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Fanning the Flames?:
Negotiating Gendered Identity in Forest Fire Suppression

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of gendered identity in a regional Canadian community. Using ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews, I explore the ways in which female forest firefighters negotiate 'competent' identities in the face of formal and informal workplace barriers. Drawing on literature from sociology and women's studies that focuses on gendered subjectivity, spatial environments, sociology of the body, and women in non-traditional work, I examine how varied workplace settings and the social interactions that take place within them shape women's gendered subjectivity. In contrast to the existing literature on forest fire suppression, the majority of which focuses on male firefighters, this study explores the daily experiences of female firefighters at the Thunder Bay District Fire Center and out on the fire line.

I argue female firefighters in northwestern Ontario construct and maintain 'competent' workplace identities in ways that suggest a marked departure from the monolithic image of the firefighter as an 'adrenaline junkie,' a notion advanced in much of the existing literature (Maclean 1999; Thoele 1995). In this context, this study recognizes that the negotiation of gendered identity is a complex and nuanced exercise. I suggest that the work of Thoele (1995) and Greer and Hendrickson (2001), a promising point of departure, fails to adequately distinguish between the plurality of identities operating in the Fire Program.

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Chapter 1 - Situating Gendered Identity

Introduction

In the spring of 1994 I began fighting forest fires with the Ministry of Natural Resources in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. For many of the seasoned male firefighters, hiring 3 women that spring meant that they had to work in a gender stratified environment for the first time. Although their reactions were mixed, a number of influential men maintained that women in forest fire suppression were hired as the direct result of affirmative action policies implemented by the provincial government.[1] These same men, who consistently stated that women were 'quota hires' who were 'out of place' in the crew system, renewed masculinist assertions that forest fire suppression was dangerous 'men's work' which often resulted in a glorified death.

Reflecting on the characterization after 6 years, 3 separate bases, a promotion from Crew Member to Crew Boss and numerous forest fires, my own experiences suggested that the supposed dangers and fear of a tragic death by fire did not daily impact my identity negotiation, nor those of my fire fighting colleagues in northwestern Ontario. I knew, instead, that my own negotiations of workplace identity were more profoundly shaped by the offensive imagery that objectified women in the space. For example, I remember being incensed by an image of female genitalia carved into my Crew Boss' hard hat, pictures of topless women on the lockers, and the gendered dynamics of various workspaces. My own reactions to the fire fighting ethos and work subculture led me to want to more systematically

[1] Although official government quotas for hiring and promoting women have never existed (Popowich

observe the group and its work. I wanted to critically analyze the gendered social and professional interactions, that had both fascinated and infuriated me, with the goal of making positive changes.

These concerns were points of departure for my study of women working at the Thunder Bay District Fire Center and on the fire line. Using systematic ethnographic observation for a period of 4 months and conducting in-depth interviews with fifteen women firefighters, I studied the gendered dynamics that characterize forest fire suppression. This thesis examines the myriad ways in which female firefighters negotiate gendered identity in varied spatial locations constructed and maintained along masculine gender lines. Using insights from Foucault (1977) and McDowell (1995), I explore how hegemonic notions of gender, space and knowledge shape women's workplace experiences and the evaluation of their performances both on and off the job. The study illustrates the ways women challenge and conform to prevailing gender norms and how they strive to maintain, above all else, a 'competent' workplace identity under a managerial gaze.

In order to understand the ways women maintain 'competent' workplace identities, the remainder of the chapter discusses the existing literature that focuses on the construction of gendered identity. The first part examines theoretical conceptualizations of what constitutes identity; in particular, I explore the impact of various social factors that shape and control the daily articulation of gendered difference. The second section details the ways in which varied spatial environments, including male-dominated workplaces, influence gendered identity.

2005), this urban legend is often invoked as a method of controlling women in forest fire suppression.

Finally, I discuss the ways in which women in the non-traditional workspace of forest fire suppression negotiate their gendered identities.

Factors Shaping Identity

Within the academic realm, many different and conflicting theories attempt to adequately define the essential elements of identity. For theorists who espouse binary opposites, an important component of identity is "the recognition and articulation of difference" (McDowell and Sharp 1999, 132). In their collective opinion, difference informs identity in a reciprocal relationship where notions of the 'self' are solidified and maintained in direct opposition to "various culturally constructed others" (ibid.). When applying such absolute definitions to theories of the self, the tendency to represent identities as static and unchanging is inevitable. What gets lost in this framework is the idea that individuals are active agents in the dynamic social process of identity construction (Andermahr et al. 1997). Instead, the notion of the 'self' is envisioned in a way that fails to recognize the myriad social factors that constantly shape and reshape identity.

Several theoretical frameworks attempt to challenge the belief in a "unique core or essence to identity" (Marshall 1998, 293). Contemporary theories focus on the notion that we, as individuals, inhabit multiple identities that are constantly shifting and changing throughout the life cycle. These theories often conceptualise identity as "part of an individual 'lifestyle' choice", thereby establishing the individual as an autonomous being, active in the social process of identity construction (McDowell and Sharp 1999, 133). The idea that agency plays a vital

role is of paramount importance to this perspective, as it refutes the tacit suggestion that people passively accept their social roles without playing any part in building them.

Differences, in this context, are applied to the very categories that more archaic theories of identity maintain. Indeed, it is argued that in order for differences "to be meaningful, [they] must differentiate within the same [category]" (Andermahr et al. 102). This theoretical provision weakens the monolithic construction of identities by acknowledging the potential for differentiation within a specific group. For example, women foster and develop separate notions of the self; they choose to assert varied aspects of their identity, which may serve to amplify or diminish the importance of being a woman. Categorical homogeneity is broken down, challenging the very beliefs and ideas that rigidly maintain identities based on gender, race, class and sex differences.

Factors Shaping Gendered Differences

Beliefs surrounding gendered differences are culturally and socially shaped, thereby inflating the importance of difference in group interaction. These beliefs impact upon individuals in their attempts to adopt characteristics specific to their gender. To discover the ways in which gendered identity is daily negotiated, theoretical debates surrounding the proposed reasons why differences between men and women exist must be discussed. For the most part, these notions of difference can be placed on a spectrum: biological determinists occupy one end, social constructionists occupy the other. Biological determinism is characterized by an

adherence to the notion that behavioural differences between men and women are the result of basic biological distinctions. Behavioural destiny, according to biological determinists, is predetermined, static, and immutable (Cassell 1998). Conversely, social constructionism - "the axiom that social reality is constructed"- is based on the premise that gender evolves through human interaction (Andermahr et al., 203). Gender is a socially created ideal that is perpetuated through discourse, relationships, activities, cooperation, and contestation. The recognition that gender is a form of social plasticity, shaped through a process of performances, pervades the work of many contemporary social constructionists (see, for example, Butler 1999; Bartky 1990; McDowell 1995; Valentine 1996; and Bell et al. 1998).

When gender is "performed," it serves to reaffirm the hegemonic norms that govern society. According to Butler (1999), theatrical presentations congeal over time, making it appear as though gender is something we 'are' instead of something we 'do' (Salih 2002, 46). Collective performances - fictional in the extreme - reproduce the bipolar model of masculinity and femininity, seemingly naturalizing that which is highly constructed, negotiated, and fluid (Butler 1999). "[Individuals] are born male or female, not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, 'a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many different styles of flesh'" (Bartky 1990, 65). Gendered roles constrain individual actions to a limited repertoire of acceptable behaviours, demand individual conformity, and are enforced through regulatory structures and repetitive actions.

Controlling the Gendered Subject

Regulatory structures, saturated with elements of power, influence the actions of gendered subjects. The structures deploy power through various forms of discipline, punishment, and surveillance that coerce people to conform (Foucault 1977; Ramanazanoglu 1993, 22). Of these methods, surveillance is touted as the most effective. "[It is] more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy of power to place people under surveillance than to subject them to some exemplary penalty" (Foucault 1980, 38). What is so efficient about surveillance is the way in which the practice can be equally applied to both monitor and exert varying degrees of power over others.

One of several pervasive means of diffusing power within the social order, 'the gaze' can be defined as "[t]he process by which people and things in the world are made into objects of consumption by the vision of a privileged subject" (McDowell and Sharp 1999, 103). Some feminists have argued that 'the gaze' is an inherently masculine concept (Mulvey 1989; Haraway 1991) which tends to "[reify] the split between the active Male (the surveyor) and the passive Female (the surveyed)" (McDowell and Sharp 1999, 104). In this context, representations of femininity are largely constructed by the active Male (the surveyor) (ibid.).

There are a number of feminists who contest notions that situate women as passive subjects in the construction of their own femininity. Much of the criticism focuses on the presentation of "an overly monolithic conception of the gaze" which denies women the agency that is inherent in the role of surveyor (Andermahr et al.

1997, 85). In some instances, the original argument has been modified to acknowledge "the possibility of a more active female gaze" (ibid.).

Yet, the active female gaze is often internalized (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993). Surveillance, initially imposed upon the individual by institutions, is applied to the self.

> [T]here is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze, an inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself (Foucault cited in McDowell 1995, 78).

The subject learns that there are punishments - in the form of differing reprisals - that accompany failure to conform to the established rules and regulations. To avoid any disciplinary action, s/he begins to monitor individual subjectivity in an attempt to exact control upon any deviation from the enforced norm. "Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault 1977, 138).

When discussing 'docile' bodies, Foucault's work is marked by the use of the masculine pronoun and the presumption that generic male experience is universal. The exclusive language, often the focus of feminist criticism, fails to recognize the unique impact of gender upon the production and maintenance of 'docile bodies' (McDowell 1995, 78). According to Bartky (1990), the concept is individually experienced in myriad ways that depend upon gender and social context. She argues that experiences of surveillance and control are not evenly applied in a universal fashion. Certain aspects of identity - particularly gender - determine the severity and

consistency with which specific bodies are monitored. From Bartky's perspective, the female body is the subject of far more rigorous scrutiny and control.

Much of the scrutiny focused on the female body is in place to ensure that specific standards of appearance and comportment are adhered to. Bordo (1993) argues that women, beholden to a singular - but historically variable - standard of femininity, invest considerable time and energy attempting to achieve the prevailing ideal of feminine comportment. In our narcissistic and visually oriented culture, disciplining the female body is a "flexible strategy of social control" (Bordo 1993, 166) that often yields compliant subjects.

> Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity - a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion - female bodies become docile bodies - bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, "improvement" (ibid.).

For many women searching for an 'elusive ideal,' the pursuit is without end or tangible reward. The myriad practices that inform the pursuit are habitual occurrences, a part of the daily routine that produces 'docile bodies.'

Daily routine also contributes to the production and reproduction of embodied knowledge. Information that is learned "through and with the body" and cemented by repetitive acts, is embodied knowledge (Cassell 1998, 31). Habitus, the theoretical notion that "might briefly be defined as embodied social structure," consists of knowledge mediated through the body that is passed on from generation to generation (Cassell 1998, 39; Bourdieu 1977). Therefore, the way in which people stand, walk, move, and react determines exactly who these people are socially; it wordlessly communicates their social location to others. Habitus, then, is

based on embodied "activity through time, rather than [on] abstract structures or ideas" (Cassell, 39).

Finally, the concept of hegemonic masculinity influences the degree to which the gendered subject is able to negotiate particular aspects of identity. As opposed to representing the interests of society, hegemonic masculinity exists when the ideals of a specific type of masculinity appear to represent universal interests (Marshall 1998, 272). "Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear 'natural,' 'ordinary,' 'normal'" (Donaldson 1993, 645). A number of identities articulated within this framework are incongruent with the ideals, compelling those who reject hegemonic masculinity to negotiate individual subjectivity within its confined structure (Connell 1995, 37).

