individuals from conversations (Blithe, in press; Sue, 2010).

In the interviews with women firefighters, their stories signified that most often the microaggressions they experienced were in the form of microinsults and microinvalidations. For instance, Mikayla shared her experience with her engine captain, who often used microinsults. She expressed:

I never saw him talk to the males the way he did to me and I thought maybe it was just because I was the driver [or] maybe because I was like moving up and had like a higher position so he was just trying to be harder on me since I was higher up...And I like suspected it was kind of like a female thing, just because when we would come on to other fires or any time that another female co-worker came up in conversation, he always just bashed them...like would just bad-mouth them...But it's funny because he didn't seem to act that way until you were like driving or until you were in a higher position and starting to take it serious.

Mikayla mentioned that her engine captain would often bad-mouth her and other females she worked with, especially if those women were in higher positions. Another interviewee, Laura, shared an example of how she experienced microinvalidations when she was questioned as she started advancing in her career. She disclosed:

...the most frustrating would be just advancing in the world of fire and getting the operation of qualifications that for so many years were held only by men. Like it was fine if you were on a crew or on an engine or whatever, but as soon as you started taking on those supervisory leadership type of roles, then everybody questioned you like, "Are you sure you know what you're doing?" [or] "How did you get to where you are because you haven't been in fire for a hundred years so there's no way you could be that qualified without doing something." And it's like, really? I've worked hard to get where I'm at.

Laura experienced microinvalidations from her male coworkers when she starting taking on supervisory and leadership roles, as they negated her competence and qualifications.

Similarly, Sarah shared a story about a female captain who experienced microassaults as she was discouraged from pursuing her career further by her male coworkers. She said:

...[a female engine captain] had been doing fire for a while and it was her last summer doing it when I met her and she was transitioning out of fire...but her big reason for leaving was because she'd been working so long and so hard and just trying to earn the respect of people at this district and people on her engine. Like she's the engine boss...[and] she had reached this point where she couldn't do it anymore because she didn't get good fire assignments, she rarely got to leave the district...her engine always did menial tasks, people talked behind her back, people said she was bossy and working with her, like she never came across as bossy to me, like she was an assertive female. But if all of her overhead is male, they're going to see that as bossy. It was just so sad to see that like this whole district had kind of worked together to discourage her from pursuing her career further...if she was an assertive male leader, I don't think the district would have said, "You're bossy, you need to stop."

Sarah explained that a female captain on her crew was demoralized to the point that she left the organization entirely. As a captain, she was not given the respect from her male coworkers that she deserved, and instead was criticized for being an assertive woman.

Two other women firefighters also mentioned a lack of respect from men in the field toward women who have advanced in their careers and become superiors. For example, Stacey suggested that male firefighters use microinvalidations toward women who rise in the ranks because they do not believe women can do "men's work." She stated:

...you do have those people who, or men that you work with who don't believe that women should be firefighters or they don't believe that you could ever amount to anything that they ever will, and you do have those people who do take it out on you...I at least saw it more with career seasonals than I did with any of just the seasonals. So I think it happens more with women in the field who have the potential to move around or move up.

Stacey conveyed that some men in the field do not think women are competent, and they use microaggressions to negate women's worth in the occupation. Adrianna shared an example about the men she works alongside, who use microinsults because they do not respect her or appreciate her. She expressed:

...honestly, I think it comes down to being a female and having an education. Both of those are rare. I am a female and I have a master's degree and that is not common in this field of work. I have worked with a lot of individuals who don't appreciate that, whether it's because they're jealous or insecure of themselves...or they just think females don't belong here, an educated female at that...that's definitely been the challenge. You can tell pretty clearly, pretty early on, what males don't want females in this work or don't respect females in this work...

Both Stacey and Adrianna expressed that they work with men who do not think women should be firefighters, especially those that rise in the hierarchy or hold a high degree.

According to Adrianna, men might feel jealous or insecure—or in other words, threatened—when women appear more competent than them, and therefore, use various forms of microaggressions because of their perceived threats. Another woman wildland firefighter, Tehachapi Doe experienced a microinvalidation that kept her from getting a job. She shared:

I was also being trained to be a look out...on a dozer...[a male co-worker] requested that I get on there and see if I liked it because they were looking for a look out...so I did that on the off-season and I loved it. But...they weren't looking to put a woman in that position, so I got kinda...excuse the expression, but screwed out of it, and they picked up a guy. And there was a lot of that and I know some of that still exists...It was because they were maybe afraid that we were going to take their jobs...

Tehachapi Doe was not given the opportunity to work as a look-out for a dozer because certain men did not want a woman in that position, and in turn, they invalidated her expertise. In fact, Tehachapi Doe suggested that the men felt threatened by competent

women because they were afraid women would take their jobs. According to Sarah, men feel threatened and use microinsults if a woman beats them on a hike or a run. She said:

I've also heard guys say like, we were hiking...they're like, "Well I at least have to beat all the girls on the crew" ...and they're like, "I know I'm a failure if I can't beat one of the girls on this hike."

Sarah and her other women coworkers experienced microinsults from their male-counterparts, as they unintentionally framed the women negatively by suggesting they are failures if a woman beats them on a hike or run. Correspondingly, Carrie disclosed that men use microinsults when they feel like women do not work as hard as them. She shared:

...women have to work harder, but I think it's perceived as the opposite. Like I feel like men get aggravated because they think that women have it easier. And I feel like [women] get...like pushed down...for that reason.

Carrie suggested that women get pushed down and framed negatively because men feel like women "have it easier."

According to the women firefighters in this study, men feel threatened by women who out-perform them either physically or by advancing in the career and, in turn, they insult, degrade, or discriminate against the women using various forms of microaggressions.

In addition to experiencing microaggressions from their male coworkers and superiors, women firefighters in their interviews commonly described microaggressions coming from other women. For example, Daisy experienced microinvalidations from other women when she was successful in the job. She said:

...for me, in my position, I would say that women were more hard on women because if they couldn't do [something], then they would make fun of you more

because you did a good job and it made them look bad...So women weren't empowering each other in that level..."

Daisy's expertise and hard work on the job was often nullified by other women firefighters because they did not want her to make them look bad for not being as successful as she was. One interviewee, Carrie, described her experience with another woman on her crew who used microassaults. She shared:

I think that female firefighters are harder on each other...there was another female that was on the department and she was just incredibly like rude and degrading to me and I feel like that was because she had to fight through the stigma and everyone kind of already liked me when I just started. And so I feel like that can be an issue of like other women like resenting.

Carrie experienced microassaults from another woman on the crew, who was blatantly projecting her bitterness at having been treated unfairly by the men onto Carrie. Another woman firefighter, Jackie, used microinvalidations toward other women firefighters and compared it to the movie, *Mean Girls*. She explained:

...I think of that movie, *Mean Girls*. Because girls in fire, even though we should be like friends, we're really not. It reminds me of *Mean Girls*, because like when a girl in fire is on the line and I see another girl, it's like, "Oh, how tough are you? You must be kind of tough, but how tough?"

The movie, *Mean Girls*, is centered around a popular group of high school students referred to as "the Plastics." The group of girls earned this title because they are shallow and fake, like plastic, and they are degrading and cruel to other girls at the school. The movie describes how high school social cliques operate, and the demonstrate the effect social cliques can have on girls. Jackie's comparison of women in fire to the movie, *Mean Girls*, suggests that women in fire treat each other poorly, judge each other, and question each other's competencies as firefighters. Specifically, Jackie used microinvalidations toward other women firefighters in questioning and invalidating their

“toughness.” Anna described the competitive nature of women firefighters in her interview, which caused some women to use microinsults toward other women in the field. She explained:

...there can be a kind of competitive nature between women, especially because like we all know that we're in the spotlight and you don't want to be the weakest link and so it's like, “Okay, well I've got to be better than her” as opposed to being supportive...I know that it can exist and that can be some of the worst kind of interactions. Like I know a friend who was a fuels technician and firefighter for quite a while and she had such a horrible relationship with another female firefighter on her staff that she ended up leaving...like it was terrible...that's like born of this system that we're in where we're so rare that you then see the other women as competition rather than as friends.

Anna explained that women see other women as competition because women are constantly in the spotlight trying to prove themselves and they feel as though their success depends on being better than the women working alongside them. Therefore, women unintentionally frame their woman counterparts negatively. Similarly, Chris described her experience with another woman on her crew who used microinsults. She shared:

So there was another girl at my station and I think that she was used to being the only girl around guys, and then I came last year and I feel like a lot of women are like...they feel like threatened by other women...which is like silly...she was kind of like cold towards me when it's like, we should be friends and we should be working together because we're like two women in the whole field of men...

Chris experienced microinsults from another woman on her crew, who subtly treated her “cold” because she felt threatened. Both Anna and Chris conveyed that women have systematically learned to devalue other women and see them as competition rather than as friends or comrades, and in turn, use various forms of microaggressions.

Although microaggressions often occur in subtle ways or happen unintentionally, they can have detrimental impacts to the person being affected. For instance, many

interviewees told stories about themselves or women they knew who left their occupations or transferred to other stations because of the microaggressions they experienced. Moreover, the women who are not deterred from the organization and decide to stay are continuously put down, held back, and challenged by microaggressions. Even more problematic is that because microaggressions are often unintentional and can result from an implicit bias toward a group (i.e. women), people are often unaware of the damage they are causing with their behaviors and words (Blithe, in press).

Stigma

“...there’s that whole idea of not being that girl, right? That girl being the girl that reports inappropriate behavior to higher up, or that girl who can’t carry her own weight, or that girl who is always trying to get special treatment. You know, there’s lots of different stigmas out there. Almost all of them are negative. Or that [girl] who’s a lesbian, or that girl who is just an angry female because she’s a feminist or whatever.”

-Candi

According to the women firefighters in the interviews, women firefighters are often stigmatized for various reasons, the biggest being because women are viewed as acting outside of gender norms when they fulfill their job requirements. For instance, four stigmatizations were most prevalent in the interviews. First, women in fire are stigmatized as being lesbians because they are fit, strong, and want to do a “man’s job.” Second, they are stigmatized as only wanting to do the job to find a romantic partner or sleep around with the men. Third, they are stigmatized based on their “girlish” appearance, which does not fit the “manly” description of a firefighter. Lastly, they are stigmatized based on other people’s disbelief that a woman could get a job as a firefighter.

Lesbians

Multiple women revealed that at some point or another, they have been stigmatized as a lesbian by their male coworkers or by the public. For example, Sabrina shared that another woman she worked with was stigmatized as a lesbian for being buff and fit. She said, "...I know a female that I did a detail with and people thought she was a lesbian just because she was super buff and super fit." According to Sabrina, if a woman firefighter has masculine characteristics, like strength and muscle, she is labeled as a lesbian. Likewise, Amanda said, "...when you say that you're a wildland firefighter as a girl, they automatically think you're probably a lesbian of some kind, like they'll just automatically jump to that..." Amanda suggested that people automatically assume a woman firefighter is a lesbian based on the fact that she has a job within a blue-collar occupation. Correspondingly, Randi disclosed, "...I've definitely had people question if I was gay, for sure." Another woman firefighter, Macy, revealed that women who are capable and strong are stigmatized as lesbians. She said:

It's the stigma of, men can do this versus women cannot. If a woman can, then she has to be gay...Or if she's strong, they would say, "Is she one of those girls?" I think that's one of the stigmas. If you see a strong woman, she has to be gay.

Macy suggested that strong women are labeled as "one of those girls," whom are stigmatized as lesbians. Similarly, Laura shared that women are assumed to be lesbians just because of their chosen occupation. She expressed:

...I know for a lot of years the perception of women is, "Oh, you're a firefighter, you must automatically be a dyke," "You're obviously gay because you want to do a man's job," or "You're walking around with a chip on your shoulder and you want to do a man's job to prove a point."

According to Laura, women are stigmatized as lesbians because they are women firefighters who want to do a “man’s job.” Correspondingly, Tehachapi Doe said, “...a lot of times when you would tell somebody [firefighting is] what you did for a job, what’s the first thing they’d think? You’re gay.” Tehachapi Doe indicated that people’s first thought upon telling them you were a firefighter was the stigma that women firefighters are lesbians. Similarly, Daisy disclosed that women firefighters were looked at differently and questioned about their femininity. She stated, “That we’re not feminine...people would look at you and wonder if you were at all feminine and stuff like that. You would definitely be looked at differently.” As Daisy suggested, due to traditional gender norms and stereotypes embedded in society, people often invalidate women’s femininity based on the premise that they are firefighters, doing “men’s work.”

Each of these women have been stigmatized as lesbians by their male coworkers and the public because they are working in a non-traditional field for women, which makes them appear different from the traditional image of a woman and therefore not feminine or heterosexual.

Fireflies

Another common stigmatization mentioned in the interviews was the idea that women become firefighters only because they want to find a romantic partner or sleep around with their male coworkers or superiors. For example, Amanda noted how women who appear “girly” are assumed to be there to find a romantic partner. She explained:

If you’re like a girly girl out there then they’re just like, “What are you doing here?” Like [people think] you’re trying to find a husband, you’re trying to find a boyfriend, and you’re trying to get noticed. Like you’re doing it for attention instead of actually just doing the job.