Spatial Applications and the Gendered Subject

Tied to the negotiation of identity is an element of spatial application. Social interactions in particular spaces are not benign; each concept informs the other in a reciprocal relationship. "Space is essential to social science; spatial relations exist only because social processes exist" (Spain 1992, 5). Although each is intricately connected with the other, both are fostered and maintained through power imbalances. Social 'performances,' which occur in spatial environments, "congeal over time to give the appearance of a 'proper' or 'normal' production of space" (Valentine 1996, 146; Massey 1994). These arrangements provide an arena for the 'legitimized enactment' of polarized gender norms. In this context, space becomes a

theatrical stage upon which prevailing status differences are acted out, ensuring that gendered differences are highly normalized and uncontested (McDowell 1999).

Of the myriad ways in which these status differences are maintained, Spain (1992) argues that the unequal distribution of knowledge through spatial arrangements reproduces hierarchy. Much emphasis is placed on the ability to acquire valued knowledge. However, gaining access to the spatial environments where knowledge is (re)produced is often limited, exclusive, and guarded by institutional gatekeepers. It is necessary to acquire valued knowledge and skill to gain status and prestige on the hierarchical scale (Tallichet 2000, 237). That which constitutes valued knowledge, however, is determined by the dominant members of the subculture who wish to "maintain and reinforce [their] position" by asserting the significance of one kind of knowledge over all others (Spain 1992, 16). "Spatial arrangements between the sexes are socially created, and when they provide access to valued knowledge for men while reducing access to that knowledge for women, the organization of space may perpetuate status differences" (Spain 1992, 3).

The separation of spheres - public and private - partially determines the extent to which access to valued knowledge is granted. Articulated much more clearly at the level of ideology than it is practiced in daily routines, the elaboration of the feminine, private sphere and the masculine, public sphere shapes contemporary notions of a woman's 'proper' place within society (Domosh and Seager 2001, 5). In this context, the home becomes a "geographical anchor for many women" that may serve as an ideological barrier to their participation in the public sphere (Domosh and Seager 2001, 31).

As stated, there are several contradictions between the ideological separation of spheres and the daily realities of men and women. Within the confines of a capitalist society, the tacit assumption that men enter the public domain to fulfill the role of 'provider' for the nuclear family lacks conviction. "Many men chafe at the roles that this ideology assigns them; being the breadwinner and the stoic standard bearer is wearing" (Domosh and Seager 2001, 39). The most glaring contradiction to this ideological construct, however, is the fact that most women daily participate in the public domain in myriad ways.

The Gendered Subject at Work

The preceding theories concerning gender, space, knowledge and power relations have been expanded on and applied to studies concerning women and work (see, for example, Tallichet 2000; Cassell 1998). Studies that have attempted to clarify the link between theoretical postulations and women's lived experiences, draw on these models to facilitate a clearer understanding of the ways that women conform to and resist the social construction of gendered dichotomies in the workplace (Cassell 1998; Cockburn 1991; and Reskin and Roos 1984). These studies focus on the extent to which the negotiation of gendered identity in a male-dominated workplace is regulated by spatial environments, the construction of valued knowledge, and power relations.

Stereotypical gender norms, upon which most social relations are based, are reified in the work environment through the production of binary job categories.

> Jobs are not gender-neutral - rather they are created as appropriate for either men, or women, and the sets of social practices that constitute and maintain them, are constructed so as to embody socially sanctioned but variable characteristics of masculinity and femininity (McDowell 1999, 135).

The process of 'gendering' work - creating specific job categories that appear to be appropriate for either men or women, not both - is a definitive aspect of workplace culture. What results is a marked division of labour which often situates men in full-time work in industry and women in part-time work in the service sector (Armstrong and Armstrong 1993; Reiter 1996).

> Even the most cursory historical and global surveys suggest that when men and women "work," they do so under different conditions and constraints, they tend to work at different jobs, and they work in different places (Domosh and Seager 2001, 36).

Those that sustain the ideological categories of gendered difference in the workplace help to facilitate a climate in which employment opportunities for both sexes are curtailed by the rigid framework.

Despite the ideological tensions surrounding gendered work, a number of women have sought out employment opportunities in the male-dominated fields of merchant banking, surgery, engineering, construction, the military, steel work, mining, structural fire fighting, tree planting and forest fire suppression. A growing body of literature on women in non-traditional work has emerged in order to document the impact of sexual integration on women and men (see, for example, Ranson 2005; Eveline and Booth 2002). Much of the literature focuses on the ways in which women negotiate differing aspects of workplace identity and the varied responses of men to the infusion of women into traditional masculine spaces.

In her study of gendered performances in the male-dominated field of merchant banking, McDowell (1995) notes that the very presence of the female body is both disquieting and destabilizing.

> Women's bodies are, by very definition (and in contrast to those of men), grotesque, incomplete, fertile and changing. Like nature, women too are natural, marked by sexuality, fecundity and growth and so apparently uncontrolled and uncontrollable. And while culture is appropriately found in the public or civic sphere, nature is located in, and should be confined to, the private or domestic arena (McDowell 1995, 80).

Unable to emulate the 'disembodied' male aesthetic so central to the production of a 'proper' workplace identity, the female subject becomes the embodied 'other' that is clearly out of place in the public sphere.

Recognizing that they are out of place in an atmosphere that clearly valorizes representations of masculinity, women must engage in gendered workplace performances that are constrained by what Hochschild (1983) refers to as the "managed heart." In this context, the personal attributes of a woman - including sexuality - become marketable commodities to be sold. "[S]eemingly spontaneous forms of personal interaction are in fact carefully managed" to produce a compelling image of conventional (hetero)sexuality, an image propagated by women who adhere to the required constructions of femininity (McDowell 1995, 76).

The work of Joan Cassell (1998), which examines female surgeons, asserts that these women are often persuaded to perform 'appropriate' articulations of femininity. Cassell states,

> I observed exchanges between women surgeons and patients, nurses, chiefs of surgery, colleagues, and residents in which "feminine" behavior was elicited, encouraged, even extorted, at the same time that aggressive "masculine" displays were penalized. It was obvious that, if the women surgeons' behavior

> was not entirely socially constructed, it was surely influenced by the people around them (Cassell, 1998, 18).

As the preceding quote states, one model of gendered characteristics is socially sanctioned and legitimized. Female surgeons who deviate from the received role by yelling at subordinates or throwing tantrums - not atypical behaviour for some male surgeons - are faced with strict and swift reprisals. Most often, these women are branded with the deflating moniker "bitch" (Cassell 1998, 82). Thus, Cassell presents a convincing argument that "[a] woman's body (integrating the symbolism of sexual and social domination and submission) is out of place in a position of power" (ibid.).

A kind of spatial segregation, taking place within the medical discipline of surgery, further entrenches the notion that the female surgeon is out of place. Female surgeons are often relegated to relatively low-prestige surgical subspecialties (Cassell 1998, 67), such as breast surgery. With little opportunity to perform the "dramatic saves" many male surgeons have grown accustomed to, most men find surgeries associated with the breast "boring" (Cassell 1998, 72) and the patients difficult to deal with.

> [P]atients are frantic and terrified. A woman's breasts have enormous symbolic and psychic valence, and the prospect of losing one is terrifying (ibid.).

It is collectively assumed, then, that the embodied experience of being a female surgeon will naturally facilitate a higher standard of patient care for women facing breast surgery. Told they are no longer "real surgeons" upon entering the subspecialty, female surgeons are expected to demonstrate sensitivity and

compassion towards their patients, characteristics that are seen as an intrinsic and embodied part of being a woman (ibid.).

In the upper class professions of merchant banking and medicine, gender is constructed in the workplace by representing the female worker as an embodied subject. Women, in this respect, are embodied workers inextricably linked to the body, and subjected to its myriad shortcomings and failings (Cockburn 1991). In male workspace, female bodies "trouble as they cut into spaces where they don't belong" (Probyn cited in Valentine 1996; Cassell 1998). Once again, the embodied female is measured by the disembodied male subject; the social yardstick. This affirms popular sentiment that women simply do not belong in male-dominated and male-defined jobs.

Ranson (2005) argues that women in the male-dominated field of engineering manage their identities in ways that do not disrupt the primacy of hegemonic masculinity. As such, women enter the field as 'conceptual men,' maintaining an identity that "confers legitimacy on [their] professional contribution only when they act like men" (Ranson 2005, 148).

> ... the professional socialization of women in engineering ... teaches them to present themselves as competent and non-threatening, and to show solidarity with other members of the profession. This requires "their willingness to identify with, rather than challenge, the macho engineering identity" (Ranson 2005, 149).

To appear non-threatening, women must adopt a workplace identity which submerges particularly salient aspects of femininity and become "one of the boys" (Ranson 2005, 150).

Women, compelled to become "one of the boys," experience the negotiation of identity as an exercise fraught with tension. According to Ranson, it is yet to be established that women have a right to enter male-dominated workplaces as women (Ranson 2005, 148). It becomes plainly apparent that women do not have that right when the emergence of signs linking the female subject to womanhood - like pregnancy - disrupt the 'macho engineering identity.' Without ever really being legitimated within the occupational subculture, incongruent aspects of female identity eventually blow the conceptual cover provided women (ibid.).

According to Jorgenson (2002), becoming "one of the boys" is only one of several efficacious strategies employed by women in engineering. Jorgenson notes, however, that scholarship is often limited by a framework that categorizes women's workplace strategies in polarized ways; women are either able to "resist the influence of oppressive institutional forces or ... [they are] mere passive reflections of social structure" (Jorgenson 2002, 357).

> Given the difficulty of navigating these interpretive tensions between control and resistance, less dualistic theoretical frameworks are needed that afford a more dynamic exploration of the interplay between meta-narratives that shape female workers' subjectivities and individual self-interpretations (ibid.).

Relying on the concept of discursive positioning, Jorgenson attempts a 'dynamic exploration' of the many different, and often contradictory, factors that shape identity construction. As opposed to framing women as 'passive reflections of social structure,' the study provides context for the decisions that govern their subject positions. For example, women hired as a direct result of affirmative action may "insist that engineering is a gender-neutral territory with equal opportunity for

men and women" (Jorgenson 2002, 352). It can be implied, in this instance, that the use of affirmative action is a form of special treatment for women and minorities. To reduce the emphasis on this policy, women may deny sexism within the subculture and uphold masculine interests (ibid.).

The construction industry, one of few remaining areas characterized by a large "male manual working class" (Greed 2000, 189), advances masculine interests by blocking the influx of alternative ideas and people who appear to be 'different.' Many women - told that the job is too hard and too dirty, in order to justify their exclusion - are discouraged from entering the industry. When they are able to obtain work, women employed in construction often find themselves in support services or less prestigious jobs at the 'soft' end of the construction spectrum (Greed 2000, 187). The majority have to contend with male professionals who make a point of distinguishing between "soft" construction and "real construction."

Although women have much to contend with in construction and engineering, both Jorgenson (2002) and Greed (2000) state that many of the women are reluctant to "frame their experiences in terms of being a woman" (Jorgenson 2002, 362). Theorists who hope to exact social change through the concept of critical mass, note that women recognize their common interests and act in concert to pursue them only very sporadically (Eveline and Booth 2002, 559). In fact, many of the women express "sheer disdain" (Greed 2000, 188) for feminism or professional women's groups, believing neither has helped create workplace opportunities for them.

The 1970s feminist movement has contributed to women's employment opportunities in the Canadian military. However, many of the policies regarding the

workplace participation of women have been created by an organization that is characterized as socially conservative and known to be "anti-woman" (Gouliquer 2000, 256).

> The particular masculine identity inculcated [in the Canadian military] ... is anti-woman, anti-feminine, and anti-homosexual. The disparagement and subordination of women and homosexuality that underpin military traditions, culture and training are also the quintessential core of a cultivated, dominating and institutionalized male heterosexuality (ibid.).