Amanda suggested that women firefighters are questioned regarding their motives of getting into the occupation, which people assume as being there to get noticed by men. Comparably, Laura disclosed that people think women start careers as firefighters so they can either find a husband or sleep with her male coworkers. She shared, ‘...I've heard comments made of, “Well, she's only fighting fire because she's trying to find a husband,” or “She's only fighting fire because...she's easy and she knows that everybody will sleep with her.” ...it's just horrible.’ Another woman firefighter, Alyssa, also suggested that people think women start firefighting just to find men to date. She expressed:

There have been stigmas that I've heard and it's something that I've just heard about and I have never experienced. But there's like the firefly persona as it's called, and that's the women that get into fire in order to find like dudes to date basically. So you have women that are like, wearing makeup or...they like take showers every night at fire camp or they are kind of clearly only there for one reason. And I've never experienced this kind of person but I've heard about them...I guess that's what a stigma is, is like this like amorphous sort of stereotype that people talk about but that I haven't ever actually experienced in real life.

According to Alyssa, women are often stigmatized as “fireflies” because people assume they started their careers as firefighters just to “fly around” from man to man, dating all of their male coworkers. Another interviewee, Randi, also discussed a similar concept to the firefly persona. She said, “...women are just definitely watched more...the whole badge bunny thing...just someone that just sleeps around with people that wear badges.” In her interview, Randi explained that women firefighters are labeled as badge bunnies because people assume they sleep with their supervisors, who wear badges. Lastly, Brooke discussed how women are stigmatized as only fighting fire to get access to the men. She shared:

...I think that there's that stigma, like you're coming into it for not the job, [but] for the dudes. Which I have yet to really meet a female that that's all she's coming in for...they come into it because they're also athletic, they grew up on a ranch, they grew up in a mining family, they grew up in a military family. Like they grew up being physically active, they grew up hunting. And I think that more or less, women are coming into for that. Not the stigma of, "You're a tent jumper," [or] "You're a fire whore."

Brooke highlighted some of the stigmas women firefighters experience as a result of being a woman in the field, which she labeled as "tent jumpers" and "fire whores," as some people find it hard to believe that a woman would become a firefighter for the same reasons that men become firefighters.

Because women are "different" from the traditional male figure who works in a blue-collar profession, the males within the organization and the people outside of the organization do not think women become firefighters because they actually want to fight fires. Rather, the women firefighters shared in their interviews that their male coworkers assume they are only there to find a husband, find a man to date, or sleep around with multiple men.

You, a Firefighter?

Women are also stigmatized based on their appearance, as women who fight fires are viewed as defying gender norms by working in a non-traditional occupation that puts their femininity into question. For instance, a woman firefighter, Megan, expressed that people in the public are surprised to find out that a "little blonde girl" is a firefighter. She said, "As far as the public goes, it's just like, "Wow, you do it?" I've gotten a lot of people saying things like, "You? That little blonde girl?" Because Megan has blonde hair and is "little," she is stigmatized for defying gender norms as some people feel that women, especially small women, should not be working in a male-dominated occupation.

Correspondingly, Chris shared a similar example of a comment made by a stranger at the grocery store. She disclosed:

I think I was at the grocery store one day. And some lady came up to me and said, “Oh my God, what’s your uniform?” Even though it says like ‘FIRE’ huge on the back. I’m like, “Oh, I’m a wildland firefighter.” And she was like, “That is so cool...you’re way too pretty to be doing that.”

Chris was also stigmatized for defying gender norms as she was told that she’s “too pretty” to be a firefighter, which members of the public often associate with masculine characteristics. Similarly, Sarah explained that many people discredit her as working inside, at a desk for dispatch instead of out on the fire line. She said:

Just from conversations I have with strangers, is people don't even realize that I'm a firefighter. Or, they'll say like, “What do you do?” And I'm like, “Oh, I'm in wildland firefighter.” And they're like, “Oh, so are you in dispatch?” ...And it's just kind of like, funny for people to wrap their brains around...

Sarah revealed that she experiences stigma from the public when they refuse to believe that she is an actual firefighter. Another participant, Shelly, shared that she was also stigmatized because of her appearance. She expressed:

I definitely think there is a big difference between the perception of men and women firefighters. I especially get that just because, I don't know how to put it, I'm a younger female not horrible to look at and I get it a lot, “I can't believe you're a fire fighter.” It's like, “Why not?”

Shelly explained that people are shocked to discover she is a firefighter and they stigmatize her for defying gender norms because she is a woman, young, and “not horrible to look at.” Comparably, Chris discussed how she was stigmatized for similar reasons. She shared:

I feel like people, when I tell [people] what I do, they're like, “What? No way. You don't look like you can do that.” Well what does that look like? And why

does it have to look like one thing? It's just a job. Like I can do any job I want if I wanted to. I don't have to look a certain way or act a certain way to do it.

Once again, Chris was stigmatized for eluding gender norms, as people do not associate a woman with the masculine characteristics that they associate with firefighting. In another example, Adrianna commented on how women who are small or who look young are stigmatized. She expressed:

I've experienced [stigma] and I see it with other females. One of the problems I think is, especially if you're small in stature or you look young, and I would say both those types meet, a lot of times you were not taken seriously. You go to these meetings or to these big briefings...there's pretty high up people. Most of them are the cliché middle-aged male with the beard, and you stick out. You look young, you look small, and you're female and they don't think that you're even supposed to be there.

Adrianna suggested that women firefighters are stigmatized because of their gender, their size, and their age, which altogether gives people a reason to justify that a woman does not belong in the fire community. Lastly, Anna pointed common gender norms and stereotypes that guide stigmatizations toward women. She shared:

...just different perceptions of like what people are capable of. Like...guys must be really good drivers and maybe women are not, or like, guys are already going to be really good at using a chainsaw and women are not, or like they know how to problem-solve and use equipment and those sorts of skills. And just by virtue of like looking like a dude and having a beard or being tall, then people think that they know all these things. And then another thing is like leadership, this happens a lot where the tallest guy on the crew with a beard, no matter what his job is on the crew, he will be approached as like someone assumes that he's in charge. Whereas it's like, the opposite for a woman. People just kind of assume that she's not in charge.

As Anna illuminated, due to gender norms and stereotypes, people often assume that men are capable in ways that women are not, especially in a male-dominated occupation, and thus, they place stigmas on women because they have defied traditional gender norms, yet they do not look like men, and therefore cannot work as competently as men.

According to these women firefighters in the interviews, people have a hard time accepting the idea that a woman can be a firefighter, as firefighting is known to be associated with traditional values of hegemonic masculinity, such as physical strength and aggression (Maleta, 2009). More so, women are viewed as acting outside their gender norms and rather than changing their vision of what a firefighter looks like, people stereotype women firefighters because their choice of occupation conflicts with their expectation of what a firefighter looks like.

What Did You Do to Get Here?

Finally, women are stigmatized as a result of other people's disbelief that a woman could get a job as a firefighter or that a woman firefighter could get promoted. In fact, multiple interviewees indicated that the males within the organization or people outside the organization assume they only got the job because they are filling a minority quota, because they slept with someone, or because their parents are in the organization. For example, Megan disclosed that her dad works within the fire organization and discussed how she experienced stigma because people assumed she only got her job because of her dad. She said:

...I hear this from other people outside [of fire], "Oh, girls just sleep their way into being firefighters or just sleep with all the guys." ...I also get that a lot too, "Oh, you just got it because of your dad." ...guys just get the job and I don't think anyone ever thinks of it. But I think when girls get the job, guys are kind of like, "Oh, you either slept with someone, or your parents [are firefighters]..." Which is kind of shitty.

In her interview, Megan also noted that aside from being stigmatized for only getting their jobs through their parents, women are stigmatized for sleeping their way into the

job. In a similar example, Laura shared that women are stigmatized when they advance in their careers. She expressed:

...sometimes it's a little demeaning because you go into this job, you've passed the same tests that they've passed, you've done everything they've done, but sometimes the ego thing kind of gets in the way and it's very frustrating to try to move up. You get the, "Whose ass did you kiss?" or "Who did you sleep with?" or "How'd you get there?" Well, I busted my ass to get here. And so sometimes it's very, very frustrating.

Laura explained that despite passing the same tests as the men, women are assumed to have "kissed someone's ass" or slept with someone to advance in their careers.

Correspondingly, Macy shared, "...[a woman] can't advance. It's like, "How did she transfer from so and so?" [Or] "How did she get from a GS-3 to a GS-5? She must have had to f— somebody." Macy also suggested that women experience stigma from their male coworkers if they advance in their careers, specifically, women are stigmatized as sleeping with their superiors if they move up the hierarchy. People also assume that women are only in this career because of quotas. For instance, Tehachapi Doe shared, '...I think the conception truly is, they just think that women got there because, "Oh, they're just women and they've got to have their quota," you know?' Similarly, Randi indicated that women experience stigma solely because they are women in a male-dominated career. She stated, "...how women get the job easier because we have a vagina...like in general people throw out there, that it's easier for people, like for women to get that particular job only purely because they're a female." Both Tehachapi Doe and Randi illuminated the stigma women experience of only being hired because of their gender.

Again, based on the idea that women are “different” from men in regards to traditional gender norms, women firefighters are the targets of stigma because they do not meet the expectations set by gender stereotypes. Thus, people assume that to be a firefighter, a woman must have had to “do” something, such as sleep with a superior, or have received special treatment because of her gender.

Overall, based on the stigmas conveyed by the women firefighters in their interviews, I have begun to realize how women firefighters are stigmatized for being ‘too’ feminine and not capable of working in a blue-collar profession, yet stigmatized for not being ‘man enough’ to be a competent firefighter. Because the image of a firefighter in our society is commonly associated with traditional values of hegemonic masculinity, women are stigmatized for being different from those values—a less desirable kind of different. Thus, women are hindered for being women in this occupation and, in turn, are stripped of their status as members of the group. These stigmatizations are very problematic in the workplace, especially a male-dominated workplace, as they have become normalized and appear unproblematic to everyone aside from the women who are being stigmatized.

Changes in Behavior

“...especially when I was new, trying to figure out how to fit in to the culture and how to do that in an authentic way. And I definitely at first kind of just tried to mimic all the people that were around me, who are very different from me because they’re mostly men.”

-Anna

Women working in a male-dominated occupation are perceived as different from the rest of the group. On top of being different, women are likely to have negative experiences in the workplace due to their low numerical representation. However, in

order to avoid negative treatment and fit into the male-dominated culture, the women in this study felt pressure to change their behavior—hiding their femininity, desexualizing their bodies, using “masculine” language, acting like the boys, or acquiring a way of speaking about and to other women (Smith, 2013). Therefore, a big challenge for women in the fire community is altering their behavior to fit in to the male-dominated culture or to avoid being looked at in a negative light. For instance, Anne described how she altered her behavior by acting like ‘one of the guys.’ She explained:

...in fire camp [I changed my behavior]...a couple friends of mine are the same, like we go into fire camp and you have your hoodie on or baggy clothes, you march around, you have your game face on, you don't make eye contact, like you have to mean business. You can't be giggly...it's so easy to reflect poorly on your crew and I just never wanted to be like that giggly girl from such and such a crew...I'm just really, really careful about my reputation and it's just so easy for something like a little tiny comment from some guy to like get around and then it just paints you in a way that I'd rather not be seen as. But yeah, I definitely like put on my dude hat at fire camp.

According to Anne, being a giggly girl would put her in a negative light. To avoid being seen in a negative light, Anne altered her behavior by acting and dressing like one of the guys; which she referred to as “putting on her dude hat.” Similarly, another woman, Anna, admitted to acting like ‘one of the boys’ so she would be accepted into the male-dominated culture. She shared:

...I was just like trying to be accepted by [the men] and the way that I felt like I could do that was by being like them...I was just being mean...we had two brand new firefighters and I was mean to them in a way that I'm not and in a way that I don't want to be. But I saw like okay, the way to be a strong leader is to kind of be an asshole...cause that's what I was surrounded by. And I think that I was a lot more judgmental and mean and I kind of lost touch of the other sides of me that are like really caring and more gentle and maybe interested in like doing art, and dance, and things like that, that wouldn't be seen as cool or whatever. I think I just kind of like stopped myself from talking about things that I didn't think other people would appreciate. And I probably do that still a little bit. But it's

something I really think about a lot and I'm trying to be like my full self as opposed to like my fire-self and my not fire-self.

Anna thought the way to be accepted into the masculine dominant culture was to act like the men she was surrounded by. Therefore, she developed another identity—her fire-self—which she would use to be mean and judgmental toward others. Another participant, Sarah, also described her experiences in trying to act like 'one of the guys' so she would fit in and appear less threatening. She remarked:

My whole first season in fire I tried to be like one of the bros and behave I guess in like tomboyish way so that I would fit in and be seen as a friend. And maybe not be seen as threatening. Just Like trying to seem like I was one of the boys so that I could do everything they are doing. And last season I worked on not altering my behavior as much. But I definitely act different in fire, for better or worse.

Sarah suggested that she would act like 'one of the guys' so she could befriend her male coworkers and fit into the male-dominated culture, regardless of whether the outcome was good or bad. Another woman firefighter, Alyssa, also explained her efforts in trying to resemble her male coworkers, and admitted her efforts did not work. She shared:

...I was trying to be bossy when I am absolutely never a bossy person. I was like, maybe this is how I get through to them, like maybe this is how I look like a leader and then I realized that that's absolutely not how you do that.

In her interview, Alyssa explained how she tried to imitate her male coworkers by being bossy, but quickly realized that she was not respected as a leader when she acted in that way. Due to society's cultural beliefs, which associate masculinity with authority, Alyssa was not taken seriously when she tried to be bossy; whereas her male coworkers were respected when they were bossy because it was seen as authoritative. Similarly, Candi shared her experience in trying to figure out a way to be successful as a woman firefighter. She explained:

In the beginning of my career, I really tried to fit in and be tough. I would say inappropriate things...Definitely cussed more because I was trying to fit in or trying to keep people away from me if they were being attracted to me...I changed [my behavior] within all of the sectors trying to figure out a way to be effective and successful in the position, in any position really, as a female firefighter.

For Candi, she changed her behavior by acting tough, saying inappropriate things, and cussing in order to fit in with her male coworkers, or sometimes to keep her male coworkers away if they were attracted to her. Many of the women firefighters interviewed struggled with figuring out how to be effective as women in the organization, and commonly noted feeling like they could not act like themselves. One participant, Mikayla, explained how she changed her behavior so she would not stand out. She said:

For one, I think I was really kind of timid, especially my first couple years in the work place. And then as I got more comfortable with a crew outside of the workplace, I was more open, but I was always like kind of just never felt like I could fully be myself out work. I just felt like I was worried about being annoying or like acting like I knew too much or I was just really afraid I guess of what they thought...I just didn't want to like stand out really.

Mikayla disclosed that she was timid and never felt like she could be herself at work because she was constantly worried about how the men were perceiving her. Another interviewee, Shelly, also mentioned having to change her behavior while at work so she would not stand out and be perceived as flamboyant. She shared:

I am a very outgoing person at home and I usually try to tone it down a lot [at work]. Sometimes it's a little harder to be around the guys...So just toning down my personality [because] it's perceived as more flamboyant and flirting with people. Even though the guys can wrestle at work, if you pick a fight with someone, it's taken in a completely different way. So having restraints in that way so you're not looked upon in that light is very big in the fire service.

Shelly discussed how she "toned down" her personality at work so her friendliness would not be misperceived as flirting. While Shelly changed her behavior to avoid appearing

flamboyant and flirty, another woman firefighter, Brooke, changed her behavior to avoid coming off as a “bitch.” She remarked:

...you're with 40 dudes, maybe one or two other females...So I feel like here I have to be a little bit more like...play like I don't know as much or not be as honest about my feelings because I feel like if you're like in a bad mood, they take it as you're just a bitch instead of as she's having a bad day...all of us get cranky, but if a woman's cranky it's different and so here I've really tried to be more positive like, just fake now and it's so sad...I shouldn't have to act like that.

Brooke explained that she had to hide her feelings to avoid being looked at in a negative light, as women who are cranky are perceived as “bitchy” in social constructs.

Correspondingly, Rhonda had to act tougher so her male coworkers could not tell when something was bothering her. She shared:

...it's funny because it's like when you're doing this, you don't realize you're doing it but thinking back, I probably put up a much tougher facade than I know I would have in like a female dominated profession. Like I'm a hard worker but I also probably acted tougher because I felt like I needed to or just like tougher as in like things didn't bother me...you can't let them know that things bother you...I probably acted a little bit different just so that they didn't know that things bothered me as much as they did.

According to Rhonda, she had to act tougher than she normally would and act like teasing or harassment did not bother her in order to fit in with the male-dominated culture.

Another woman, Adrianna, spoke about being asked to change her behavior so her male subordinates would accept her as their supervisor. She explained:

...I had a lot of talks with different supervisors over the years and they spin it and say that you have to soften your edges or change your approach or do this to appease this person. And I know some of that you just have to do, it's called personnel management because we are all different people regardless of gender. But I also think a lot of it has had to do with me being a female in charge and them trying to change me so that the people below me are okay to have a female directing them.

Adrianna touched on one of the difficulties of being a woman in a leadership position, such as changing her behavior so her subordinates would be more accepting of having a woman as their supervisor. Another interviewee, Ella, shared how she avoided drinking and socializing with her crew members so that she would be seen as more credible. She explained:

...one thing I always did and still do is...when you're away and you're not on the line and you're not getting paid, some people go to the bars and drink or do whatever. I did not ever, ever drink with my crews, ever, in any capacity because I wanted them to see me as Ella and my role as going to work. I didn't want to be seen in a weakened state. I wanted to be fully capable to do my job and do it well...I really set the bar high for myself to, I'm not gonna do this ever...it really helped with credibility because they never saw me in another way. And I think that happens a lot in the fire community where people let down their guard. Things happen that probably shouldn't happen.

Ella changed her behavior by abstaining from drinking alcohol with her crew members to avoid being seen in a weakened state, and to prevent “things” from happening that often happen to women when they drink and let their guards down.

Many of the women firefighters in the interviews mentioned changing their behaviors in order to fit in and be accepted in the male-dominated culture or to avoid being seen in a negative light. These types of behavior changes can be described as normative conformity, which is based on the goal of obtaining social approval from others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Conformity usually occurs naturally and without much thought as people are often unaware of their behaviors. However, the women firefighters in this study are forced to conform to the male-dominated culture and behave in ways they feel uncomfortable with, or go along with behaviors and situations they disagree with, in order to have a fighting chance at being accepted into the group of male firefighters.

Imposter Syndrome

In addition to disclosing how they alter their behaviors to fit in with their male coworkers, many women firefighters in their interviews also confessed to feeling like imposters in the organization. For these women, feeling like an imposter included feeling like they do not belong in the organization and internalizing negative thoughts or failures. For instance, Anne explained how she sometimes felt like she wasn't a good enough firefighter. She said:

...there was just really long days and really long hikes to wherever we were working. And there were days when we'd be hiking and I fall behind and I'd be really hard on myself about it and then those are the days that I start to think that I'm not good enough, that I shouldn't be there, and then you get stuck in this like mental cycle that takes forever to get out of.

Anne began feeling like an imposter when she would fall behind on hikes and would beat herself up over it. Comparably, Alyssa often felt as though she was not good at her job. She shared:

...last year I was like getting really...I was like sort of emotional about not feeling like I was fitting in, and not feeling like I was getting it, and I was just generally feeling like I was just like the worst firefighter ever...It was like it took everything in me a couple times to not cry like on a fire, probably like two or three times. But I never did.

For Alyssa, the feeling of not being accepted caused her to internalize her emotions and thoughts about being "the worst firefighter ever." Another participant, Anna, also expressed how she often felt like she did not belong on her crew. She disclosed:

...trying to find my own way to fit in and feel a part of [the crew] without losing my own sense of self. And that goes along with definitely feeling like an imposter at times. Like, "Do I really belong here?" [or] "Am I actually good enough to be doing this?" Things like that. [And] my first season I was not physically prepared to like be on par with the crew and that was incredibly challenging because it just amplified all those other feelings of like not being sure if I was good enough.

Anna struggled with trying to fit in with the crew and execute the same performance standard as her male coworkers, which amplified her feelings of inadequacy. In another example, Sabrina conveyed her fear of only being hired to fill a quota rather than being hired because she deserved it. She said:

That is definitely something that I've worried about myself, like "Was I just hired because they have to fill a quota?" When they pull names of applicants, they have to go through Veterans first, then females, and then males...it's something that you definitely take into consideration. Was I just hired because they have to have me on here, or was I hired because they think I'm worth something? And so it's something that I definitely worry about myself.

For Sabrina, constantly worrying about whether she got hired to fill a quota made her question her own worth as a member on the crew. The fear of only being hired to fill a quota was also perpetuated through another woman firefighter. Sarah expressed:

I've wondered about that just personally...I got this position on the shot crew and there's gonna be like five other women on the crew, which is most women I've worked with on a hand crew. And I've talked about it with friends and we're like, "Do shot crews have a quota for women?" Because we've noticed that shot crews have like a higher percentage of women and we're like, "So do they have this quota because they're more kind of in the public eye?" And that's not something I'm ever gonna ask.

In her interview, Sarah suggested that her fear of only being hired to fill a quota is something that will always be on her conscious. Similarly, Anne explained that the fear of being hired to meet a quota was her constant worry. She shared:

...if you get a job as a female and there's someone else who's maybe more experienced that didn't get it, you're kind of aware of that. So I found that hard when I got hired because there's so many amazing people that apply for these jobs and it was my constant worry that people might resent me because I got the job as a female and that I wasn't as good as other applicants. So I personally found that really stressful.

Anne disclosed that she was constantly worrying and stressed about whether she got her job over a man who might have been more experienced than her just because of a quota, which contributed to her feeling like she was not “as good” as the other firefighters.

Whether it be fear of not being good enough, fear of not fitting in, or fear of only being hired to fill a quota, the women firefighters in the interviews revealed behaviors and traits associated with imposter syndrome.

Feeling like an imposter in the workplace is a challenging mental state to overcome. For instance, as the women firefighters internalize failures, struggle with self-confidence, and focus on their fears, stress and anxiety become more prevalent (Parkman, 2016). In addition, having a heightened state of stress and anxiety as a firefighter can be especially problematic, as the job itself is extremely dangerous and requires concentration and confidence. Because the fire service community is a heavily male-dominated occupation and has a male-dominated culture, women are disadvantaged and struggle with being accepted by the majority group, which often results in feeling not ‘good enough’ to be a firefighter.

Work-life Management

In talking to the women firefighters about difficulties that arise from their job, many of them mentioned how challenging it is to manage their work lives and their personal lives. According to the women in their interviews, part of this challenge occurs as a result of the demanding hours of the job. For instance, wildland firefighters are frequently attending fires for prolonged and unpredictable amounts of time, ranging between a couple days to multiple weeks. Thus, wildland firefighters are often separated from their families and are unable to make plans with their loved ones. Another challenge

of balancing their work lives and their personal lives applies specifically to women firefighters, who find it extremely difficult to raise a family and be a firefighter simultaneously. Therefore, women frequently leave the organization when they want to start a family of their own. One interviewee, Stacey, discussed the difficult demands of being a wildland firefighter. She said:

I think it's been difficult like managing my work life and my personal life. That's probably the most difficult part. Because it becomes hard and I don't want to say you have to give everything, but you do. If you're there, you have to give a hundred percent. So then it becomes hard to give a hundred percent in all areas of your life...like balancing time and relationships.

Stacey found it difficult to give “a hundred percent” in all parts of her life, like her relationships, because as a firefighter, she is required to “give everything” in her occupation. Comparably, Anna described the sacrifices she has had to make as a wildland firefighter. She shared:

...it's challenging to be working long hours...we make a lot of sacrifices. Like I can't make plans with my family and friends for six months out of the year. And it's really exciting but it's definitely starting to wear on me a little bit more, of just like missing being around people that I love. And we don't get compensated for being on call, and as an initial attack crew, I was on-call twenty-four-seven. And you can't be more than two hours away from your home base...that's challenging, for sure.

Anna explained that she had to sacrifice not seeing her family for half of the year because her occupation was extremely demanding. Hannah also shared that making plans as a wildland firefighter was unmanageable. She said, “Family life...early in my career, planning was almost impossible.” Because of the demands of her role as a wildland firefighter and the spontaneity of fires, Hannah was unable to make plans with her family. Another interviewee, Daisy, mentioned the time commitment of fighting fire. She explained, “I mean, it was a big commitment cause I was gone, right? I wasn't gonna be

with [my family]. I couldn't come back. So I was going to be away from family for a long time.” According to Daisy, starting a career as a firefighter knowing that you will not be able to make plans to see your loved ones is a challenging task.

Another challenge for women addressed in the interviews is raising a family while trying to advance in the career. For instance, Ella mentioned how important it is for a woman firefighter to have a support system if she wants to raise kids. She explained:

I always tell my boys, they're grown up now, but like, “You did a lot of fighting fire in my belly. You jumped out of a lot of planes, you've flown a lot of helicopters.” And I would offer it again...making a difference for yourself thing...Yes, you're going to have maternity leave and you're going to have some time off. And then, how do you balance when you're fully present with your family and when you're at work? And it does take a support system. I know I couldn't have done it without a supporting husband...or partner, whoever your partnership is. And, so yes, I see a lot of women that start off in fire, they fall in love with someone in the Forest Service or somewhere else and they get hooked up and then they have a baby and then the woman seems to go right to patrol or prevention...where it's not a lead crew job anymore...And it's like, how do we help hold that so they don't lose that effort? And what does it look like to have that support system? So that is something that's a very real thing in a male-dominated profession like firefighting.

Although Ella was able to raise kids and fight fires at the same time, she explained that many women leave their lead crew jobs to work in administrative duties when they have kids. Another woman suggested that it is impossible to have children and rise in the ranks as a woman wildland firefighter. Alyssa said:

[It's] a whole 'nother can of worms in terms of women that want to have children or a family. That's like pretty much impossible as far as I can tell. I don't really know how women would ever do that, have children and then rise in the ranks as a wildland firefighter. It would be really, really difficult...you're away from home for, especially on a hotshot crew...115 days a year...It's just like, I don't know how anybody could do that...you're gonna lose a lot of women to that I think no matter what. No matter how many women you get out on crews as 20-year-olds, you're gonna lose them at 30 when they want to have kids...it's what I've seen anyway in my experiences, is that women that are higher up that are in their 40s

just don't have kids. And that's like the only way it seems like...I wish it wasn't that way.