In this context, it is not surprising that the Canadian Forces Administrative Order 19-20 was not repealed until 1992. The policy, implemented to dishonourably discharge any member of the military found to be a homosexual, resulted in widespread "witch-hunts" that forced women and men to hide their sexuality (Gouliquer 2000, 258).

There exist among women who witnessed the witch-hunts, a "residue of fear" (Gouliquer 2000, 266) that tends to shape the ways in which they negotiate their homosexuality. Most lesbians adopt a non-confrontational and subtle approach when dealing with members of the military community. The subtle approach remains a necessary aspect of identity negotiation, even though overtly discriminatory policies have been eliminated. Conservative attitudes, that dominate the social climate "act as impediments to gay servicewomen living an open and accepted lesbian lifestyle" (Gouliquer 2000, 272). The study on women in the Canadian military demonstrates that organizational policies can evolve as a result of changes in the social climate.

Livingstone and Luxton (1995) discuss the evolution of the male breadwinner norm as it relates to the changing social climate at Stelco, a Steel Mill in Hamilton,

Ontario. They argue that the male breadwinner norm, challenged by women entering the trade, cannot simply be attributed to male chauvinism. Instead, it

> is typically bound to a deeper sense of responsibility to provide for their families. Both the wages earned and the very sacrifice and strength required to do the work offer a basic self-esteem and self-worth ... in virtually every case, the steelworker's male identity appeared to be integrally tied to his perceived capacity to bring home a 'decent' or 'living' wage (Livingstone and Luxton 1995, 188).

Given that the male identity is so inextricably linked to the ideal, men will often defend the concept over women's rights to employment opportunities.

Keck and Powell (1996) argue that the standard breadwinner norm does not adequately reflect the lived realities of many women working in the mining industry. The notion that there is a male breadwinner in most homes is a fallacy. Almost sixty percent of the women in the study are the sole providers for themselves, or their families. The reality is that most of the women working in male-dominated fields, with all the concomitant problems and issues, need to secure a 'decent' wage (Keck and Powell 1996, 156).

"Women who enter male-typed occupations such as mining are usually regarded as incapable "intruders"" (Tallichet 2000, 235), a stigmatization difficult to overcome when continually subjected to sexual harassment and coworker hostility. The label is costly in an environment in which informal relations influence access to training and promotional opportunities.

> Formally, management agrees not to discriminate when assigning jobs, but foremen often rely on the impressions of a miner's co-workers when assessing a miner's capabilities (ibid.).

Managerial perceptions of individual skill are often shaped by the opinions of foremen and male coworkers. In this context, a hostile coworker who is unlikely to offer a positive, or accurate, assessment may appraise a woman's skill level.

To preserve the gendered hierarchy in mining, women are seen as highly sexualized objects (Tallichet 2000, 236). The practice of maintaining sexual power imbalances at work incorporates sexual harassment, jokes, teasing, lascivious comments, homophobic remarks, and propositioning. These acts, seemingly innocuous to some, "make sex differences a more salient aspect of work interaction" (ibid.). At the same time, the acts regulate interactions between women and men by entrenching their subservience to men.

At Emsite, a gem mine notorious for a very public commitment to affirmative action, female subservience is assured. Women are charged with the task of normalizing the workplace by policing the conduct and cleanliness of their male coworkers (Eveline and Booth 2002, 564). Although a number of men refuse training on equipment they designate as 'women's machines,' (Eveline and Booth, 567) the same men unflaggingly support the espousal of a more traditional and unpaid role for women.

> Almost to a man, male workers consented to the designation of women's housewifely [work]. With women around, male operators told us, the place was cleaner, women took orders more readily, there were less fights (between the men), there was always someone different to talk to, or discuss family problems with (Eveline and Booth 2002, 566).

It is clearly established that women are in place, at least in part, to keep the men happy and regulate the space.

The men of Emsite, however, are decidedly loath to extend similar workplace courtesies to women onsite. Using "misogynistic forms of differentiation," (Eveline and Booth, 567) considerable attention is focused on the protection of 'hegemonic masculinity.' In comparison to Tallichet's findings (2000), men protect their constructed environment by magnifying the significance of female sexuality in daily interaction. Masculinist camaraderie, often generated at the expense of the sexualized female form, facilitates group cohesion by demeaning women at work. For example, "offensive names, such as 'bush pig' and 'dyke'" (Eveline and Booth 2002, 567) are part of the everyday vernacular that places women squarely at the margins of the workplace subculture. Male territory is further "staked out" by literally papering the walls of the shop floor with offensive pin-ups.

Women in Structural Fire Fighting

In Yoder and Aniakudo's (1997) study of African American female firefighters, space is appropriated by male firefighters to marginalize 'outsiders.' Marginalization takes place in the Firehouse, where coworkers have to spend upwards of twenty-four hours together as a part of their official job responsibilities. The spatial exclusion of African American female firefighters is facilitated through the use of "insufficient instruction, coworker hostility, silence, close supervision, lack of support, and stereotyping" (Yoder and Aniakudo 1997, 324). The preceding forms of derision and outward hostility (re)produce a spatial environment in which women occupy the position of an 'outsider,' regardless of their ranking or years of professional service.

Much of the recent literature on female structural firefighters documents the impact of sexist discrimination and sexual harassment on women (Yoder and McDonald 1998; and Wang and Kleiner 2001). Yoder and McDonald (1998) state that the Schedule of Sexist Events, developed by Klonoff and Landrine (1995), is a reliable measure of sexist discrimination (487). The Schedule, applied to forty-four female firefighters, resulted in the disclosure that forty-one felt they had been discriminated against; those who reported heightened discrimination felt that their mistakes were noticed more often (Yoder and McDonald 1998, 490).

Wang and Kleiner (2001) focus on the two different types of discrimination, disparate treatment and disparate impact. They apply the concept of disparate impact - institutional policies that exclude individuals from specific jobs or promotions - to the physical standards tests that firefighters must pass. Arguing that the requirements of these tests are too high, Wang and Kleiner suggest that qualified women are unnecessarily excluded from fighting fire (2001, 176).

In response to sexist discrimination and harassment, women find that attempting to ignore harassment is an ineffectual way to cope with it (Yoder and Aniakudo 1995, 127). Those willing to confront the issue directly - acting in an aggressive and threatening manner - are far more successful in neutralizing the undesirable behaviour. In contrast, women that adopt a passive stance are viewed with open contempt (Yoder and Aniakudo 1995, 131).

Finally, Moore and Kleiner (2001) suggest a number of strategies to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination from occurring within the fire fighting subculture. Discrimination occurs when men and women work in a competitive job

environment that breeds positional insecurity. To protect their positions, some men maintain a singular vision of an 'acceptable' fire fighting identity.

> Firefighters are expected to be large, strong, athletic, unemotional, ... good with tools, physically hard-working, brave, aggressive, ... self-confident, and socially skilled (Moore and Kleiner 2001, 208).

Masculine characteristics, deemed essential for firefighters, perpetuate the notion that fire is the domain of the stereotypical male. Driven by their insecurities, some men closely monitor female firefighters in an attempt to remove them from the workplace.

Maintaining the Masculine Woods

Although operating within a radically different geographical context, female treeplanters are subjected to the same kinds of monitoring as female structural firefighters. The nascent body of literature chronicling women's experiences of being monitored outside the built environment discusses the ways in which discriminating behaviour crosses spatial boundaries. Adding to this body of work, Clark (1998) suggests that sexual discrimination and harassment pervade the natural environment in the same way the concepts pervade structural environments. Women who surpass men in overall production, for example, are not granted the same status in a subculture that valorizes the male planter (Clark 1998, 82). Furthermore, some men assume that female planters are naturally skilled at the monotonous work of planting trees because it clearly mimics monotonous housework.

Discrimination and harassment are also encoded in hiring practices; foremen manipulate their power to hire women that they have an interest in bedding (Clark, 83). For the most part, women are expected to comply with the sexual requests of their superiors. Refusal to give in to the sexual coercion can result in the assignment of unsavory tasks, or outright dismissal (Clark, 84). As relatively recent additions to the male-dominated space, women who fail to meet the needs of their male supervisors are often seen as expendable.

In this context it is not particularly surprising that much of the earlier literature on forest firefighters fails to mention sexual discrimination and harassment. The dearth of research on women in forest fire suppression often assures that they are not mentioned at all. Epic tales focus instead on notorious fires that took the lives of young men. Mann Gulch, the most notorious fire of its time - until eclipsed by the disaster on Storm King Mountain - is the subject of Young Men and Fire (1992), a book written by Norman Maclean. Maclean explains,

> The Mann Gulch Fire would never have attained its preeminence in the history of forest fires if foreman Wag Dodge had not set his escape fire. It made the Mann Gulch fire a lasting mystery story, unlike much larger tragic forest fires that were open-and-shut affairs, buried forever with only one interpretation. With only one interpretation, a forest fire soon becomes a statistic (Maclean 1992, 282).

At the center of the controversy was whether or not the escape fire, set by Dodge to protect his crew from the main fire, was the actual fire that overtook thirteen men.

It would appear that Maclean is remarkably blasé when he states that fires in which lives are lost eventually become mere statistics. Once the collective work of

both Norman and John Maclean is considered, however, it appears that fatalities typify the experience of fighting fire in the United States.

As opposed to describing the daily interactions of firefighters, John Maclean seems more interested in chronicling the events that lead up to fire fatalities. Both of his books detail 3 of the most catastrophic forest fires - Mann Gulch (1949), the Rattlesnake Fire (1953), and Storm King Mountain (1994) - in recent history. Fire on the Mountain (1999) discusses the disastrous forest fire on Storm King Mountain that claimed the lives of fourteen people, 4 of them women. Fire and Ashes (2003) is a collection of stories, 2 of which focus on the Rattlesnake Fire and the last survivor of the Mann Gulch Fire.

In Fire on the Mountain the homogeneous workforce of the United States Forest Service has given way to a gender-stratified fire organization. The tragic events on the mountain brought about "fragmentary," and often private, opposition to women in forest fire suppression (Maclean 1999, 241). Often invoked in combat exclusion debates, those opposed to women's presence in forest fire suppression assert that men show a disproportionate amount of concern for the women that they work with (Decew 1997; Maclean 1999). To his credit, Maclean states that these concerns should have been laid to rest in an official inquiry (Maclean 1999, 241). Within 2 pages, he is able to succinctly dispel the notion that the presence of women on the crew contributed to the loss of life on Storm King Mountain.

Texts that discuss other aspects of fire, as opposed to chronicling fire fatalities, tend to explain forest fire fighting as a rite of passage (Pyne 1989). Fire,

then, becomes the natural equivalent of 'sowing your wild oats.' The individuals that involve themselves in fire suppression have loftier ideals.

> [I]t shouldn't be surprising that many [firefighters] never intend to remain [firefighters] or even to work in the woods for the rest of their lives. A good number of them are students working for M.A.'s or Ph.D's - even more go on to be lawyers and doctors, and even more to be dentists (Maclean 1992, 28).

People fight fire at a time in their lives when it makes sense to be hung over fifteen minutes before work (Pyne 1989, 4), when the hubris of youth is expected and even encouraged.

Central to the rite of passage ideal, is the maintenance of a singular fire fighting identity. The model of the forest firefighter as a monolithic adrenaline-junkie pervades literary accounts, a model that tends to unify individual experience (Pascucci and Pascucci 1998; Magnuson Beil 1999). Karen Magnuson Beil discusses situations like entrapment as though they are everyday experiences. She asks "Why do people choose to put their lives on the line for fire," (Magnuson Beil 1999, 13) making it appear that mortal peril often informs the identity of a firefighter.