Alyssa revealed that in her experiences within the organization, women who have supervisory or leadership roles do not have children, and women who do choose to have children leave the organization when they turn 30 years old because they cannot manage to raise a family and be away from home for one-third of the year. Comparably, Stacey explained that the job is not made for women who want a family or stability. She expressed:

I think it's important for people to know that there's not a lot of women in fire because I think what happens is that, well at least for me...I didn't have anything holding me back and I didn't have any responsibilities. I could go anywhere, I could do anything, and so there's a lot of freedom and excitement that comes along with that. But then you do get a boyfriend and you start planning for your future and then you realize, "Oh crap, I can't do this forever." So I think it's important to know like, the job is not made for girls who want a family, or a regular home life, or the stability. Those things all go out the window if you want to stay fighting fire...So it was hard because then it's like an ultimatum.

Stacey suggested that women who are single are better able to be firefighters because they do not have the ultimatum of choosing between their family and their career.

According to the women firefighters in the interviews, they are not the only ones who believe it is near impossible to raise and family and be a woman firefighter. For instance, Candi explained that the fire organization as a whole assumes women will leave the occupation when they are ready to start a family. She stated:

...I think that there's a misconception that eventually a woman will get out of firefighting because she is going to find another career or start a family. So they don't invest as much energy into a lady as maybe they would a gentleman. It is quite a bit harder for us to have children in this profession than it is for men. In my opinion, it is just because a male partner isn't as likely to stay at home with kids. I've seen it a lot.

According to Candi, women often become the stay-at-home parent while men continue working when a child is born, making it difficult for women firefighters—as compared to male firefighters—to have children. Another woman suggested that raising a family and being a woman firefighter is possible if, and only if, their partner was a stay-at-home parent. Shelly explained:

During summertime, I know I've been gone for three months basically with only a handful of days off. Working certain jobs in the fire service could be extremely difficult, but if you have a partner who is doing something else or could be more of a stay at home parent, absolutely. If there is a cohesive schedule it could easily work.

Shelly suggested that a woman firefighter could have her occupation and a family if she had a partner who was the stay-at-home parent. Another interviewee, Amanda, suggested that she would still be fighting fires if she was not a single-parent. She expressed:

I loved [firefighting]. Like it was such a passion of mine to where if I wasn't a single parent I probably would be like, my happy ass would be out there like in the summers years ago. I miss it to this day...I loved it so much.

For Amanda, being a firefighter was not cohesive with raising a child on her own. In another example, Brooke disclosed that she started her career as a wildland firefighter after she already had kids. However, she mentioned that having kids while being a firefighter was the most difficult aspect of her job. She explained:

So the most difficult thing for me was definitely because I had kids first. So I did like the backwards, most people go into fire really young, like 18 and I believe I was 26 with two kids and a husband...So I think it was a huge commitment for my family to take for me to take that first step. But also, I definitely feel like that was the hardest, most difficult thing. Most people choose fire and they don't have anything to worry about and I had...kids.

In her interview, Brooke explained that she had a very supportive husband who committed to helping her raise the kids so she could fight fire. Sadly, another interviewee explained that fighting fire broke up her marriage. Tehachapi Doe shared:

...[my coworker] was a firefighter. But she didn't stay doing that because when she got married her husband said, "Please don't do that anymore," because I think he worried too much about her doing that job. And let's be honest, that's what broke up my marriage because...well I was gone too much and it broke my marriage up...that's just how it goes.

Tehachapi Doe explained that her marriage ended because she was away from home too much as a wildland firefighter, while her coworker chose to end her career as a firefighter to keep her marriage in-tact. Either way you look at it, the women were unable to manage their work lives and their home lives as women firefighters.

Women in fire are often forced to choose between having a family and continuing their careers as firefighters. This is a challenge that their male-counterparts are not hindered by because they do not carry the baby for nine months and they are often not the stay-at-home parent of choice, according to societal norms. Although male firefighters also experience the hardships of being separated from their loved ones for long periods at a time, they do not experience the additional challenge of having to choose between having kids or advancing in their careers. This challenge is a challenge specific to women in this occupation.

CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIES

In this chapter I will present the strategies women use to manage the difficulties, hardships, and challenges they face as women in this occupation. These strategies include excusing or normalizing bad behavior of their male coworkers, standing up for themselves when they are treated inappropriately, and proving themselves as competent firefighters. In addition, the women provided a number of potential strategies for reducing barriers that they thought might work for other women in future contexts. This chapter will give readers a better understanding of the inequalities women firefighters experience as they engage in various techniques to mitigate the challenges that arise in an organization that is heavily male-dominated, such as wildland firefighting. To start, this chapter will display the ways in which women firefighters excuse degrading and disrespectful behaviors of their male counterparts. Second, this chapter will demonstrate the tactics women firefighters use to become accepted in the male-dominated culture. Lastly, this chapter will highlight the participants' personal hopes and dreams for the future of firefighting, in terms of reducing inequalities between men and women firefighters.

Excusing Bad Behavior

During my conversations with women firefighters, a unique theme became very prevalent. As the women discussed the stigma, discrimination, harassment, and barriers they face, I noticed how many of the participants accepted unequal treatment as a way of life for a woman firefighter, and often excused the bad, negative, and harmful behavior of their male coworkers. Specifically, in this section I explain two strategies the women

firefighters in the interviews use to justify harassment from their male coworkers: (1) reasoning that men are just sexual creatures; and (2) rationalizing unequal treatment by just pushing it off.

Men as Sexual Creatures

According to the women firefighters in the interviews, men are creatures of sexual desire who frequently harass their female counterparts. In addition, the women suggested that their male coworkers' sexual drive was higher at fire camp because the men had been separated from women for a long period of time. For instance, Sabrina shared how men gawk and cat call because they haven't been around women in a long time. She said:

In my crew, like [men] are very respectful and they are very inclusive. [But] I've noticed definitely after two weeks of not seeing females at like fire camp, it's kind of a different story. There's definitely a lot of gawking and men will approach me and have things to say...I'm sure it's just because they haven't been around a woman in a long time. But there's been cat calling and that kind of thing and my boss immediately puts a kibosh to it. But it's definitely there, for sure.

For Sabrina, her male colleagues' cat calling was understandable because they needed to be around women in order to temper their sexual desires. Comparably, Carrie mentioned that men cat call when without women for three weeks. She shared, "...men are very sexual creatures, I guess. So they definitely like cat call and see a pretty woman and they're not afraid to say something. Especially when they're without women for 21 days." Similar to Sabrina, Carrie suggested that it was reasonable when her male coworkers harassed women since they had a heightened sexual desire. In another example, Anne commented on how a woman has to be careful if she giggles or makes eye contact with a man at fire camp because it can be misinterpreted as a sign of interest or attraction. She explained, "...these guys haven't seen women in like two weeks or something and so, you

know, like a little giggle and eye contact like can easily be misconstrued.” Anne suggested that it was natural for one of her male coworkers to misinterpret giggling and eye contact as flirting after two weeks without women. Also describing her experiences with her male coworkers at fire camp, Tehachapi Doe explained that she was not allowed to walk around camp by herself. She expressed:

I had a captain that would not allow me to walk from one point to another without being escorted by a line supervisor. I could not walk anywhere in that camp without being escorted. HA! Isn't that something? Haha. No, but I put up with it. I put up with it.

Tehachapi Doe's captain treated her like a victim by not allowing her to walk through fire camp alone, completely infantilizing her in his attempts to protect her from her sexually aroused male coworkers. Her response to this bad behavior was to excuse it by “putting up with it.” Similarly, Amanda explained that she was not allowed to go out on the fire line because her crew was working alongside a convict fire crew. She said, “...when we combined with a con-crew, they wouldn't let me go with that because the men haven't been around girls for so long that they don't allow, they weren't comfortable with it...” Again, Amanda was infantilized by her superiors because they “wouldn't let” her join the men in doing the job. Moreover, she was kept from going out on the fire line to stay safe, while it was allowable for the convict fire crew to be hypersexual.

While many of the women wildland firefighters suggested that men tend to view women as sexual objects after being separated from women for long periods of time, one structural firefighter indicated that men harass women because they live in close quarters. Shelly explained:

I have talked to plenty of women that have been harassed and asked to do things that are completely inappropriate. I definitely think that it takes place in the fire

service, especially with being on duty for such long hours. You're basically living with these people.

For Shelly, harassment from her male colleagues was admissible because they live with each other. In another example, Tehachapi Doe suggested that men are sexual creatures who do not think with their brains. She said:

...you're going to have a gal that's there that's really nice looking and you know, and they fall all over themselves, which is natural and human nature to be that dumb. That's just the way it is, you know. Sometimes guys they're not thinking with their brains, they're thinking with other parts of their body.

Tehachapi Doe explained that men's sexual tendencies and behaviors toward their women counterparts is just human nature, and that "thinking with their private body parts" is natural.

In reasoning that men behave inappropriately due to their natural sexual tendencies, the women firefighters in the interviews have excused this bad behavior and accepted it as normal. As the males' poor behavior has become normalized, it appears that the women are unconsciously making excuses for the unacceptable behavior. For instance, the women excused harassment because they feel that men are powerless in controlling their bumbling sexual needs, and thus, believe that treating women appropriately is out of the men's control.

Pushing it Off

Women firefighters also excused inappropriate behavior of their male comrades by rationalizing it as inevitable behavior and just pushing it off. This tactic includes rolling with the punches, acting like 'one of the guys,' playing into it, shoving it away, laughing it off, and just taking it. For instance, one interviewee explained that as a

woman in fire, you can either be on the outside looking in, or you can join in with their jokes. Megan shared:

...as a female you have to be willing to work as hard as the guys and like I said, you have to be willing to like roll with the punches of their jokes...it's going to happen and you have to kind of jump in. And you can either be on the outside like looking in and you can be like, "Well I don't like what you said," or you can just be in the conversation, and generally when you're in the conversation, it's good.

For Megan, her male coworkers' inappropriate jokes were a normal part of working in a male-dominated field, so she rationalized them by "rolling with the punches." Similarly, Brooke explained that if you don't play into the men's jokes, then you are not accepted. She said:

...a huge part of this job is crude humor. That's just how it is, that's just how it is. It's accepted and if you're not part of it, you are unaccepted. You're not in the 'good ol' boy club'...you definitely have to play in to it. You have to play into it, because if you don't, they won't talk to you anymore...

Brooke perceived crude humor as an inevitable behavior, so she made allowances for it by "playing into it." While Megan and Brooke both discussed joining in and playing along with crude humor, Sammie explained that it's better for her to just walk away from it. She expressed:

I've been kind of like...a recluse just because like being the only girl, like it does get old hearing guys talk about guy stuff. It's so much easier just to step away from that and kind of like just do my own thing, which is really nice... just stepping back away from all of it and be like, "All right. This is enough."

Sammie extenuated the men's inappropriate discourse by temporarily stepping away from it.

Many women firefighters interviewed described needing to mentally prepare for their male coworkers' inappropriate and degrading behavior in advance. For example, Macy explained:

It is definitely harder for a woman to do this job in the type of environment that they set up. It doesn't matter what race you are, it is just the fact that you are a woman and there are things that you will need to keep to yourself...you do need to hold stuff in and so I would just say, don't only physically prepare but mentally prepare to hear some bullshit, to hear some bullshit that you don't want to hear, to do some shit that you don't think is necessary...

For Macy, coming into the organization prepared to “hear some bullshit” and “do some shit” that was unacceptable was her way of making an allowance for her male coworkers' bad behaviors. Another woman firefighter, Jackie, noted that you need to have a certain mentality going in to the job, knowing that firefighting is not going to be ‘a walk in the park,’ or flowers and roses for a woman. Instead, she explained that the job is going to be Copenhagen and some sweat. She added, “We know what we're signing up for...just being a chick and just taking it.” Jackie suggested that it is a requirement for women to come into the organization already accounting for male firefighters' bad behaviors, and “just taking it” for what it is. Similarly, Anne commented on the importance of looking at things in a different way as a woman firefighter. She said, “...being a female firefighter...you have to see things in a different way. Like if you get offended every time some old dude makes a comment about women and fire, like it's going to be hard for you...” For Anne, seeing things differently as not to get offended by derogatory comments was her way of justifying misconduct by her male colleagues. Another woman, Laura, explained that fighting back against unequal treatment would only make it worse. She said:

Those are some of the things that you learn to just laugh at because, is it right, wrong or indifferent? Probably not acceptable, but you learn to just like whatever cause if you fight it, it's going to make it worse.

Laura provided a rational for her male coworkers' unacceptable behaviors by suggesting that fighting against it would only make it worse. Another participant, Ella, explained how she pushed off discriminating comments. She expressed:

...I've got my red helmet on and the crew is all behind hiking and there's this perception, "Oh, is this female supervising all these guys?" and blah, blah, blah. And it's like, get to know somebody before you judge them. So that's always been and it happens. Do you personalize it? Do you not? I always just kind of let it bounce off me like, "Eh. You can have your thought and I have endless, traceless awareness of how I choose to respond to it."

Ella suggested that discriminatory comments made by male firefighters have "always been and it happens," and thus, she perceives those behaviors as inevitable. Because she views it as unavoidable, Ella just lets it "bounce off her" rather than personalizing it.

Correspondingly, another interviewee, Brooke, noted her strategy for dealing with harassment and stigma. She explained:

Like they call you things like "tent jumper," they'll call you things like "you're a fire slut" or blah blah blah behind your back and this could be your brothers that you work with and you just have to like...you kind of just have to push it off. Like if you hear like, "Oh, so and so thinks you're sleeping with this guy that you're friends with," you know you're not. As long as you know you're not, you shove it away.

For Brooke, shoving away or pushing off belittling comments made by her male coworkers was her way of excusing the behavior.

A few women firefighters described the ways in which they excuse harassment.

For instance, Tehachapi Doe disclosed that she just had to work with the bad behavior because it was never going to change. She expressed:

We would have never thought about [reporting harassment] to save our soul. Never would we...honestly, if you do something like that within the fire agency, you might as well just give up doing that job. Whether you like it or not, it's going to always be that way. No matter what...the boy's club is always going to be the boy's club. That's how it goes...that's never going to change. Never going

to change. All you can do is work with it...do the very best you can...Hey, they can't fault you if you can kick their ass. They can't fault you if you're the first one up the mountain, can they? So you work your ass off so you can get your ass up that mountain faster than the rest of them.

In her interview, Tehachapi Doe also explained that women who reported harassment did not remain in the organization for very long and that complaining to your supervisors was unheard of. She added, "I was on fires and I literally had crew members throwing stuff at me...One guy threw a shovel at me and missed by head by six inches...[But] You bucked up or you were done." Tehachapi Doe perceived harassment as inescapable in suggesting that "the boy's club would always be the boy's club" and that women needed to "buck up or you were done." Similarly, Brooke conveyed that reporting harassment would have made her look bad. She disclosed:

...but I knew [reporting harassment] would look bad. It would make me look bad as a rookie firefighter coming into a profession and being whiny. That's how I would have been looked at. Especially being on this district now for four years, that's how it would have been portrayed. And I knew better, I knew better. So I just didn't.

Like Tehachapi Doe, Brooke made an allowance for harassment so she could avoid being portrayed negatively by her male coworkers. Another interviewee, Jackie, suggested that women firefighters need to be flexible with the harassment they might experience on the job. She said:

...anybody that's that naive to think that [harassment] doesn't happen before they even sign up, you know, it's not good. You obviously haven't done your research and I think signing up for this job, that's something that you do have to take into consideration [and] you do have to have flexibility with.

According to Jackie, it is the woman's responsibility to do her research and prepare for being harassed prior to starting the job, as harassment is to be expected for women in fire.

In order to survive as a woman in the fire community, women firefighters often excused the bad behavior of their male comrades by accepting it and using strategies to help them dismiss it. The women firefighters in their interviews suggested that these strategies were necessary in order to avoid more discrimination and harassment. Thus, by pushing off the negative, degrading, and hurtful comments, actions, and behaviors of their male counterparts, the women firefighters were able to continue fighting fire alongside the men.

Overall, the women firefighters in this study have learned that in order to manage as a woman in the heavily male-dominated occupation of wildland firefighting, they need to use various techniques to excuse being treated unfairly by their male comrades. For instance, in their interviews, many women firefighters shared stories about harassment and gave examples of gender inequality they've experienced. Throughout their stories and examples, I noticed a common pattern of the women dismissing gender discrimination and sexual harassment by either justifying that men cannot help themselves because they are hard-wired to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or by rationalizing the men's bad behavior and just brushing it off. In both cases, the women contribute to reproducing the culture of hegemonic masculinity by normalizing their male coworkers' behavior, allowing it to continue, and accepting the idea that 'it's just the way it is.'

Acceptance

In talking with the women firefighters of this study, I realized that many of the participants had to work extremely hard physically, mentally, and emotionally in order to feel welcome in the male-dominated culture they were emerged in. Specifically, in this

section I reveal two strategies the women firefighters interviewed used to become accepted in the organization: (1) proving themselves as competent firefighters; and (2) defending themselves when they are treated unfairly by “pushing back.”

Proving Themselves

The women firefighters expressed in their interviews that their male counterparts and superiors often doubt their abilities to do the job or think women only made it there to fill a minority quota. Thus, the women explained that they have to work harder in order to prove themselves worthy and competent. For instance, one interviewee, Alyssa, disclosed that the most difficult challenge of her career thus far was proving her worth on her hotshot crew. She said:

...the most difficult thing for me in my entire career was getting on a hotshot crew and trying to prove my worth. And trying to not like discount myself because I'm not as fast or strong as a lot of the guys...the first two months of your first hotshot season is like, there's just a lot of like anxiety over if you're like doing well enough, or if you're proving yourself enough, or if you're giving them enough value as a person on their crew.

Alyssa had to work extra hard in order to prove that she was capable of fighting fire alongside men. Similarly, Laura explained that as a woman, you have to continuously prove yourself so you can earn your male coworkers' trust. She stated:

...there's always those days where it feels like it's a complete gender battle...you've got to continuously prove yourself or you've got to work harder than the guys because you have to prove yourself that you're good enough to be there and you have to earn their trust.

In her interview, she also discussed that in her nearly 25-years of experience in the organization, she has learned that being seen as an equal is how you go about it mentally. For instance, she added, “...you can sit around and whine and cry all day long or you can just get out there and prove yourself.” For Laura, continuously proving herself was the

only way to be seen as an equal. Correspondingly, another participant voiced that it is women's responsibility to prove themselves, despite men viewing women as inferior.

Anne stated:

...people are always gonna have something negative to say, you know? So I think you just need to learn to shut it out and just show them that you're capable of doing the job. So I really think it's again, why I get cranky sometimes, because it's like, yeah guys are d-bags sometimes and they say crappy things and might view us differently, but then that's why it's on us to like show them that we're capable of the job and that we're here for the right reasons...the onus is on us to just like step up to the plate.

Anne suggested that women need to prove their capabilities in order to survive in the male-dominated culture, rather than recommending men treat women as equals. A structural firefighter conveyed that she was able to prove herself with training. Shelly said:

Definitely at my house it's been a little hard breaking through that barrier. Like I said, it's kind of that boy's club. They've been all-men for a long time. It's been a hard track trying to basically prove myself to them that I can do the job, and through training I've been able to do that...I've been able to prove that I can be there and I can keep up.

Because Shelly's fire house had been all-men since its existence and the men within it did not view women as capable, she had to prove to the men that she could keep up with them. Another interviewee, Daisy, described how she was treated equally after she proved herself. She expressed:

...I even would [detail on] to hotshot crews. But as a hotshot crew, you got the crappiest job because you were just a substitute...So you would have to prove yourself. In every job, I always feel you have to prove yourself...And then as soon as I prove myself, I felt like it was equal [and] I was treated equally.

Daisy revealed that she was not treated as an equal until she proved her competency as a firefighter. Similarly, Randi said, "...some of my co-workers like completely accepted

me as an equal, as a co-worker. And then some of them, you do feel like you have to show, you have to prove yourself a little bit before you gain respect.” Randi explained that she was not treated with respect until she proved her worth on the crew. Another woman firefighter, Chris, also explained that she had to prove herself before she was taken seriously. She said:

I think that probably everyone’s first perception is probably like, “Hey, let’s see how this girl can hang.” So you really have to prove yourself in order for people to take you seriously, whereas like a new guy can just be taken seriously immediately and stuff.

Chris pointed out that women have to prove themselves to be taken seriously, whereas men just automatically have credibility when they join the organization. Tehachapi Doe also discussed how she had to prove that she was qualified to be a firefighter. She stated:

...by your actions, right? That could be how you would prove to [the men] that it was a good call that you were hired. Because your actions spoke loudly...if they learn that you want to work with them...and you prove to them that you’re qualified then, you know?

Tehachapi Doe proved to her male coworkers that she was qualified by demonstrating her competency and worth out on the fire line. Another woman firefighter, Brooke, disclosed that she started doing CrossFit—a constantly varied training program that builds strength and improves conditioning—in order to prove that she can lift as much as the men. She explained:

...you want to be treated like you can do everything they can because you know you can. You’ve done it, which is why I probably got into CrossFit because I was definitely trying to show like, I can lift just as much as you. I can do everything you can...it was just one of those where it’s like you try to prove yourself to them.

Because women are not taken seriously when they join the organization, they have to take extreme measures to prove their competency, such as doing CrossFit, like Brooke.

Similarly, Macy said, "...you could feel as strong as you are, but you always feel like you have a point to prove..." For Macy, it did not matter how strong she was, she continuously had to prove herself. Another woman firefighter, Stacey, disclosed that she has to prove herself more than the men ever will. She stated, "...you do have to prove yourself...at least for myself, I try to prove myself more than I think others ever will because I'm a girl and they're not." Stacey suggested that her male coworkers will never understand what it's like to have to prove your worth and competency because they are already seen as worthy and competent before they step out onto the fire line.

Finally, two other interviewees conveyed that men were more considerate and accepting after they proved their competency. For instance, Macy explained that the men treated her better and trusted her judgement after she proved her competency by running six miles on a sprained ankle. She said:

...I think [the men] were more considerate once I spoke up about certain workouts and just reminded them of my ankle. Once I proved, because the fact that I did the six miles, proved a lot. They didn't know I had a sprained ankle. So I think from then on they trusted my judgement.

For Macy, she was treated with respect after she proved that she was tough and could do the job. Ella also expressed that she built the men's trust and credibility by demonstrating her competency. She explained:

Well I think it was great to for me just to start off at such a young age because I didn't have like a perception...my mind wasn't tainted by like, "You couldn't do this or you can't do this cause you're a woman," it was always like, I'm just gonna do this, and I'm one of you, and we're no different. And I think instantly building the credibility, because people saw it like, "My goodness, you can sling a saw, and you can hike, and man, don't mess with you." And it was like, you instantly built their trust or credibility within the circle.

Ella suggested that she went into firefighting feeling equal with all of her coworkers, yet she only built credibility by proving that she could use a saw and hike.

Based on the women firefighters' interviews, the concept of having to prove yourself is only applicable to women in the field of firefighting, as men are automatically given credibility upon being hired and stepping through the doors of the station. Although some of the women firefighters suggested that they were accepted among the men after proving their worth and competency, other women conveyed that proving themselves was a constant battle. Either way, women often use proving themselves to their male coworkers and superiors as a strategy for being accepted into the masculine dominate culture.

Pushing Back

Aside from proving their worth to fit into the male-dominated culture, women firefighters also reported pushing back against inappropriate, degrading, and demoralizing comments and actions of their male comrades and supervisors. This tactic includes techniques like sticking up for themselves, speaking up when something bothers them, standing their ground, or snapping back. For instance, Anne described the importance of standing her ground and snapping back when someone insulted her. She said:

...you really have to grow a pair...people will test you whether you're male or female and you know, someone has something negative to say about women in fire? Then like you just fire right back. Like if you're going to like get upset and wilt every time someone's like that, then you're going to find it a real big struggle...it took me a while to figure it out. But you really have to like find your confidence, snap back, stand your ground, like don't let people get away with like trying to [challenge you]...as soon as you do that, then you're accepted.

Anne suggested that getting upset over insulting comments was not the correct way to handle inappropriate behavior, and explained that she was accepted when she snapped back. Amanda also suggested giving negative behavior right back to the men. She expressed:

If you're out looking for it to be insulting, trust me you'll find it...if you're out looking to be insulted, if you're super sensitive, even if it's like any kind of joking or super crazy and you just don't understand the basis of like, it's a joke, like give it back. Like be like that hurts my feelings because I'm a woman and you're sexualizing her...I'm not going in there to change the minds of the men to be like, women are here! I was going in for the job. I knew what I was going in for, I knew it was male-dominated, I don't care if it was male-dominated, like I was here for a job and it's not that big of a deal. But I'm also like not one of those super hypersensitive people.

Similar to Anne, Amanda explained that as a woman in fire, she needed to joke back in order to be accepted because men are not going to change their minds and suddenly treat women fairly. Jackie also expressed that men should not have to change their behaviors just because women are there. She explained:

I like to be able to converse with them on an unprofessional level and still have it be cool...I like opening up that door of, they can talk to me. We can flick each other shit back and there's not going to be any hard feelings, right? If you offend me, I'll let you know. But until then, it's an open door...I think that's how it should be. Guys shouldn't tip toe around because there's a chick on the engine.

While some women, like Jackie, feel that men should not change their behaviors to cater to women, other women conveyed that standing up for themselves and letting the men know how they feel is a valuable technique for persuading the men to discontinue their bad behavior toward women. For instance, Sabrina mentioned she was teased until she stood up for herself. She said:

They're a bunch of tough guys. And I don't say I'm tough all the time. I know that I definitely have my weaknesses, but I definitely act tougher around them for sure

and we do a lot of teasing and that kind of thing. I know that if I don't stick up for myself, they're just gonna tease the crap out of me.

For Sabrina, acting tougher and sticking up for herself when she was being teased was the only way to get her male coworkers to put an end to their teasing. Similarly, Sammie explained how her male coworkers often apologized and quit their bad behavior after she told them she was uncomfortable with it. She stated:

I think as women though too, we need to, not assert ourselves in like a bitchy manner, but just like, allow people to understand me, like I'm here. And not deal with bullshit, like not deal with guys making like crude comments or if they say something that makes you uncomfortable or does something that makes you uncomfortable, you let him know right away. And I know that's so hard to do and especially like with younger women, but like I started that when I was younger and I've stuck with it and it really does work, of course, like maybe not all the time but majority of the time they like take a step back and are like, "Damn I'm sorry."