Greer and Hendrickson (2001) provide a Canadian perspective on forest fire suppression. They detail the experiences of fighting fire in different provinces and territories in Canada. In comparison to other works, Greer and Hendrickson focus on the nuances of fire fighting identities. As such, they discuss the mental tedium that accompanies long stretches of working in adverse conditions, the camaraderie, the petty frustrations, and the hard work that characterize fire fighting. In the coffee table book, however, there are limited references to gendered identity. A few

quotes from female firefighters, found throughout the text, are the only evidence that the workplace is gendered.

There is a pervasive belief that women in forest fire suppression hold their job positions as a direct result of affirmative action hiring policies and diminished standards of physical fitness (Thoele 1995, 150). Women, who are already competing against several forms of institutional control, have to daily contend with the reservations and doubts of their fellow coworkers. Doubts about the 'professional' capabilities of women follow them into leadership positions where they can "expect some division supervisors and fire bosses to look right through [them] and address the nearest male, even if he [is] a rookie" (Thoele 1995, 147).

Focus of the Study

In reviewing the literature on women in male-dominated workplaces, including the limited work done on women in forest fire suppression, it became apparent to me that there were gaps in the existing literature. Both Thoele (1995) and Greer and Hendrickson (2001), who incorporate women in their discussions, briefly explore gendered dynamics on fire crews in the United States and British Columbia, Canada. Although their work represents a promising point of departure, these abbreviated discussions do not explicate the ways in which female firefighters daily negotiate gendered identity in the male-dominated settings that comprise forest fire suppression. As such, this thesis adds to the existing literature by combining studies that focus on the factors that shape gendered identity in male-dominated workspaces (see, for example, Tallichet 2000; and Eveline and Booth 2002) with the nascent

body of work on women in forest fire suppression. What emerges is an in-depth examination of the various ways in which female firefighters negotiate their identity at the District Fire Center in Thunder Bay, Ontario and out on the fire line.

This study requires observing how femininity and the female body are perceived in the Fire Program. Having been a part of the subculture for a period of 6 years prior to the commencement of the fieldwork, I possess experiential knowledge of the myriad factors that shape the ways in which the presence of women on fire crews is perceived. Through the careful documentation of this knowledge, I have been able to compare my analyses to existing studies on identity construction in specific gendered spaces. Thus, as stated, the focus of this thesis is to add to the existing literature on gendered identity negotiation in male-dominated, male-defined workspaces.

Significance of the Research

In academia, the interest in women in non-traditional work environments has grown considerably. Much of the recent literature produced in the wake of this interest focuses on identity construction, workplace tensions, agency, the separation of spheres, spatial environments, 'valued' knowledge, and the female body. A number of these studies suggest that women must daily manage their feminine subjectivities (Ranson 2005) in order to be recognized as 'acceptable' additions to male-dominated spaces.

When considering the construction of female identities in specific spatial locations, it is important to note that forest firefighters inhabit several different

spatial locations during a fire season. These sites provide ideal grounds for study because women - who occupy different contextual positions within each setting - are influenced by the ways in which the spaces are constructed in varied and distinct ways. As such, they are in a constant state of identity (re)negotiation that largely depends on their occupied environment.

As stated, the issue of identity negotiation has inspired a number of studies on women in non-traditional workplaces (see, for example, Cassell 1998; McDowell 1995; and Tallichet 2000). Although many theorists have focused on a variety of male-dominated workplaces, they have yet to discuss the issue of identity construction as it relates to forest fire suppression. To my knowledge, this thesis is the only ethnographic study of its kind that focuses on the ways in which female firefighters construct identity. In this context, I have chosen to focus on women in the Fire Program who work at the Thunder Bay District Fire Center and on the fire line.

The main goal of this thesis is to elucidate the varied ways in which women negotiate a gendered identity in a male-dominated workplace. Through the research process, it has become clear that members of the fire fighting subculture are daily impacted by the dominant constructions of space, gender and knowledge; each concept impacts upon different individuals in varied and unique ways. The purpose of this study is to add to the growing body of literature on women in non-traditional work settings.

Plan of the Thesis

Chapter 2 focuses on the methodological framework that informs all aspects of this work. I examine the extent to which particular tensions and debates within feminist methodologies played a role in the development and application of the theories and research methods used. The chapter also discusses the challenges encountered when feminist research methods are practised.

Chapter 3 discusses the ways in which the structured work environment of the District Fire Center in Thunder Bay impacts the negotiation of a 'competent' workplace identity. Central to the development of a 'proper' workplace performance is the managerial gaze, a gaze applied by managers to members of the crew system. In this chapter I argue that women are subjected to more than one type of gaze when crew people – who may or may not be superior to the objectified individual – appropriate the managerial gaze.

In Chapter 4, the fire line is the work site under scrutiny. In contrast to the static geographical structure of the base, fires vary in accordance with a number of topographical factors. These factors, which govern the number of personnel committed to a fire, set the stage for the social interactions that take place on different fire lines. In the absence of the managerial gaze proper, there are a number of strategies invoked to maintain the fire line as a masculine space. These strategies, such as the appropriated 'managerial' gaze, pressure to perform tasks quickly and without error, and the expectation that women need to constantly prove their abilities, extort compliant workplace performances from women on the fire line.

Chapter 5 explores the impact of the separation of spheres on the fire line and its subsequent impact on the female body. In this context, prominent members of the subculture saturate ostensibly public spaces with 'troubling' images of the 'private' female body, images that conflate the female body with overt sexuality and incompetence. Intrinsically linked to the negotiation of a 'competent' workplace identity, the female body becomes a body in need of strict control in order to maintain the image of a worker devoid of femininity and most aspects of sexuality.

Chapter 6 summarizes the main arguments of the work, compares the study to the existing literature, and makes suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 - Methodologies

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the methodological approach shaped by primary and secondary sources, ethnography, critical reflection, and semi-structured interviews guiding the design of the thesis. The methods of ethnography and semi-structured interviews are discussed in depth in the second half of the chapter. The first part examines the epistemic frameworks that establish who can be a knower and what constitutes valued knowledge; it focuses, in particular, on frameworks that legitimate women's knowledge claims in male-dominated work environments. The second section discusses methodological developments - like reflexivity - that strengthen the veracity of feminist research by situating the researcher within the confines of the study. Finally, I elaborate on the methods adopted to gather data on the lived actualities of women in forest fire suppression.

Epistemic Orientations

In order to legitimate women's knowledge claims in forest fire suppression, a male dominated, male defined work environment, an epistemological framework which recognizes the importance of various forms of knowledge is adopted. A number of the dominant epistemological frameworks developed in the conspicuous absence of women fail to recognize the ways in which gender shapes the very pursuit of what constitutes valued knowledge. Positivistic epistemologies, for example, have dominated formal discourse in the natural and social sciences for more than 400 years. Many of the "crowning achievements" of Western civilization have been

attributed to positivistic methods of science (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 7). These 'achievements,' however, have occurred within disciplines that primarily recognize the centrality of the male perspective.

Positivism is defined "as the view scientific observation is free of contaminating conceptions, values, beliefs, and ideologies of the scientific observer" (Nock 1993, 15). As such, the scientific observer is entirely separated from the object s/he perceives. The knowledge of that particular object, gained by the observer, is purported to be an 'objective' and 'unbiased' understanding of the essential nature of the object perceived. Following this logic, the results of scientific inquiry are defined by the discovery of 'value-free facts,' forms of pure knowledge that are completely separate from social phenomena.

From an epistemological standpoint, positivists assume that they "have surmounted their own individual, gendered bodily, and emotional specificity" (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 1997, 63). In direct contrast to the epistemological approach taken by many feminists, the positivistic researcher is supposedly unencumbered by the somatic constraints of embodied experience. Denying their very subjectivity, positivist researchers formulate specific judgments about what sort of individual is capable of producing valued knowledge. As such, a woman is, more often than not, perceived as an 'object' about whom knowledge can be deduced (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 1997, 62). In this instance, the woman is not an agent in the production of such knowledge. Instead, she passively waits for an accomplished researcher to interpret her experiences; thereby creating an 'academic' description of gendered experience.

Much of the feminist literature on epistemology attempts to legitimate "women's own understanding of their experiences" (Maynard 2000, 23). Feminist epistemologies are constructed based on the idea that women are an active part of social reality, not 'objects' to be scrutinized. This, however, does not mean that the researcher relies solely upon subjective accounts of women's experiences when carrying out feminist research. As Skeggs asserts, "Harding argues that women's experiences in themselves or the things women say do not provide reliable grounds for knowledge claims about social relationships, culture and structure (Skeggs 2000, 79). These experiences of the social world do not necessarily foster a deep-seated awareness of the social rules and regulations that govern gendered interaction. Women's gendered subjectivities represent partial accounts that must be contextualized within the proper theoretical framework and epistemological paradigm.

The feminist researcher, in such instances, must ensure that the experiences of women are situated in a context that does not appropriate these experiences into dominant discourse.

> a moment comes after talk has been inscribed as texts and become data when it must be worked up as sociology ... as long as we work within the objectifying frame that organises the discursive consciousness, we will find ourselves reinscribing the moment of discovery of women's experiences as women talk with women, into the conceptual order that locates the reader's and writer's consciousness outside the experience of that talk (Smith cited in Holland and Ramazanoglu 2000, 126).

Careful attention must be paid to the way in which women's experiences are framed. Researchers who explore women's knowledge claims outside of the dominant framework must consistently remain aware of their commitment to producing,

interpreting, and validating that knowledge without subsuming it into dominant male discourse.

In many ways theorists who focus on feminist epistemological concerns pit themselves against the dominant paradigms of their respective disciplines (see Maynard 2000). By fashioning their arguments against the traditional order, feminists can inadvertently reproduce a dualistic system in which one school of thought is concerned with the validation of subjectivities, while the other is guarded by theorists - usually white, male, and heterosexual - who have established a framework based on 'universal truth' and 'objectivity'. "In much of the literature men as men disappear altogether - we have only 'society' and 'women'" (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 2000, 34). What emerges from this dualistic system then, is a singular 'interpretation' of the social world, "coloured by masculinist bias" (Maynard 18). The inherent bias of such 'interpretations' leads proponents of the framework to believe they have discovered 'universal truth,' as opposed to a subjective reading of experience.

Feminist epistemologies present a definite threat to the existing frameworks; primarily because they critically analyse basic assumptions that are considered to be 'absolute truth' or 'pure knowledge' according to the academics who espouse the dominant paradigms of their respective disciplines. Challenging the very assumptions that have elevated traditional thinkers above the critical realm, feminist epistemologies attempt to strip away notions of 'objectivity' and value-free 'facts' by locating the researcher within the research process (see Maynard 2000; and Stanley and Wise 1990).

Within a dualistic system, feminist epistemologies face scrutiny as a direct result of the long-standing assumptions they challenge. A concept as seemingly benign as feminist empiricism attempts to "remove sexist and other biases from the processes of research, particularly when problems for study are initially being identified and defined," without altering the existing framework through which information is gathered (Maynard 2000,19; Harding 1987). This approach merely 'adds women and stirs' (Harding 1987). It represents an attempt to reform the present system in a way that is perhaps, the least invasive and least productive method of exacting change or including women. For Harding, feminist empiricism represents a starting point; a way to start asking research questions that are important in women's lives, while carefully monitoring the context in which these questions are asked (1987, 6).

Feminist empiricism however, does not exist in an epistemological vacuum. In fact, Harding argues that both feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory are being developed concurrently (Harding 1987; Maynard 2000, 19). Feminist standpoint theory goes a step further, asserting that "a committed feminist exploration of [women's] experiences of oppression produces more complete and less distorted knowledge than that produced by men" (Maynard, 19). Standpoint theory suggests that women possess an explicit understanding of their oppression; the researcher need only provide the respondent an opportunity for disclosure.