Sammie explained that her male colleagues often "took a step back" and apologized to her after she told them their behavior made her uncomfortable. Another interviewee, Jackie, disclosed that she immediately addressed the men when they upset her. She expressed:

If we have an issue with someone, you handle. Boom. If I got something to say to you, or you tick me off, I'm going to say something. We're going to address it and move forward because I'm not going to sit there and let it linger...dwell on it, pity, and start to ignore you so that way you can see that I'm upset, right? Like no. I'm going to walk up to you and be like, "Hey, that was really shitty what you did and this is why.

Jackie suggested that the best way for her to move forward from being treated poorly was by directly addressing the situations with her male coworkers. Similarly, Brooke discussed how men need to be told that their behavior is offensive. She explained:

...you're getting teased and you don't like it, speak up for yourself...if you don't like it, tell them. They're not going to know. Men are not going to read you. They don't read through the science of you being angry and going to the bathroom

every time you're mad. They're not going to know. They're going to think that you're having a bad day and you have to pee a lot...If you're having a bad day, be honest about it because we work in a tight truck.

Brooke explained that being honest with the men was important because firefighters are constantly around each other for long periods at a time and getting along with each other is important when it comes to fighting fire. Thus, she suggested that addressing bad behavior helped diminish it.

In another example, Amanda shared how she happily handled discriminating behavior from her boss. She explained:

[Having a mean boss] made me push back and be like, well bring it. So I made sure that I was super bubbly and laughing and just like super optimistic every day, and just made sure I shoved happiness in his face...just so he wouldn't have the gratification of like knowing he broke me down. So it's like I took the weight he made me carry happily and I wouldn't say anything the whole time. I wouldn't bitch about it. I just did it with a smile on my face. And then that way, no one could talk shit to me about it...I just made it even more bigger of a point to say like 'F— you' and just laugh the whole season and just kill it.

By owning discriminatory behavior from her boss, Amanda was able to be optimistic and enjoy her experience despite the discrimination she experienced. Moreover, by “shoving happiness” in her boss's face, her boss was not able continue affecting her with his bad behavior. Another woman firefighter, Anne, conveyed that standing up for herself made her life as a firefighter easier. She said:

...it sucks, but you're in a men's environment. So you really need to like stand up for yourself sometimes and snap back and not be a delicate flower. That's a learned skill. I took me a while, but it definitely makes your life a lot easier.

In her interview, Anne suggested that standing up for herself made her career as a firefighter easier, as she experienced less discrimination and harassment. Similarly,

Brooke expressed the importance of having a backbone as a woman in the fire community, and not being delicate. She stated:

...I feel like mentally you work double as hard. You have to come into this career with a backbone. And if you don't, you'll quit. Guaranteed. I've seen so many women leave this job and it's really sad, it breaks my heart because a lot of the women, even in my own district, that have left, you see them so defeated and it kills you.

Brooke explained that women have to come into the firefighting organization with strength in their character and work twice as hard as their male counterparts in order to deal with the inequalities they experience.

The women firefighters interviewed often had to stand up for themselves and explain to their male coworkers that they were upset or uncomfortable when they were being harassed. Some of the women also conveyed that 'pushing back' as a strategy helped mitigate the bad behavior of their male coworkers. On the other hand, a few women interviewed expressed that standing their ground and speaking up for themselves is a constant strategy they use to momentarily dissipate gender discrimination or harassment. But often times, when the women speak up for themselves, the men are very accommodating, and therefore, the women tend to use 'pushing back' as a strategy for being accepted into the masculine dominated culture.

Due to the misconceptions and stereotypes about femininity, women are assumed to be less capable and less likely to succeed than their male counterparts (Schilt, 2006). These misconceptions and stereotypes arise from our society's cultural beliefs, which strongly align masculinity with authority and prestige (Schilt, 2006). In addition, these cultural beliefs are embedded in the workplace, where masculine and feminine roles are unequal. According to the women interviewed, they are negatively impacted by

stereotypes about femininity as their male coworkers and supervisors view them as incompetent firefighters and unworthy of the job. Thus, they are viewed as ‘others’ and face discrimination and harassment. However, the women firefighters interviewed commonly worked harder to prove themselves as competent and worthy, as well as pushed back against unequal treatment by speaking up for themselves in order to become accepted into the masculine dominated culture.

Potential Strategies

While the women firefighters mostly described their experiences in the occupation in their interviews, which included aspects of the job, such as duties, physical fitness, challenges they experience, and strategies they use to deal with unequal treatment; they were also given the opportunity to discuss their hopes and dreams for the future of firefighting. Therefore, in this section I exhibit three potential strategies for reducing gender barriers and inequalities as proposed by the women firefighters interviewed: (1) make changes within management; (2) implement training and mentoring opportunities; and (3) increase the percentage of women in the organization, while instilling methods to decrease gender discrimination and harassment.

It Starts with Management

When asked what changes they would make to the organization to make firefighting better for women entering the field in the future, or how they hope to see this occupation in terms of gender representation and gender equality in the next five to ten years, the women interviewed often presented the idea of making changes within management and leadership positions and removing the people who engage and

contribute to gender discrimination and sexual harassment. For instance, Stacey hoped for people in management positions to respect women. She said:

I think if you have people in management positions that respect women, then you're going to see that trickle down through the people below you. But if you don't have that, then there's not a standard to be held or there's not like an expectation that people are faced with because if these people that are in charge of you don't care how you treat people, then you're never going to be questioned or you're never going to learn like what's appropriate and what's not. Like that's a big part...I would change the way that management like handles things.

Stacey explained that women firefighters would benefit from a change within management that would trickle down through all employees, such as treating women as equals. Similarly, Mikayla recommended leaders who pay attention to and care about the people being treated differently. She expressed:

Maybe having more female leaders, but not just having them as leaders just because they're female. But giving them the opportunity. And I just think [gender equality] just needs to be talked about more...cause we have our briefings every day and we'll usually do like a safety topic. I just think [gender equality] needs to be a good discussion, whether the leaders are female or not. But the leaders need to be taking it seriously and looking out for those that they might suspect are being treated differently. I just think it needs to start with the leaders because otherwise everyone just follows their example.

Like Stacey, Mikayla discussed that people in leadership positions need to set better examples for the people below them by talking about gender inequality, taking gender inequality seriously, and actually helping people who are affected by gender inequality.

Another interviewee, Tehachapi Doe, indicated that changes to the culture of hegemonic masculinity need to come from within the organization. She shared:

So [my] captain said, that if there was going to be any change, that it had to come from all sources. That it was not the women that were being hired in that had to do the changing, that it was the men that had to do the changing because the women were obviously the minority, and the men were the ones that had been there since you know, God was alive, and the changes, we had to adapt, but the

changes had to come from within the organization...because like he said, [women are] here to stay, and I'll never forget him saying that...

Tehachapi Doe suggested that the men within the organization needed to change by accepting the idea of women as equals. In order to make changes to the management and leadership positions, Adrianna proposed removing all of the people who commit or condone gender discrimination and/or sexual harassment. She explained:

I think the only way to solve the problem is to take out the bad apples. You know the saying, "One bad apple can ruin the whole barrel," and it's true. You have that person who has those preconceived notions or those prejudices for whatever reason, but they influence everybody else. And like I said, there are so many great, supportive men in this field and a lot of them are mentors to me or friends to me, and if everybody was like that, gender would be a non-issue. But unfortunately, there is a very large percentage of individuals in this field of work that see gender and don't see [women as] equals.

Rather than getting the men to change their perceptions of women, Adrianna suggested an overall cultural change by completely removing the people who do not see women as equals. Correspondingly, Anna suggested getting rid of the horrible people who have committed harassment or assault, and making sure the people in leadership positions respect everyone equally. She expressed:

Get rid of all the horrible people that are there. Haha! Like just get rid of people who have committed harassment or assault. That's just basic...the fire community has talked a lot about how we need a culture change, and I feel it happening in the people of my generation. Like people in their mid-20s or so, like we have different ideas of how we want to run things than what the old school mentality is. And so, I think like just having more people who are in leadership positions that really like instill values of respect and make that a priority, and how they run their crews, and I think it definitely comes from like the top down. And so, if we can make sure that that is being communicated on all levels and making sure that people really care about respect, I think it will transfer over to everyone else.

Like many of the women above, Anna felt that firefighting could be better for women entering in the future if the people in management and leadership positions behaved in

ways that their subordinates would want to emulate, by instilling values of respect.

Another woman firefighter, Laura, also discussed the need for people in management positions to ensure everyone is treated equally. She explained:

A lot of women that I've known throughout my career, they have just gotten so frustrated with everything that they just give up and they leave and so then it leaves that huge hole. And management tends to be like, "Well, they wanted to go home and have babies or they just couldn't handle it," or whatever instead of, in my opinion, really looking at the situation and saying, "How could we have kept this woman if it was truly because of frustrations? And how could we have committed to that person? Or how could we have changed things to go forward in the future to make sure that this frustration is not continuing?" I think we, as a fire community, still have a lot of learning to do to connect the dots on the differences between men and women...also we need to teach people to communicate and we need to allow people to truly go to management or go to their supervisor and have those open conversations without retaliation, but when people are scared, they're not going to have those conversations, and the communication is not there, and people get mad and they leave.

Laura disclosed that management places the blame on women when they are forced to leave the occupation due to discrimination, harassment, stigma, or wanted to have children, rather than reflecting on what they could have done to make the environment better for women. Thus, she suggested that management needs to learn more about gender differences between men and women so they can extinguish inequalities. In her interview, Laura also expressed her frustrations with the fear of retaliation, and not having a safe environment that allows women to have conversations with their supervisors about gender discrimination and harassment. Similarly, Candi recommended changing the hegemonic masculine culture and holding people accountable for their bad behavior. She shared:

I would change the way that we hold people accountable. Like right now, when people mess up or do stupid things...when people do things that break policy, they need to be held accountable and we need to be able to have enough power to fire them and get rid of them because they can in the future be a liability...I also

think that it has to be a cultural change. Like we have to keep developing folks that are willing to respect each other, and use better language, and not adhere to these roles when people have different goals outside their gender role potentially. And I think our communication just needs to get better...there's this demographic right now that is at the Battalion Chief Ranger level, that is still essentially part of the 'Good ol' Boys' club, and we're all just kind of waiting for them to retire so we can kind of change things...

Candi revealed that men in the current culture of hegemonic masculinity are not held accountable when they break policy or do "stupid things." Thus, she suggested that the fire organization needs a cultural change where people respect each other, use better language, and communicate more. Another interviewee, Alyssa, also advocated for redeveloping the culture to not allow harassment to be acceptable. She expressed:

...I think a lot of crews are moving in a direction of like, we have to redevelop our culture to not include harassment...cause like harassment of any kind, whether it's hazing a new guy on the crew or it's harassing a veteran woman on the crew, like any sort of disrespect or harassment gets shut down right away...that's something that a lot of crews are developing as an actual culture in their program rather than just something that they combat as it comes up...you can't just like continue encouraging these like minor hazing things that people do to rookies and then not expect it to like snowball into other forms of harassment.

According to Alyssa, her crew, among others, has started making a shift toward not allowing harassment within the firefighting organization. Many of the other women firefighters interviewed agree that a cultural change that does not allow harassment would benefit women currently in the field and women entering the field in the future.

Some of the women firefighters interviewed strongly believe that making changes to management and leadership positions would potentially create a better environment for women in the workplace. For instance, one improvement they suggested could be changing the way management handles inequalities, like gender discrimination and sexual harassment, in order to hold people accountable for bad behavior. Another

improvement that the women interviewed would like to see implemented would be disposing of all the people who have committed or condoned gender discrimination and/or sexual harassment.

Training and Mentoring Opportunities

In addition to making changes within management, many of the women firefighters interviewed felt that implementing more training and mentorship opportunities would make firefighting better for women entering the field in the future. For example, one interviewee, Sarah, suggested implementing more training around harassment and discrimination, as well as leadership training for women. She said:

I would say, more leadership training and opportunities for women...giving women the courage to take on leadership positions and the tools to take on leadership positions. I think that's pretty important. And more training around harassment and discrimination...and that's really hard to do that just for the Forest Service, because like, how do you change a culture of men that don't understand that they're discriminating? So that's like a big one. But I have this dream that there will be women in fire that are allowed to drive and that don't get like, creepy comments from their co-workers and their bosses.

According to Sarah, if the organization implemented more training around harassment, discrimination, and leadership, women in the future might be allowed to drive on their hand crews and would no longer get “creepy” comments from their male coworkers.

Another interviewee, Sammie, recommended implementing equal opportunity training. She expressed:

We need more women...and we really need to like spread the thought of like, women are here to fight fire and that's not changing. So it's, you treat us as equals because we are equals. And that's something that I know that we go through, like equal opportunity training and stuff like that. But we all know that's a joke and it's kind of just like click through it...it's just something that like, it's not enough, like it's not enough for the old timers or the people who don't think we need to be there.

Sammie expressed her concern for improving equal opportunity training, because the current PowerPoints and videos regarding equal opportunity do not help in changing the behaviors of men who do not think women belong as firefighters. Similarly, another woman firefighter, Anna, suggested making experiences like the Women in Fire Prescribed Training Exchange (WTREX) more available to women in the field and women entering the field in the future. According to Anna, WTREX works to recognize and reinforce the importance of women's perspective and leadership in fire management. For instance, she explained:

I think having female support networks for more female firefighters would be really helpful. Have you heard about the Women's Prescribed Fire Training Exchange, WTREX? I was super lucky that my FMO encouraged me to apply and paid me to go to that conference...I think that's the only reason why I'm still doing fire, honestly...maybe I would have kept doing it on my own, but I was having a rough time and being able to meet a whole bunch of other women who are successful and who had been through things that I was experiencing and didn't know how to quite explain or didn't know if other people felt that too...to see how they had gotten through it, and also how they hadn't been able to talk to other women about it really, and to form that community. And like now I have this community of 40 to 50 women across the country and I know that if I'm having a rough time, I can call them and they love me...And getting to see leadership qualities that were more similar to my own than ones that I had seen in men. So, if we could make that kind of experience more available to like all women in fire, I think that would do a huge, a huge service to everybody.

Anna had the opportunity to attend a conference that focused on the importance of women's perspectives and leadership qualities, which she expressed was one reason she did not quit fighting fire when she was having a rough time fitting in. Thus, she suggested implementing a system that allowed for women to have other women as support networks. Another woman participant, Anne, also proposed making women in fire mentoring programs more available to women in the organization and women entering the organization. She said:

I would like there to be, well there is a women in fire mentoring program, but I don't think it's like a really set in stone program. I think it's more loose. But there is a mentoring program and I know people who are involved in it, and it's really helpful, and I wish there had been something like that place when I started or that I was aware of. [Firefighting] is like totally different world. It's like your life changes. There's a new language to learn, there's expectations that are unspoken. It's like a whole culture shock and it's terrifying and exhausting, especially as a female.

For Anne, having a women mentoring program would have helped her overcome the culture shock she experienced when she started her career as a firefighter. Additionally, Macy also advocated for a firefighter mentorship program that speaks on behalf of gender equality. She expressed:

I think that there should be like at least a mentorship program of past women firefighters. To not only mentor the new women coming on board, but to also speak to the males that are already there. Like I said, some of [the men] are saying things they don't even realize they are saying. It's their ignorance, and you don't know how people have grown up, but I think there needs to be some sort of on the job training and leadership and mentorship program for this.

In addition to implementing women mentorship programs, Macy suggested instilling a program that would help in mentoring new women joining the organization, but also to help male firefighters understand the challenges women firefighters experience. While many women urged for training and mentorship opportunities for women in fire, one interviewee advocated for promoting women in fire at summer camps so children could learn about the career and see both men and women firefighters. Shelly said:

I would say reaching out to some of the younger girls and having a summer camp basically. Kind of getting them involved when they're younger and get them thinking about it...It's a great job and just showing people that, especially athletic girls that like to be outside, it's a great way to learn a lot and you don't always have to stick with it. There's plenty of avenues to branch off from it and it's great learning too.

According to Shelly, promoting women firefighters at youth camps could work to change the culture of hegemonic masculinity as young boys and girls would be able to men and women equally performing their jobs.

In their interviews, many women firefighters discussed their experiences with other women in fire. While some women had built positive and supportive relationships with other women in the workplace to help them maneuver the masculine dominate culture, other women firefighters often had negative experiences with both women and men firefighters, making their job all the more challenging. Thus, many women firefighters interviewed suggested implementing mentorship programs so women entering the field could create support networks with their woman comrades. The women also conveyed how important having a strong support network is when working in an environment where you are not seen as an equal. Therefore, some women interviewed suggested implementing more training around gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and equal opportunity.

Increase Women, Reduce Harassment

According to the women firefighters interviewed, it was many of their hopes and dreams to see the percentage of women in the field of firefighting increase while gender discrimination, gender inequality, and sexual harassment decreased. Many women interviewed suggested strategies like enforcing evaluations and zero harassment tolerance policies would help to create a more equal and safer workplace for women firefighters. They also expressed that having a more equal distribution of men and women in the organization would make a positive difference toward gender equality. For instance, one interviewee, Adrianna, expressed her hopes for the future of wildland firefighting. She

said, “I hope to see more females, you know, even if we can't remove those folks that disrespect this gender, at least trying to even out the playing field a little bit. I think it would make a big difference.” Adrianna suggested that acquiring more women to the organization would help to reduce inequalities. Similarly, Sarah hoped for more women on crews and in leadership roles, and added that she would like to see a safer environment for women in fire. She expressed:

I hope to see just a larger percentage of women on crews and a larger percentage of women in leadership roles. And the women that are working, to feel safe at work. Like, at fire camp, I don't walk to the showers alone...to have little things like that not be such a concern.

Sarah felt that getting more women into the organization and into leadership roles would help create an environment where women feel safe at work and at fire camp. Another woman firefighter, Anna, also wished for more women in the organization, but even more so, hoped women eventually get more support and are no longer harassed. She explained:

...just simply, I would love to see the numbers go up of women in fire. Like right now we're at ten percent, I'd love to see it go to 30 or 40 percent. That would be awesome, but I also recognize that this job is not for everyone...So I don't think the answer is trying like an affirmative action idea of accepting more women or something like that. I think it really has to be the right people doing it...so if those numbers can't change, I don't think that that's the only thing that is a marker of success, but just having more women would be great and having more avenues of support...having people not be harassed and assaulted and having people feel respected in their workplaces. Like those things are harder to put a number on but I think are like, just as, or maybe more important, as the numbers.

Although Anna would love to see more women in the organization, she expressed that increasing support and respect for women in the workplace, especially women who are harassed or assaulted, is more important than the number of women in firefighting.

Another participant, Alyssa, also had aspirations of all coworkers being nice to each other. She shared:

...it was like a huge emphasis at the beginning of the year like that we are not rude to each other...And I think a lot of hotshot crews are moving towards that policy of being nice to each other instead of like being a bunch of dicks...And I think that's because of like this role of like bringing women in...certainly having female presence and [women in] overhead roles plays a huge part in making the crew a more hospitable...it's cool to see how pervasive the attitude of just being kind to each other is in the fire world...it becomes more of like a culture thing then...

Alyssa mentioned that her entire hotshot crew focused on being nice to each other as a result of having more women in overhead roles, which created a more hospitable culture for all involved. In another example, Daisy advocated for implementing an evaluation system for the supervisors to be evaluated by an expert team during the season in order to ensure equality. For instance, she explained:

...the only way to [have equality] is evaluations, right? And I don't know that [my boss] was ever really evaluated...no one ever came. And I think of his teaching, nobody ever came and saw how he treated us or made sure that he was on top. He just had to report [to somebody]. Nobody came and asked us how we felt. So maybe that could be more of a checkup...And then a little evaluation for them that we could do...

Similar to school systems, Daisy suggested implementing anonymous drop-by evaluations to ensure superiors were treating their subordinates with respect and equality. In addition to having an outside evaluation, Daisy continued in suggesting creating an opportunity for employees to anonymously send in evaluations at the end of their season. She said:

...if females at the end of their season would be able to do more evaluations, be able to write, be able to have an anonymous place to where they can send to something and have people contact them. I don't know if people really know that in firefighting. I wouldn't have known who to contact if I was being harassed, especially if it was my boss, that's the only person that I report to every single day. I wouldn't know who to go to...if I went [to my department] then they would know that I went there, right? That wasn't anonymous...I don't know that people in firefighting know how to express themselves and maybe they would feel safer if they had somewhere that they [could] go to.

Because women are so fearful of retaliation, Daisy found it important for women to have the opportunity to anonymously evaluate their superiors or male coworkers. Similarly, Candi said she desired that management would adhere to the zero-tolerance policy for harassment and that women would not be the ones punished for reporting harassment.

She shared:

...the Forest Service has put in to place that we sign the harassment policy, where we have absolutely zero tolerance, and I would just like to see them adhere to that. When folks speak up, I would like to see an investigation if they think it's serious and that it's really professionally done, really thorough, but also in a timely manner because what is happening is these people are filing complaints and it takes years for the investigation to get done and during the investigation period, the person that ends up getting moved or whatever is usually the person that filed the complaint, not the one that is potentially like the perpetrator...[The perpetrators] get rewarded for poor behavior whereas the person who is being affected is the one that gets punished. So, I'd like to see that get changed.

In her interview, Candi suggested that when women report harassment, the investigation period can take up to years, during which time the women have to transfer to another district or choose to leave the organization altogether, rather than the perpetrator being punished.

The women interviewed have demonstrated that firefighting is not only a "man's job." For instance, they revealed many qualities necessary to be successful in this occupation, most of which were not qualities typically associated with masculine traits. Thus, they hope that the ratio of women to men in this occupation will be more equal if more women are able to recognize that firefighting is a possible career prospect for women. However, the women interviewed also expressed that if the percentage of women in the field did not increase, that reducing harassment by implementing evaluations or

enforcing zero tolerance policies was the most important strategy in creating equality for women firefighters.

Since the time when women began entering the workforce, gender has dictated women's competency in the workplace and in society (Smith, 2013; Whittock, 2002). As a result, the women firefighters in this study have had to endure inequalities, hostile work environments, and various forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, and also engage in numerous techniques to prove their competency and become accepted in the culture of hegemonic masculinity. However, the women firefighters interviewed have not given up, and they have hopes and dreams of a better future for the fire community. For instance, they felt as though making changes to the way management handles sexual harassment and discrimination, making changes to the way management allows hegemonic masculinity to be reinforced by allowing inequalities to continue, and making changes to the way management is also male-dominated would create a more equal and safe work environment for women in the organization. They also felt that implementing more training opportunities around these issues and more mentorship programs for women and young girls could also contribute to a better work environment. Lastly, they felt that working toward balancing the ratio of men to women in the organization and enforcing more strict policies around gender discrimination and sexual harassment would help create a positive change for women entering the field in the future.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the challenges women firefighters experience as they work disproportionately alongside their male coworkers, and discover the strategies, if any, that they use to deal with those challenges. In this final chapter, I review the overall findings of this research study, illuminate problematic gender inequalities that need action, and discuss limitations and directions for future research. Twenty-five women firefighters shared aspects of their job, including positives and negatives, according to their lived experiences in the workplace. As this analysis reveals, women firefighters experience an array of challenges due to traditional gender norms and stereotypes and the culture of hegemonic masculinity, and use various strategies to deal with those challenges.

The data reveal that women in the fire community endure gender discrimination and harassment, micro-aggressions, stigma, imposter syndrome, struggle with work-life management in contrast to their male coworkers, and often alter their behaviors based on the need to become accepted in the masculine dominated culture. These challenges are consistent with data that has been found in previous studies regarding stigma and women working in non-traditional occupations. For instance, women disclosed being stigmatized by the public, as the public views women firefighters as employing methods that defy gender norms and puts their femininity into question (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). This form of stigmatization aligns with morally tainted dirty work. Moreover, women also revealed being stigmatized from within the organization by their male coworkers, as the men often believe that women are not physically strong enough or worthy enough to fight

fire. These stigmatizations are directly in line with previous literature on stigma, discrimination, and prejudice of women in the workplace.

In addition, the challenges women firefighters reported in this study coincide with research on token women, such that women often feel like they need to work harder and prove themselves as a result of being hypersurveilled by traditional male workers who assume incompetence or hold a disbelief that women can do physical aspects of the job (Smith, 2013). More so, women firefighters as tokens experience gender role socialization, stereotyping, more adverse working conditions than their male counterparts, and more experiences of sexual harassment and gender discrimination (Ericksen & Schultheiss, 2009; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Mansfield et al., 1991; Stringer & Duncan, 1985). Due to these gendering practices, the women in this study use various strategies, such as proving themselves, to get by. For instance, they remove themselves using strategies such as internalizing belittling remarks they receive, hiding their femininity, or desexualizing their bodies, and they play into the masculine-dominated culture by learning “masculine” language, learning how to be in the presence of talk about women, and acting like the boys.

While sections of this research aligned with previous literature, some new understandings and insights emerged as a result of my research problem. First, the women firefighters in this study offered a new way of describing the work in a male-dominated occupation. For instance, the women shared an extensive amount of qualities needed to be a successful firefighter, most of which were not typical of the qualities traditionally associated with “men’s work.” Rather than have typical male traits, such as strength, authority, and aggression, women described qualities such as situational

awareness, being mentally tough, bringing a positive attitude to work, having good communication, and being adaptable and flexible.

Next, the data added to the literature on the challenges and hardships women face in non-traditional fields by illuminating microaggressions, imposter syndrome, and work-life management. Microaggressions were present in accordance with men perceiving women as threats as they started advancing in their careers, and they also arose between women, as women viewed other women as competition in trying to prove their competency and worth in the organization. The women also conveyed feeling like imposters alongside their male coworkers, as they struggled in trying to become accepted into the male-dominated culture. This struggle resulted in heightened levels of fear, stress, and anxiety, and lower levels of self-confidence, and ultimately, a feeling of not being 'good enough' to be firefighters. Additionally, the women in this study confessed to being disadvantaged in ways their male counterparts are not, when it came time to starting a family. For example, many women shared stories of women either transferring to a department that does not require them to be out on the line, or leaving the organization altogether. This challenge is specific to women firefighters in this occupation.

The data also added to and provided new findings regarding future strategies for making firefighting better for women entering the field in the future in terms of gender equality and gender representation. For instance, based on their own experiences and perspectives as women firefighters, the participants of this study shared strategies they felt would improve inequalities for women in their organization. These strategies included making changes to management, such as the culture and gender norms and

stereotypes they allow, as well as accepting more women into leadership positions.