Like feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory is a 'successor science' (Stanley and Wise 1990, 27). "It accepts the basic premises of 'scientific endeavour' just as feminist empiricism does, for it still accepts the existence of 'true reality' and

the methods of science as the means to establish it" (ibid.). In this context, standpoint theorists believe they are engaging in a truer form of research practice, categorizing themselves as outsiders who are more likely to understand women's experiences of oppression (for a more detailed discussion of this issue see Stanley and Wise 1990; and Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkowitz 1997).

Stanley and Wise (1990) suggest that standpoint theorists merely reaffirm hierarchical notions that govern knowledge production when they fail to acknowledge feminist stand*points*. "Once we admit the existence of feminist stand*points* there can be no a priori reason for placing these in any kind of hierarchy; each has *epistemological* validity because each has *ontological* validity. Here we have contextually grounded *truths*" (Stanley and Wise 1990, 28). It is from this epistemological framework, then, that the research proceeds.

Methodological Developments

Following the establishment of my epistemological orientations, the methodological concerns shaping the direction of the research process are now addressed. When developing the methodological framework, one of my leading concerns was the extent to which 'valued knowledge' - a necessary workplace fiction - was not critically examined at the Ministry of Natural Resources. I ensured that many forms of experiential knowledge, relegated to the margins of the workplace, were validated during the research process. Key theoretical components have been amalgamated to shape a theory of research practice that focuses on the question, "What methodology would best bring women's experiences of a male-

dominated workplace to the foreground?" Applied social theory, an invaluable part of a developing methodology, allowed me the freedom to address these issues in a meaningful way (Harding 1987, 3). By adopting a feminist theoretical framework, I could attempt to understand the varied experiences of women in a male-dominated workplace. Yet, what does it mean to adopt a feminist theoretical framework when the very term itself is so ambiguous and fraught with tensions?

Feminist researchers recognize that traditional theories "have been applied in ways that make it difficult to understand women's participation in social life, or to understand men's activities as gendered (vs. as representing "the human")" (ibid.). Faced with the inadequacies of traditional theoretical development, feminist thinkers often attempt to formulate their own ideas in order to overcome the shortcomings of conventional theory. Stanley and Wise, however, caution that feminist theories can lead to a realm where "'academic feminism' becomes the legitimation for a new form of expertise, that of feminist theoreticians over 'mere women'" (1990, 24). In this instance, the feminist researcher occupies a position of power, interpreting and categorizing women's experiences into a framework constructed by the subjective concerns of the researcher.

Feminist theory, like any other, can appropriate women's experiences by failing to recognize that data obtained become "objectifications ... always at odds with the lived actuality in which they are accomplished'" (Smith cited in Holland and Ramazanoglu 2000, 126). The danger of producing a work that is purportedly feminist, but actually very much a part of the dominant order, can be avoided by

deriving theory from experience and continually revising the theory to ensure that it reflects women's changing experiences (Stanley and Wise 1990, 24).

Based on past experiences in my field of study, I have informally witnessed the influence of social theories on gendered practices. As a direct result of these informal observations, I discovered that several dominant members of the subculture believe that gendered differences are the result of biology, making these differences immutable (Cassell 1998). Biological determinism, then, becomes a way to validate and magnify differences between the sexes that are actually socially produced. When members of the subculture embrace this theory, they legitimate their own perspectives which often see 'real women' – those who wear tight clothing, spend time on their appearance, and take an active interest in their male coworkers – as physically incompetent.

In direct contrast to biological determinism, this thesis espouses a theoretical framework that considers social interaction and gender roles to be performative (Butler 1999) and subject to contestation. Examining women's lived experiences through the lens of social constructionism is of great importance. Instead of attempting to categorize women in specific gender roles, social constructionism recognizes the myriad ways in which women can actively negotiate their identity. This theoretical framework attaches agency to women's actions, while allowing for the changeability of gender roles over time (McDowell 1999, 23; Butler 1999). In the absence of a theory that suggests the possibility of exacting change, the research process would be an exercise in futility for the researcher and respondent alike. If

our gendered differences are indeed static, immutable, and predetermined, what is the point of studying differences that will never change?

Feminist methodologies are not solely based on the application of theories that recognize the fluidity of social interaction. Instead, these methodologies often combine theory with analytical tools like reflexivity that shape the ways in which feminist research proceeds (Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkowitz 1997, 134). Reflexivity, the concept that researchers explicitly recognize their involvement as women in the social world they study, is a central tenet of feminist methodologies (Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkowitz, 134). The identity of the researcher - in the form of gender, class, race, sexuality, and educational background - becomes part of the research process. This methodological orientation provides the researcher the opportunity to discuss the ways that particular aspects of his/her identity shape the direction of the research project, the questions asked, and the interpretation of the results. "Thus the researcher appears to [the reader] not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (Harding 1987, 9).

In this context, reflexivity is not used as a justification. Instead, it serves as a constant reminder that the beliefs of feminist researchers "shape the results of their analyses no less than do those of sexist and androcentric researchers" (ibid.). As opposed to presenting their research findings as 'objective facts', feminist researchers account for their own subjectivity when analysing the results; thereby increasing the validity of the study.

The use of reflexivity enhanced the validity of my research process in several ways. Working in a male-dominated industry, as previously stated, does not necessarily dictate that women in such an environment are automatically aware of the oppressive nature of the social interactions that govern the space. I, however, am a socially conscious feminist with a burgeoning awareness of the informal modes of inclusion and exclusion - jokes, gossip, curses, flirting, sexual innuendo, derogatory slang, homophobic comments, and ridicule - that pervade my workplace. As a woman, I often feel angered and humiliated by these tactics, which seem to be employed to make specific individuals feel uncomfortable at work. These group oppressions are perpetuated through the use of everyday actions that appear to go unnoticed by the vast majority of people at work. As a woman occupying a position in the fire crew system, I am more likely to notice that many of the forms of informal social interaction at work are insidious forms of oppression.

In the workplace, I also identify as a white, middle class woman. Most of my fellow workers are white, working class men. These distinctions often reproduce a binary opposition, one where differences are carefully measured in order to determine individual ranking in the social hierarchy. For example, my middle class background might suggest that I have power over those occupying a lower class position. Instead, the reality is that class differences mark me as an outsider within the group, while racial uniformity has the opposite effect (see, for example Yoder and Aniakudo 1997; and Dunk 1991). Having white skin means that I have a certain amount of unearned status and privilege within the subculture.

A very salient aspect of my workplace identity considerably increased the degree to which I was marginalized. Although I did not attempt to hide my homosexuality in any way, many people were more aware of it because I would not tolerate homophobic rhetoric (and I had very short hair). Popular workplace sentiment dictated that an individual defending a lifestyle maligned within the Ministry must certainly be a member of that marginalized population. This kind of thinking, pervasive throughout the workplace, impeded my ability to interact with some members of the group. The moment I spoke out about 'inappropriate' comments, all discussion - on that topic, or any other - ceased entirely.

Finally, I recognize that my educational background influences particular responses to the research process. Many of my coworkers know that I am in the Master's program at Lakehead University. As a matter of fact, I have been assigned nicknames - such as "Dr. Ross" - in an attempt to tease me about my educational status. To some of the people I work with, formal education is of very little importance in their lives (see Dunk 1991, 136-140). My attempts to 'study' the gendered interactions of these individuals were, at times, met with suspicion and disdain. To me, this clearly indicated that dominant members of the subculture felt threatened by the fact that their interactions were the ones being scrutinized. In order to try and circumvent this issue, I incorporated methods into the research process that I considered to be less intrusive. I did not want to constantly remind my coworkers that they were being monitored.

Methods

The thesis draws upon primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources - participant observation and in-depth interviews - provide a wealth of information regarding women's experiences of identity construction and negotiation in a male-dominated work environment. Participant observation, which has been "endorsed" as a feminist research method, is not an intrusive form of gathering information (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 2000, 46). The goal of the feminist researcher applying participant observation is to focus on women's lived actualities - an integral part of the social network within which they exist - without continually asserting her/his role as a researcher (Reinharz 1992, 48). The espousal of this particular method of information gathering is central to the scope and direction of my research.

From May to the beginning of September 2002, I employed participant observation, keeping a daily journal, to study the everyday interactions of women and men working in the fire crew system at the District Fire Center in Thunder Bay. In that four month time frame, I focused primarily - though not exclusively - on three individuals that worked on my crew and other dominant members of the fire fighting subculture in the Thunder Bay District. The district, comprised of three separate bases located in Thunder Bay, Armstrong, and Shebandowan, housed seventeen four-person initial attack forest fire suppression crews. Seven crews were stationed in Thunder Bay proper, six in Armstrong, and four in Shebandowan. Although each crew had a designated home base, they were often dispatched to fires in other districts, provinces, and even the United States. The workforce being

observed was characterized by constant fluidity; both the composition of the crew and their geographic location were subject to change at a moments' notice. In that context, I was provided the unique opportunity to observe a fluid workforce in a variety of different settings; to witness the extent to which the addition of a single person on a crew, or a change in geographic location, could markedly shift the social dynamics of the crew being observed.

In order to observe members of the crew system, I obtained permission to do so from the Ethics Board at Lakehead University and the Fire Management Supervisor (FMS) at the Ministry of Natural Resources.[1] The research was carried out in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Public Works and Government Services Canada 2006).

Participant observation falls under the umbrella of ethnography, which can be defined in a literal sense as mapping a people. In this instance, it is the mapping of a very specific occupational subculture, with the recognition that any subculture both reflects the dominant culture within which it exists and differentiates itself from the same dominant culture. According to Clifford Geertz, the goal of ethnography is to provide a "thick description" of particular events or actions (1975). This largely depends on the researchers deep understanding of the context of that event or action and where the researcher is situated in relation to the subculture being studied. Geertz argues that an understanding of social interactions within a group can only

[1] Within the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, I obtained verbal permission to complete the study from Terry Popowich (Fire Program Manager - Northern Ontario) and Bob Johnson (Fire Management Supervisor - Thunder Bay).

stem from the immersion of the researcher in the group under observation. A researcher conducting participant observation constantly "participates ... in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, [and] asking questions," thereby facilitating some degree of immersion within the subculture (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, 2).

In the six seasons of fighting fire prior to my research, I was able to establish an identity within the subculture which was, in no way, linked to my role as a researcher. Having an established occupation within the Fire Program, however, facilitated a deeper understanding of the group dynamics that characterized the fire fighting subculture. Without requiring outside interpretation, I recognized the daily routines practiced by the fire fighters; I knew the significance and overall importance of most of the social interactions that characterized a 'regular day' at work. Familiarity with the 'cast of characters' in the Fire Program facilitated the research process.

The main goal of participant observation, then, was to discover the extent to which the use of space, gendered experience, power dynamics, and knowledge production impacted the negotiation of women's gendered identity. In the daily journal I kept, I drew diagrams to record the myriad ways in which space was used. These diagrams mapped the location of bodies in their work environment; they recorded the salient manipulations of space such as tent placement on a fire line, bodily position and posture in varied work environments, and the gendered appropriation of spaces central to the maintenance of a fire fighting identity. The frequency with which I was able to record spatial phenomena was entirely dependent

on the extent to which my crew occupied certain spaces. Fortunately, our time was equally divided between several sites that comprised the work environment of a fire crew.

To fully comprehend women's experiences in forest fire suppression, I spent much of the time keeping detailed notes of the daily routines that shaped the lived actualities of female fire fighters. Much of the content of the notes focused on the ways in which power dynamics, inherent in the Fire Program, were reproduced and maintained through social channels. I scrutinized the extent to which specific members of the subculture were subjected to close supervision, derogatory humour, involvement/exclusion in the production and dissemination of 'valued knowledge,' popular conversation topics - overtime, the management, women, bathroom humour, sexuality, and sex - and the use of language. In a literal sense, I wanted to determine the extent to which external environmental factors contributed to the process of gendered identity negotiation.