Women also suggested implementing more training and mentorship opportunities, and enforcing more strict policies around gender discrimination and sexual harassment. I feel that taking suggestions directly from women who experience gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and stigma provides both a unique and insightful view on the matter.

Finally, this research advances and illuminates women's entry into the blue-collar occupations, and helps to further expose the stereotypes and gender norms surrounding blue-collar women. Moreover, this research has added another occupation to the list within the literature on both nontraditional and blue-collar work that women engage in, wildland firefighting, thus revealing data that future researchers may employ in their own feminist work.

Overall, this analysis has revealed that women firefighters are, in fact, discriminated against and sexually harassed by their male colleagues, and often stigmatized both within the occupation and by society despite the advances women have made in nontraditional occupations. Although advances have been made, we are still at a time where blue-collar work is still considered "men's work." From the moment women enter this occupation, they face barriers on the job. As the analysis revealed, they encounter pressure to do better from their male coworkers and supervisors, and due to that pressure, they are likely to experience imposter syndrome. They can also be stigmatized both within and outside the organization, they do not receive respect or support when they want to start families or have kids, and they are commonly discriminated against and harassed on the job. The inequalities women experience arise due to gendered norms and stereotypes about women, along with the culture of

hegemonic masculinity that constrains them. As a result, the data unveiled that women use various strategies to manage and deal with the challenges and hardships they face. Although it is good that women are currently using these strategies so they can do their jobs, both the challenges they experience and the strategies they use to mitigate them are problematic, and a few implications arise from these themes. Thus, the questions that remain are: (1) What can be done to create a better and more equal work environment for women in this occupation? and (2) How can we boost interest and draw more women into jobs like wildland firefighting?

To start, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and stigma have to be reduced. I argue if these injustices are reduced, many of the challenges women currently experience will diminish, and they will no longer need to use temporary strategies like excusing bad behavior of their male coworkers or proving their competence and worth in order to become accepted into the masculine-dominated culture. In order to reduce the injustices, the current systems fire organizations have in place need to be revised. Currently, the sexual harassment and discrimination reporting system hinders women, as it is often not anonymous and can take up to years to complete an investigation. Due to this hindrance, the woman who reported is forced to transfer to another district or leave the organization altogether, rather than punishing the perpetrator. There are also a few mentoring systems currently instilled within the organization, such as WTREX, however they are not easily accessible or well-known to all women. Lastly, the fire organization has sexual harassment training systems put in place, yet the women firefighters interviewed disclosed how ineffective they are and mentioned that nobody takes them seriously. Women are not the ones who are not good enough, the culture of hegemonic

masculinity and the current systems for mitigating discrimination and harassment are not good enough.

Just as gender is fluid and differs with culture and time, the systems in place have to be fluid and on-going. For instance, in the late 1960s and early 70s when my mom was growing up, she was not allowed to play sports and she was required to wear dresses to school, along with all of the other girls she grew up with. For myself, I was fortunate enough to play any sport my heart desired while growing up, and one change that made that possible was government funding. Schools started allowing girls to play sports so they could get funding, because schools had to demonstrate equality for women in order to receive money. I argue that relocating funding within the federal government in order to put more focus on equality for women with reporting systems and mentoring and training opportunities, equality for women would slowly begin to improve.

We need to promote practices, trainings, and policies that address the barriers that women face, including respecting and supporting women who have family responsibilities. Similar to the suggestions from the women firefighters in this study, I argue that this organization needs to instill better training systems around discrimination and harassment, better mentorship opportunities for all genders, but especially women as an underrepresented group entering the field, and an improved system for reporting discrimination and harassment so women no longer have to be afraid of retaliation. However, if management does not adhere to these improvements, funding needs to be reallocated. In addition to instilling better training systems around gender discrimination and harassment, and instilling mentorship opportunities for women to network with other women in the field, I suggest implementing an evaluation system, also similar to teachers

in schools, where supervisors, Captains, and management gets evaluated on random occasions, an opportunity for all employees to submit an anonymous evaluation at the end of every season, a zero tolerance policy around harassment that is adhered to, and people in management who will look out for the best interests of women, encourage equality, and enforce a culture of kindness. These changes, in turn, will attract more and more women to firefighting, and the more women that enter into this occupation, the better chance women will have at breaking the stereotypes, and thus, the higher likelihood that the stereotypes will be changed. Once the stereotypes begin to change, the culture of hegemonic masculinity can start to change, at least within male-dominated occupations.

I know a change like this is possible, because many women firefighters interviewed discussed situations and experiences where they felt as equals, had supportive male coworkers and supervisors, and did not experience discrimination or harassment. However, many women were also unaware of the strategies they were actually using to deal with discrimination and harassment, as these practices have become normalized. In fact, stigma, stereotypes, and gender discrimination often go unnoticed in the workplace as stigmatizing, stereotyping, and discriminating against women has become normalized, especially among male-dominated occupations (Link & Phelan, 2001). Therefore, I argue that because stigmatizing, stereotyping, and discriminating against women is normalized, the women might view the strategies they use to mitigate those injustices as a normal way to function in their occupation.

Moreover, despite the gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and stigmatizations women firefighters experienced on the job, the women were extremely

satisfied with their career choice. For instance, many women expressed having an appreciation for being outside, enjoying the spontaneity of the job as their tasks were constantly changing due to the unpredictability of fire, they found happiness in the relationships they built within the organization, they felt like their job had meaning, and they felt proud and accomplished after a day out on the line. Although women expressed an overwhelming satisfaction for the job despite the inequalities they experience, I believe that women firefighters would be even more passionate about their jobs if they were supported, respected, and treated equally; and in turn, more women would be attracted to the occupation. However, more evidence would need to be collected to understand why women do not apply for more firefighting jobs.

One limitation was found in this study and questions that arise from that limitation remain to be answered. In this research study, I did not ask respondents to identify their sexual orientation or their race. Therefore, it is hard to know whether or not race or sexual orientation would affect the challenges women face and the strategies they use to deal with those challenges. Due to this limitation, I suggest the use of intersectionality theory in future research, which would provide qualitative data to assist in understanding various intersections, such as race and sex, and how these intersections work positively for women or negatively against them.

Although I found it extremely important and valuable to highlight women's voices as they share their stories and experiences of working in a nontraditional field in order to better understand the challenges and hardships they experience to help reduce inequalities, another suggestion I have for future research is to consider men firefighters' perspectives on the issues at hand. For instance, data was collected solely from women

participants, and it is their perspectives and experiences that provide the lens through which men are presented. Thus, I propose conducting a qualitative interview study with men, which would help to uncover some of the gender dynamics and inequalities in the workplace. Specifically, it would help us to better understand how the men feel about women, gender discrimination, harassment, and how they perceive women as the women invade “their” occupation.

Lastly, I suggest looking more closely into the strategies women use to deal with inequality, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace to better understand how effective those strategies are. I also recommend exploring the potential strategies the women suggested in their interviews to make firefighting better for women in the future in terms of gender inequality and gender representation. It would be interesting to discover whether some of the potential strategies would be effective, or if they would make significant changes in the right direction.

To conclude, this study illuminated women firefighters’ work-related experiences in a male-dominated, blue-collar work environment. Specifically, the data revealed that women firefighters are forced to cope with gender discrimination, sexual harassment, stigmatization, and many other inequalities that work to reinforce the male sense of superiority and reproduce masculinity as the normative standard; thus, constraining women’s gender and position within the organization as inferior. Guided by a feminist discursive lens, I found that through women firefighters’ process of contending with these constructs, they use several strategies to either excuse injustices or to be accepted into the male-dominated culture. However, these strategies are problematic and add fuel to the fire as they work to reinforce gender stereotypes and the culture of hegemonic

masculinity. Implications stemming from the challenges women firefighters experience in the workplace and the strategies they use to deal with those challenges call for a change in the organization. I argue that organizations such as the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service must continue to work toward improving the lives of women firefighters by instilling better training programs around gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and the barriers women face, instilling mentorship programs and opportunities for women to meet and gain support from other women in the field, implementing evaluations and an improved system for reporting harassment so women do not have to fear or experience retaliation, and by hiring people who respect women and encourage equality and getting rid of the people who only feed the fire known as inequalities against women. Improved practices, trainings, and policies will not work if the people in the organization do not adhere to them.

In addition, the qualities women bring to the fire line along with their passion and love for the job despite the challenges and hardships they face, will slowly work to break and change gender stereotypes, thus contributing toward an overall change within the culture of hegemonic masculinity. The women firefighters in this study are depriving organizational structures and everyday norms of oxygen as they challenge the hegemonic masculinity with their presence in the field and their relentlessness to give up when times get tough. The culture of hegemonic masculinity needs to be confronted. Comparably, in speaking about confronting Empire, Indian activist and scholar Arundhati Roy, advocates:

Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and

our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe. (Roy, 2003, p. 5)

If we take those words, and think of Empire as the culture of hegemonic masculinity consisting of gender inequality, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, microaggressions, and stigma, then we can begin to make strides toward equality for women working in male-dominated occupations. Women firefighters can deprive the masculine dominated culture of oxygen with their sheer relentlessness to overcome the hardships, with their passion for fighting fire, with the qualities they bring to the fire line, by breaking gender stereotypes, and by continuing to share their experiences with the world so changes can be made. A fire cannot burn without oxygen. Battle the blaze, women. Starve it of oxygen.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Can you please share where you work and your job title? How long have you been working there?
2. What do you like about your job?
3. What has been difficult in your job, or in becoming a firefighter?
4. Can you describe your experiences with the physical challenges of the job? Do you enjoy them and/or feel that you excel at them?
5. What are you expected to do on a fire?
6. Have you ever perceived different expectations from your male coworkers?
7. Can you share any examples of times or situations where you feel your gender is advantageous in this occupation?
8. Can you share any examples of times when a women firefighter's gender was a barrier?
9. Have you ever changed your behavior based on how you think you are perceived at work?
10. How do you see yourself in your occupation or on your crew?
11. Do you think there are different perceptions about men and women firefighters? Why?
12. Do you think women in firefighting are stigmatized? How?
13. My research has indicated that many women working in male-dominated occupations have experienced gender discrimination and/or harassment? Do you think this applies to women in firefighting?
14. If you could, what changes would you make within your organization to make firefighting better for women entering the field in the future?
15. How do you hope to see this occupation in terms of gender equality and gender representation in the next five to ten years?

16. Is there anything I have not asked that you wish I would have? Or is there anything you want people to know about your experiences and perspectives as a woman within this occupation?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Document

Please read the following explanation of this study. Signing this form will indicate you have been informed about the study and that you consent to participate. I want to ensure you understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether you want to participate.

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by Kalynne Mitchell, a graduate student under the direction of Sarah J. Blithe, PhD – both at the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno.

I am conducting this research study to better understand the lives of women wildland firefighters within the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) as they work disproportionately alongside men in a male-dominated field.

If you volunteer to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your own experiences and opinions regarding your occupation. I anticipate that these interviews will last no longer than an hour. The interviews will occur at a time and place that is most convenient for you. If you are not in the Reno area, we can schedule a phone interview. Interviews will be audio recorded and recordings will be anonymized and only used for research purposes. Your name, location, and organization will also be anonymous.

Risks for participating in this study are minimal, meaning you will be participating in an interview that may elicit emotions about your job. The only risk to the study is the possibility of experiencing some stress or discomfort from discussing past situations that might be difficult to talk about. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may choose to skip questions, or you may ask to be withdrawn. You have the right to stop participating at any time, for any reason.

Benefits of doing research are not definite; but I hope to learn how women in a non-traditional field may be stigmatized and discriminated against by their male co-workers and/or society. The results of this research could potentially add more awareness of this issue among employers, coworkers, and our community in order to combat stigma against women in non-traditional occupations, reduce gender discrimination in the workplace, and challenge hegemonic masculinity. There are no direct benefits to you in this study activity.

The researcher and the University of Nevada will treat your identity with professional standards of confidentiality and protect it to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. The researcher, the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), and the University of

Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board may look at your study records.

You may ask questions of the researcher at any time. Please email Kalynne Mitchell (kmitchell@nevada.unr.edu) with any questions. You may also call me at 775-750-2658. There is an office on campus that provides research oversight called the Office of Human Research Protection. If you have any concerns on the conduct of the study, call the office at 775-327-2367.

I have read this paper about the study, or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received, on the date of the signature, a copy of this document. I realize I will be audio-recorded.

Name of Participant (printed)

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C

FaceBook Call-Out

Hello Facebook friends!

I am looking for women wildland firefighters!

As most of you know, I am a graduate student at the University of Nevada, Reno. I am currently conducting a research project for my thesis under the direction of my advisor, Sarah J. Blithe, PhD. I am conducting this research to better understand the lives of women wildland firefighters within the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) as they work disproportionately alongside men in a male-dominated field.

If you know any women wildland firefighters or have friends/family that might know any women wildland firefighters, PLEASE SHARE this post on your page or send it via private message to women wildland firefighters.

If you volunteer to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your own experiences and opinions regarding your occupation. I anticipate that these interviews will last no longer than an hour. The interviews will occur at a time and place that is most convenient for you. If you are not located near the Reno area, we can schedule a phone interview. Interviews will be audio recorded and recordings will be anonymized and only used for research purposes.

Please email me, Kalynne Mitchell, at kmitchell@nevada.unr.edu if you might be interested. From there, I can answer any concerns or questions.

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