The process of documenting external environmental factors that contributed to the ongoing negotiation of gendered identity evolved considerably throughout the study. At first, I engaged in a vain attempt to catalogue every social interaction I encountered in the work environment. When it became readily apparent that many of the daily workplace rituals and conversational topics discussed were incessantly repeated, however, the note taking process was modified to accommodate such repetition. After initially recording a detailed description of a particular event or action, I noted each recurrence, elaborating only if the event differed in some fundamental way from previous incidences recorded. As a direct result, a

considerable amount of time and energy was redirected in the data collection process yielding a wealth of varied information.

The judicious use of time was a second factor that motivated me to further modify the process of collecting data. In an environment where standard operating procedure dictated that crews in the Fire Program worked in excess of nineteen days without a day off, time to write detailed notes was often at a premium. For the most part, I attempted to carry out two distinct roles (that of a Crew Boss and researcher) where the imposition of time constraints made it difficult to fulfill the obligations of one role, let alone two. As a Crew Boss, however, it was obligatory to maintain a detailed record of the number of hours worked in a day and the specific job duties that had been assigned to the crew. I learned to take full advantage of the time provided to document the events of the day.

Unlike many other jobs, the day's events did not conclude when the work was finished. Fire crews spent, more often than not, twenty-four hours a day together, making the distinction between work and leisure tenuous at best. Although the amount of time spent together provided a wealth of information, it was difficult to find a private space to make notes. One of the members on my crew discovered me feverishly writing notes in the tanker truck. When he realized that I was writing notes about the work environment, and possibly him, he closed the door to the truck and vacated the area. I had the sense that I had made him acutely uncomfortable and resolved to take notes in the privacy of my tent. Even in a situation where a Crew Member seemed to experience some level of discomfort, he did not moderate

his behaviour in the days that followed, a microcosm of the overall reaction of the subculture.

The dominant members of the subculture who set the tone for much of the social interaction that took place at work saw me, first and foremost, as a Crew Boss on an initial attack forest fire suppression crew. The immediacy with which members of the subculture being studied attempted to modify their behaviour diminished as individuals quickly 'forgot' that they were being monitored and reverted back to routine forms of social interaction (Berg 2001, 147).

As stated, the majority of individuals within fire suppression did very little to modify their behaviour in my presence; the fact that I was documenting their actions did not deter them. There was, however, one notable exception to the general rule. One of the more colourful characters at work seemed to take an avid interest in the process. As a matter of fact, he offered to be a reader on my committee, should I require his expertise. I met the same individual on a fire in the spring. He had been staying in a base camp where he had the luxury of taking a shower every night. I, on the other hand, had gone without a shower for a number of days at that point. When he approached me on the road, the black flies were swarming around him. I said "The black flies sure love you." He replied, " You know, it's the female that does the biting. Put that in your thesis." That particular comment suggested that he was conscious of the fact that I was a researcher observing gendered interaction within the Ministry of Natural Resources.

When my observations of gendered interaction within the Fire Program were completed, I coded the information my journals contained. There were a number of

salient themes including spatial phenomena, conversational topics, sexuality, power dynamics, knowledge dissemination, and job assignments that provided the opportunity to systematically categorize the journal entries. I was able to code the contents of the journal in a manner that punctuated the frequency with which specific events or actions occurred. With core themes as a guide, I also examined the extent to which individual reaction to similar situations differed or remained the same.

In a very important sense, the use of participant observation ensured that my own experiences were part of the data collected. I approached the field with a level of social awareness, augmented by constructionist theories, which allowed me to view the work environment through different lenses. Those individuals who did not possess the same background or awareness perceived the events in an entirely different way. It was difficult, at times, to continually remind myself that perceptions of the social world were varied and diverse, that my perspective was a singular way to view a specific social event. I had to be certain that I was not appropriating other peoples' experiences to bolster my arguments, a central problem when applying participant observation (Marshall 1998, 482).

"Good ethnography requires that the researcher avoids simply accepting everything at face value, but instead, considers the material as raw data that may require corroboration or verification" (Berg 139). Instead of merely relying upon one method of gathering information, the ethnographer seeks to strengthen her/his observations using complementary methods. I conducted fifteen open-ended interviews with women who occupied different positions in forest fire suppression to

complement my observations in the field. It took six months to complete the interviews; I started at the end of May and finished in November of 2002. The age of the respondents was 19 to 42 years, with an average age of 26 years.

Of the 15 women interviewed, only one was no longer actively involved in the actual suppression of fires; though she was still employed by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Those respondents that were still engaged in the active suppression of forest fires occupied a range of different positions on the crews. Four individuals were Crew Leaders, three were Crew Bosses, and eight were Crew Members on an initial attack forest fire suppression crew. Levels of experience varied tremendously, from a single season to eight years on the job. When the demographics of the respondents were assessed based on those two factors alone, a great deal of differentiation amongst the women being interviewed was readily identifiable.

When selecting women for the interview process, I tried to determine the level of individual interest by engaging women on the job in a brief discussion regarding the study. All of the women I spoke with demonstrated an interest in being involved and provided me with some means of contacting them. Of the women that I approached in this fashion, two could not be reached to secure an interview time. The first provided me with a phone number to a residence she no longer occupied. When I attempted to contact the second one, someone picked up the phone and immediately returned it to the receiver. I have no real sense of why those two events happened and decided not to make an effort to contact either individual again. For the most part, however, the women that I contacted were audibly enthusiastic about their potential involvement in the interview process.

Each participant was called, via telephone, to briefly explain the nature of the study, the interview procedure, and to establish a time and location for the interview. Before the commencement of the interview, the respondent was provided a cover letter and consent form (see Appendices C and D) which further elucidated the direction of the research. Following ethics guidelines, respondents were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, that the information they provided would remain strictly confidential, that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to, and that they could withdraw from the interview process at any time. In an attempt to foster a cooperative environment, each participant was asked to choose their own pseudonym and contribute to the overall structure of the interview.

A number of the women seemed to relish the chance to discuss their personal experiences in a male-dominated workplace. Although the open-ended interview has been categorized as "a particularly bourgeois way of communicating information," (Dunk 1991, 16) it provided women the opportunity to clearly express their thoughts and opinions without fear of reprisal or interruption. In the male-dominated workplace, such forms of conversation were a rarity indeed; the space was not conducive to deep and meaningful discussions regarding gendered identity. Women's voices were often muted, "particularly in any situation where women's experiences and interests [were] at a variance with those of men" (Anderson and Jack 1991, 11). For this reason, emphasis was placed on a range of methods that complemented women's lived actualities by making their voices audible. Open-

ended interviews provided women the opportunity to expand, at length, on their experiences using their own forms of communicating.

Most of the respondents seemed comfortable in the interview process and eagerly answered each of the questions. A number of women elaborated, at length, on their personal experiences. Yet, individual comfort levels seemed to vary in accordance with personal experiences and the extent to which the women had reflected on their experiences. Several women seemed to be reflecting on issues that caused them a great deal of distress. I asked a question of one woman, who gazed out the window in an absorbed fashion for several minutes. She did not respond to the question, leaving me with the distinct impression that she was still attempting to sort out many of the experiences she had while fighting fire. The interview had obviously stirred up some very painful memories for her. In response, I offered to stop the interview to enable her to collect herself. She consented to stop, took a few moments to collect herself, and continued with the interview.

A number of the questions asked in the interview process evoked particularly strong responses. Questions that directly related to gender, or used 'gender' in the wording of the question, were met with strong resistance. Some individuals responded by saying "I don't know if it is a gender thing." In order to circumvent the problem, I tried to word the question differently, replacing 'gender' with different words and phrases such as 'because you are a woman.' However, changes in the wording of the questions did little to moderate individual responses.

Interviews create, for the researcher, several different interpretive frameworks from which the interviewer can extrapolate data (Anderson and Jack 1991). For

example, the researcher can critically examine the body language of the respondent, listen to the silences and omissions in their speech, and analyze the recorded verbal data. In this context, the challenge becomes "listening in stereo" to hear the dominant and muted channels of the respondents voice (Anderson and Jack 1991, 11; Oakley 1981). One must have an awareness that non-verbal cues are as important as that which is said in response to a particular question.

For each interview, a tape-recorder was used - with the permission of the respondent - to record the discussion. An interesting dynamic ensued around the use of the recorder; some personified the equipment, talking to the machine as though it was a third party involved in the proceedings. One woman leaned over and whispered "She's sleeping," in reference to me. Some of the other women either picked up the recorder, or positioned their bodies closer to it when they wanted to emphatically express an opinion. In one such instance, a respondent picked up the tape-recorder to punctuate the notion that she was "Twenty-seven, single, and in debt."

Nine of the fifteen interviews were conducted at my home, five were completed at work, and one was completed in a coffee shop. Whenever possible, each individual chose the location where the interview would take place. Often, convenience dictated the location, as was the case with the interviews conducted at work. During a lull in the fire season, the management allowed me to interview a number of individuals at a forward attack base. It was an incredible opportunity to get a substantial amount of data, but the opportunity certainly compromised the comfort of some of the women who participated in the interview process. For

example, I interviewed a rookie in the office during work hours. Her Crew Leader, known for his domineering attitude, stayed in the next office for the duration of the interview. As a matter of fact, he made his presence known by talking in a manner that could only be described as excessively loud. The interview lasted for less than twenty minutes and each response was perfunctory and positive.

The interview schedule (see Appendix B) posed a number of questions related to women's experiences fighting fire. Initial questions, primarily in place for ice breaking and coding purposes, focused on basic demographics such as the age, educational background, marital status, and number of years worked in forest fire suppression. Questions that followed dealt with the use of equipment, training, supervision, the gendered use of space, perceptions of coworkers, perceptions of the self, and individual access to 'valued knowledge.'

The main aim of the interviews was to ascertain the extent to which subjective interpretations of the workplace were anomalies, or commonly held. Interviewing other women in forest fire suppression provided the opportunity to discover the salient patterns surrounding the negotiation of gendered identity. Instead of focusing on a singular interpretation of the construction, performance and contestation of identities, the examination of women's experiences in 'fire' served to enrich the quality of the study.

On average, the interviews were approximately one and a half hours in length; the longest took three hours to complete. Contents of the interviews were tape-recorded and partially transcribed for coding purposes. When analyzing the data, a number of salient themes were discovered in relation to which aspects of the fire

fighting subculture had the strongest impact on the construction and negotiation of individual identity.

A wealth of secondary source literature from sociology and women's studies provided a contextual background for the study. The secondary sources chosen focused primarily on the construction of gendered identity, women in non-traditional work, the sociology of the body and gendered space. Most of the literature was selected prior to the commencement of the interviews, though a number of articles on the construction of skill in the workplace were sought out after a number of interviews revealed that to be an important theme.

During the interview process, I attempted to secure an equal number of respondents who occupied each of the three available positions on a fire crew. As a direct result of the scarcity of women in the Fire Program, however, it was difficult to place stipulations on the sample acquired. For the most part, the sample (small as it was) accurately reflected the distribution of women on the crews. In this context, there are limitations to the generalizations that can result from the data. A second limitation, specific to the interview process, is the age of the participants; only two were over the age of thirty. In part, this is the result of the recent addition of women to the Fire Program; the majority of women working in fire are young students who plan to seek a career elsewhere. I think the study would have been enhanced by interviewing older women who left fire to highlight the changes that have occurred within the subculture and discover their reasons for leaving the Program. Within the confines of this study, I focused on gender and sexuality; thereby excluding differences based on race and class. Though this can be perceived

as a limitation, I felt that the scope of the project would be entirely too large if I included these factors as well.

In the future, the study could be enhanced by a follow up that considers the myriad factors shaping difference and identity. A larger sample could be obtained, and participant observation could continue for a longer period of time. This study does, however, address the paucity of information that exists surrounding women's experiences of gendered identity negotiation in a male-dominated environment. It further develops the body of literature on spatial arrangements, power dynamics, and the production of 'valued knowledge.'

Conclusions

This chapter details the methodological approaches that shaped the design of this thesis. Central to the research was the adoption of a feminist epistemology that recognizes the importance of different forms of knowledge production. Stanley and Wise recommended the implementation of feminist stand*points*, (1990, 28) which recognized the varied subject positions from which knowledge was constructed and interpreted. Unlike a number of competing epistemological frameworks, the main tenet of feminist standpoints was that each one of the myriad perspectives was valued equally, thereby ensuring that knowledge claims were not placed in hierarchical order of import.

In an attempt to further legitimate and validate knowledge claims made by women who were often placed at the margins of knowledge construction within the fire subculture, I tried to apply social theories that focused on the changeability of

gendered performances over time. As such, many of the theories detailed the extent to which subject positions - particularly those of women working in male-dominated fields - were maintained by power imbalances and repeated, stylized performances (see, for example, Butler 1999; Foucault 1977).

Secondly, I used the process of reflexivity to subsume my own identity in the role of the researcher. I did so to account for my personal biases that shaped the direction and interpretation of the research. The act further legitimated the veracity of the research results by positioning myself within, as opposed to outside, the research.

Finally, for this study I adopted the method of participant observation endorsed by feminist thinkers as a non-intrusive way of gathering information (Kelly, Burton, Regan 2000). Using ethnographic observation, I focused on the members of my crew and dominant members of the subculture for a period of four months. The results obtained detailed a number of recurring themes which were corroborated by fifteen in-depth interviews I did with women who fought forest fires. Both methods provided a wealth of data to be examined.

In Chapter 3, the recurring theme of monitoring is discussed. The District Fire Center in Thunder Bay is a geographical space that facilitates the production and maintenance of a number of different gazes. Of these, one of the most powerful forms is the managerial gaze which members of upper management apply to firefighters working on the base regardless of their gender. Far more pervasive, however, is the appropriated 'managerial' gaze applied primarily to women in the

crew system by fire personnel who may have less experience or rank beneath the subject being monitored.

Chapter 3 - 'Managing' Identities

Introduction

This chapter examines the ways in which the fire fighting subculture studied is influenced by social interactions that take place in particular workspaces. The workplace being described is the District Fire Center in Thunder Bay which houses seven initial attack fire crews. I describe the impact of dominant constructions of space, the threat of constant supervision, and regimented daily routines on the negotiation of a 'competent' workplace identity.

Largely descriptive, the initial section examines the procedures for obtaining employment and promotion in forest fire suppression. This is followed by a brief discussion of the three positions that comprise an initial attack fire crew. The second section focuses on an ethnographic description of the District Fire Center in Thunder Bay, a spatial construct that facilitates the enactment of the managerial gaze.

The managerial gaze, a central component of hegemonic masculinity, maintains the association of power in the workplace with masculinity (McDowell 1999, 129). Fire managers apply constant surveillance or the threat of constant surveillance to fire personnel. Aided by the implementation of regimented daily routines that micromanage time, standards of appearance, and the dissemination of valued knowledge, the process instills in crew people an awareness that they are the subjects of constant scrutiny.

The final section, however, discusses the ways in which most men (and some women) on fire crews mimic the managerial styles traditionally conflated with

masculinity. These firefighters, who are often without legitimate claim to a supervisory position on the crew, appropriate the managerial gaze. In this context, women are monitored more closely (even when they are being monitored by other women) than their male counterparts, thereby compelling women to negotiate a 'competent' workplace identity devoid of feminine characteristics.

Becoming a Firefighter

Before considering the ways in which a 'competent' identity is negotiated at work, it is useful to provide a brief description of the ways employment within the Fire Program is sought and obtained. In order to become a firefighter, potential candidates must expend a considerable amount of time and money on a minimum of one course. The S-100, an introductory course on fire suppression and behaviour, is a mandatory part of the application process; without it, an individual will not even receive consideration for a Crew Member position. Run by private contractors who charge anywhere from five to nine hundred dollars per person, the S-100 focuses on pump set-ups, hose laying, helicopter familiarization and basic forest fire behaviour. Although the cost seems prohibitive, hundreds of applicants receive the certification even though it does not secure employment for the individuals who obtain it.

In addition to the S-100, potential hires must complete a physical fitness test comprised of a shuttle run, simulated pump carry/charged hose drag, and upright rows. The upright row involves a controlled raising and lowering of a fifty-one pound bar a minimum of 9 consecutive times. Unlike the S-100, however, the standardized fitness test (Pre-Fit) must be completed annually by every active

firefighter in the crew system, regardless of their age or experience. With the exception of the upright rows and the pump carry, each task is a timed event. To pass the Pre-Fit, individuals must meet - or exceed - the minimum time standard. Candidates are allowed a temporal cushion; they can still pass the overall test after receiving a 'borderline' score in one of the events.

The Pre-Fit test, the first arena in which the physical competence of women applying for Crew Member positions can be monitored and remarked upon by firefighters within the crew system (see, for example, Wang and Kleiner 2001), is an exercise fraught with contradictions for a number of seasoned male firefighters.

> There was a woman hired this year.... Before she ... even came to work the first day, I guess somebody had taken their Pre-fit with her and they said how she shouldn't be hired because she did terrible in her pre-fit test.... And they couldn't believe that she should be fighting fire. And they were saying how ridiculous it is that she got hired and that she just got hired because she was a woman. ... a guy would never get hired. I guess she did bad in her shuttle run (Zulu, Interview 12).

Many dominant members of the subculture brag about their refusal to exert themselves beyond the 'borderline' stage during the shuttle run; yet, they berate the athletic prowess of a woman able to surpass their own informal standards of performance. It is somewhat ironic, then, that these individuals would be critical of a woman whose physical performance so closely mirrors their own.

Upon completion of the Pre-Fit and S-100, individuals submit applications to several districts in the Northwest Region. With literally hundreds of people to choose from, the Fire Operations Supervisor in the district determines who will

occupy the scarce positions available.[1] As a direct result of the surplus of candidates, managers are often selective; they tend to look for candidates who have accreditation that goes beyond the required training. These forms of accreditation - such as first aid, restricted radio operators' license, and chain saw certification - "separate the men from the sheep" (Manager, Informal Interview).

Positions on the Fire Crew

When the "men" have been separated from the "sheep," the successful candidates become Crew Members on a four-person initial attack fire crew. Each crew in the Northwest Region is usually comprised of two Crew Members, a Crew Boss, and a Crew Leader. In this context, Crew Members occupy the most subordinate position on the hierarchical crew. As part of their daily routine, Crew Members perform much of the manual labour on the base. Menial jobs, like boxing hose and equipment retrieval, are often assigned to reflect their subordinate rank on the crew. In many ways, the role is based on physical prowess and devoid of any formal expectation that the individual will make significant intellectual contributions to suppression strategies. The lack of formal expectations is problematic for a number of women who occupy the Crew Member position.

> it's almost degrading (pause) being a Crew Member because it's like you're told .... 'Don't have an opinion.' ... 'Don't make decisions.' .... 'Don't come up with ideas because well, you're just a Crew Member. So basically, you don't have the training.' That's what it feels like to me; and that's coming from Crew Leader, Crew Boss, as well as Management (Anne, Interview 10).

[1] Many of the people within the crew system believe that managers employ nepotism when making hiring decisions. As such, the Ministry of Natural Resources is also referred to derisively as the "Ministry of Neighbours and Relatives."

In order to advance within the crew system, however, the Crew Member must somehow demonstrate that s/he possesses the leadership characteristics required to make sound decisions.

Depending on the leadership characteristics exhibited,[2] the position of Crew Member can be held by an individual indefinitely or abandoned after a single fire season. Those who advance beyond the station become Crew Bosses, which is the next logical step in the hierarchical chain. Individual firefighters must acquire the S-200 course, offered by Fire Management to specific people, to be eligible for the promotion. Provided by the MNR to enhance the skills and knowledge cultivated at the Crew Member level, the S-200 develops leadership characteristics such as effective supervisory techniques, awareness of safety issues affecting the crew, and strategies surrounding time management. Upon successful completion of the S-200, most Crew Members advance.[3]

On the job, the Crew Boss often engages in the same manual labour that Crew Members are accustomed to. The Crew Boss, however, is the front line supervisor "providing leadership direction in the absence of the Fire Crew Leader" (Position Specification 1995, 1). As such, s/he may choose to delegate the more unsavory tasks, those that are monotonous and therefore undesirable, to crew people. A Crew Boss is no longer a "pick head" or a "grunt," firefighter vernacular for a Crew Member. Instead, her/his job is to "monitor [Crew Member] performance on

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[2] Each individual on a crew receives a Performance Appraisal twice a year. The first appraisal is given mid-season; the second is given at the end of the year. Managers use the information provided in these accounts to formulate opinions regarding the capabilities of individual firefighters.

[3] Advancement to the Crew Boss level is often subjectively determined by the perceptions of managers toward the prospective Crew Boss and the number of available positions in the District.

assigned fire suppression tasks" (ibid.). In this context, the dynamics on the crew must shift to accommodate the resulting power imbalances that accompany role differentiation.

The highest and often most powerful rank achievable on an initial attack forest fire suppression crew is that of the Crew Leader. Once again, a potential Crew Leader must pass the S-300 course, the last of the crew training provided by the MNR. For the most part, individual Crew Leaders are responsible for "providing leadership direction to [the crew] while monitoring their overall work performance (quality/quantity), routine conduct (behaviour/attendance) and general welfare (transportation, accommodation, safety)" (Position Specification 1995, 1). The Crew Leader, then, is the hub of the crew, responsible for all aspects of crew development and professional cohesion. As such, the effectiveness of a crew largely depends on the extent to which the Crew Leader is able to facilitate a positive work environment while maintaining a personal level of professionalism and respectability.

To earn the respect of the crew, several Crew Leaders are industrious 'go-getters' who crave the action and excitement of initial attack. These individuals work beside the members of their crew and often perform the same physical duties – such as laying hose and nozzling – that they delegate to subordinates. Other Crew Leaders, however, embrace a sedentary approach to the job. Only under extreme circumstances will they deign to carry a box of hose or spend a significant amount of time in the presence of their crew. Those Crew Leaders who choose to abuse the position by inflating their importance and exaggerating the existing power

imbalances within the crew system are subject to extensive derision from crew people and other Crew Leaders.

> I think people work less hard for you, if you don't earn their respect first. You know. I mean, come on. .... As much as I love this job, and as much as I like to say that it's really important, it's just fighting fire for the Ministry of Natural Resources. .... It's supposed to be fun. .... And ... I don't take it that seriously. And I think that uh, the summer should be fun. It should be made fun. There's no point in power tripping and making ... people feel an inch tall when they make a mistake. Definitely, people will work a lot harder for you, if they like you or if they, you know, have respect for you. And you have to earn that respect. You have to give them respect, to get respect (Judy in the Sky with Diamonds, Interview 11).

As stated earlier, initial attack forest fire crews are comprised of three separate positions that are usually occupied by four people. A general understanding of the work related duties and hierarchical rank that accompanies each role has also been elaborated. What is yet to be discussed is the way in which institutional constraints on the base - both formal and informal - shape the negotiation of a 'competent' identity. How does the seemingly innocuous "Crew Area," saturated with gendered meaning, reify masculinity in a way that invalidates the production of femininity? To what extent does regimented daily routine inform the construction of a 'competent' workplace identity devoid of gender? Lastly, how penetrating is the threat of the managerial gaze that informs both geographic location and daily routine?

Defining the Space

In order to acquaint the reader with the geographic location under scrutiny, the floor plan of the Thunder Bay District Fire Center will literally be mapped out. The facility is comprised of offices and a service center – complete with a

warehouse, parts bay, and hose processing plant – that occupies over two thirds of the available space. For the most part, however, crews spend their time in the Crew Room, the offices located above the Lunchroom, or the Sector Response Room. What follows is a physical description of the base with specific reference to the spaces most often frequented by crew people.

Walking toward the crew entrance on the west side of the building, I encounter the smoking area just outside the "Initial Attack" door. The area is sparsely furnished with one picnic table and one cafeteria table placed end to end, the back seat of an old MNR vehicle that rests against the exterior wall, and a garbage can which is often too full for one person to lift unassisted. There is also a small bucket that houses the remnants of recent rainstorms and a number of cigarette butts, one of which is still smoldering. Typically, a minimum of two people are standing outside smoking, chatting, and watching people walk across the parking lot on their way to the Fire Center.

In order to gain access to the Crew Room, I must brave the fumes; other entrances to the Fire Center are restricted by card access or located on the opposite side of the building. Once inside the door, I am in the expansive Crew Room profiled by a number of different items, such as crew lockers, a coffee maker, cabinets housing spare parts, freezers, a sink, a washing machine, and retrieval benches, along the perimeter.[4] In the middle of the room, there is a significant amount of floor space the continuity of which is broken only by a cafeteria table and

[4] Retrieval benches are large work benches where firefighters clean and maintain equipment. Most often backed by a peg board housing numerous tools, the retrieval benches are highly visible to anyone in the Crew Area. In this context, an individual sharpening a chain saw or pulaski can easily be monitored.

a makeshift metal table surrounded by a mismatched collection of office chairs discarded by management; both tables, placed end to end, are perpendicular to the door. A number of copies of the latest gun magazines such as Guns and Ammo and an outdated Strategic Operations Plan (SOP)[5] litter the surface of the cafeteria table. Although neither one appears in plain sight at the moment, it is quite common to see recent issues of Auto Trader, FHM[6] and Maxim magazine. Both FHM and Maxim are hyper-masculine magazines that contain suggestive pictures of women, heterosexist articles and crude humour that tend to debase women and men both. On the spine of Maxim, the subtitle "The Best Thing to Happen to Men Since Women" reflects the general attitude of the target audience (males aged sixteen to forty). "Maxim's like, *the* fire magazine because they can pull that off without having to worry about uh, [the Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Policy (WDHP)]" (Zulu, Interview 12).

For the most part, the tables are the hub of the Crew Room. Each day, several firefighters proceed directly to their crew locker, grab their boots, and find an empty chair at the table. From their chairs, crew people discuss an array of topics, share important pieces of information regarding the current fire situation, and survey the entire expanse of the shop floor. Some individuals focus primarily on personal conversations or gossip; others oversee and remark upon the work - at various stages of completion - being done by others.

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[5] The Strategic Operations Plan is a summary of fire activity in the Northwest Region. As the fire season picks up, it becomes very difficult for firefighters to procure an updated copy which may offer accurate information regarding the number of fires burning and crew movements.

[6] FHM is the acronym on the cover of the magazine. The full title of the magazine is For Him Magazine.

In specific instances a firefighter may have to forgo the informal table talk to change into nomex coveralls. The design of the building is a telltale sign that women are a recent addition to the space; the men's bathroom is approximately five meters away from the Crew Area, has three separate entrances, and does not readily assure the individual using it will be seen by management. Conversely, the women's bathroom is approximately fifty meters from the Crew Area, and has a single entrance almost directly in front of the Fire Management Supervisor's office (which has a wall made of windows). In order to change privately, then, women must enter an entirely separate part of the building, potentially subjecting themselves to the managerial gaze.

After the required uniform has been donned, the Crew Leaders and Crew Bosses in Thunder Bay vacate the Crew Area to attend the morning briefing. To hasten the process, individuals use a door located on the far left side of the room. The door goes through a small office with a few desks, a filing cabinet filled with Fire Reports, and a shelf with a number of different MNR forms on it. Most often, the room is vacant, serving only as a passage to the Sector Response Room.

Once inside the Sector Response Room for the morning briefing, the geographical similarities to the Crew Area are immediately apparent. Although the space is much more enclosed, most of the furniture is arranged along the perimeter. The exception is an extremely large three-sided desk, the Sector Response Officer (SRO) desk. Most of the activity that goes on in the room - morning briefings and crew dispatches to fires - directly involves the SRO. As such, the desk is intended to be the focal point. A number of wooden benches line the walls, all of which

directly face the SRO desk. Upon the east wall, there is an illuminated map of the Thunder Bay District used to locate fires being responded to. The corresponding wall houses 'white boards' overflowing with information regarding the location of each crew, the status of ongoing fires, resource requirements, and maps of different scale. A sign above the door returning to the Crew Room states "Zero Tolerance"; inside the "O" there is a picture of a cannabis leaf.[7]

From the Sector Response Room, crew people have direct access to the offices; without a specific purpose, however, most do not loiter in the front of the building any longer than necessary.

> [I am] least comfortable in the office - especially when there's a lot of (laughs) management around ... just because everyone's a little bit more tense and on edge and feel like they should ... look busy, be doing something. And that's kind of difficult when there's nothing to do (Fiona Firefighter, Interview 7).

Returning to the Crew Room, firefighters prepare for alerts, relay (or withhold) information received during the morning briefing and - alert status permitting - attempt to leave the Fire Center.

The Managerial Gaze

Functioning as an environment which facilitates the (re)production of myriad forms of the gaze, the geographical structure of the base is reminiscent of Bentham's Panopticon. It is within the confines of the base that crew people, placed in "a state of conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault 1977, 201), are monitored by the managerial gaze. When executed by a manager whose voyeuristic position is

[7] "Zero Tolerance" is one of the catch phrases for the Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Policy (WDHP). It basically states that specific behaviours - including drug and alcohol use - will not be

supported and justified by his[8] place in the Fire Program, the managerial gaze is "no longer the gaze of any observer" (McDowell and Sharp 1999, 103). Instead, it is imbued with a hierarchical power that appears to motivate fire personnel to escape its penetrating stare.

Managers are "the locus of control" (Eveline and Booth 2002, 558) at the Fire Center in Thunder Bay. By applying the managerial gaze to the daily activities of fire personnel, then, they make firefighters into objects of consumption. The manager enters the Crew Area most often from the door that leads out of the Sector Response Room ostensibly to get a cup of coffee. One furtive glance around the room provides all the information he requires. With that momentary 'glance,' imbued with power, the manager grades the perceived competence of the subject.

> ... if you're not doing anything - which is never supposed to be happening. But if, for example, you're sitting down because - I don't know - you're taking a break, managers walk out, they judge you for that. And they want to know why you're sitting around (Anne, Interview 10).

Part of the power of the legitimated managerial gaze is that it does not linger. It fixes upon the subject of surveillance but a moment and then moves on. The label applied to the subject of the fleeting exchange by a fire manager in a position to deny promotion, trips and overtime lasts considerably longer. Of the fifteen respondents, eleven feel least comfortable on the base because they feel like they are being judged and watched. Mia, for example, feels like she is "under the lime light" (Interview 15) when on base. She states, "when I'm on base, it's ... 'where are the eyes ...watching you to see what you're doing' (Interview 15).

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tolerated by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR).

In comparison, Ingrid recognizes that she is being watched while working at the Fire Center. She captures popular sentiment when she describes the fear associated with being caught in the wrong place, doing 'nothing':

> I just never really knew ... what I was supposed to be doing, or where I was supposed to be.... [I felt] that I was in the wrong place. I didn't know if I was supposed to be sitting up in the office upstairs. I didn't know if I could sit down at the table for a minute cause I was afraid that a manager was going to come out... (Interview 9).

Depending on the individual firefighter, the fear of being caught doing 'nothing' manifests itself in different ways. Jones is an experienced Crew Member who characterizes the environment in which she works as "manic" (Interview 14). She suggests that the presence of a manager enacting the managerial gaze facilitates a chilly workplace climate. "[S]ometimes it's so awesome and I love it. And sometimes I feel like it's cold as ice and like I'm walking on egg shells" (Interview 14). It is in this context that Jones feels threatened by another female firefighter who constantly risks getting caught 'doing nothing.'

> Q: Do the perceptions and actions of your supervisors influence your work performance?
>
> A: (pause) You mean if I'm sitting on my ass in the room and then [a manager] comes out, do I pick up a broom? No, because I'm the person who's already sweeping. Like, Beth[9] always did that; [she] pissed me off. Every time someone important came in, she'd do that. Pretty much, the only thing I do around the shop is clean up the coffee and sweep the floor. (laughs) But I do it a lot (Jones, Interview 14).

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[8] At the time of the study (2002), every Fire Manager and Fire Management Technician in the Thunder Bay District are male.

[9] The name Beth is a pseudonym.

Within the spatial confines of the base, it is clear that Jones feels compelled to monitor the work habits of other women. Her 'competent' identity, largely shaped by the threat of the managerial gaze, could be jeopardized by Beth's inactivity.

Regimented Daily Routine - Alerts

The managerial gaze is further entrenched through the establishment of regimented daily routine. Of the myriad routines, fire personnel are most impacted by the institutional micromanagement of their crew alert status that determines response time, geographic range, and job duties assigned. A colour-coded system allocates three different times in which a crew must answer a dispatch. The colours red, yellow, and blue signify that crews are expected to remain vigilant and be prepared to fight a forest fire at all times during their shift.

Red alert, the most coveted alert status[10] within the Fire Program, ensures that "resources" (people, vehicles, and equipment are classified under the same heading) are immediately available to respond to an incident (Regional Fire Staff Indoctrination Package 2002, 48). Crews "on red" must observe strict guidelines governing professional attire, vehicular maintenance, and equipment retrieval to regulate the conditions under which a dispatch occurs. Without exception, firefighters on red alert must wear nomex coveralls and work boots during their shift. Similar standards apply to the equipment; the suppression unit is checked, and the vehicle - truck or helicopter - is readied and loaded.

[10] Red alert, coveted because crews 'on red' are more likely to respond to a fire, guarantees fire personnel a minimum of half an hour overtime.

After mandatory tasks are completed, firefighters are limited geographically by time constraints imposed upon a red alert crew. Spatially, the crew tends to be confined to the Crew Room, the Smoking Area, or the offices above the Lunchroom. These spatial limitations are further exacerbated by the fact that crew people cannot perform any labour-intensive jobs; they are required to conserve energy for initial attack. As Christena Nippert-Eng suggests, however, "employers and cultural norms indoctrinate us with the belief that we should "work" while we're at the workplace or, at the very least, allow others to do so" (1996, 81).

It is in this context that the workplace becomes "a sort of "neutral zone," where neither the time nor the place ... are committed to a particular structural activity" (Nippert-Eng 1996, 120). Uncomfortable occupying this liminal position, most firefighters pass the time in the transitional stage by sitting around and being critical of other people on the base.

> Q: Do you find that criticism is a huge part of the job?
>
> A: Yes. I think it's ... criticism for work related things or just any type of gossip, anything they can get on you, I think with this job, more than any other job I've ever had. ... it's ... way worse in fire. It's like everyone is just so bored and they would just love to hear any shit on anyone and spread it around. Mostly criticism, yeah. Like, you don't hear a lot of 'Oh, this guy did a great job....' It's ... never any of that: tonnes of criticism (Lisa Monroe, Interview 6).

What is produced is an environment in which the monotony of red alert, a defining feature of the workplace, fosters stultifying boredom and bitterness.

During 'dead red,'[11] the romantic notion that fighting fire is a physically demanding job is laid bare. Women who enter the 'exciting' field of fire fighting discover that mental tedium and negativity characterize specific work environments, like the base. It stands to reason that some men have a vested interest in maintaining the romanticized notion of fire as one of the most physically demanding jobs out there; a significant part of their identity is based on the powerful premise that fire fighting requires tremendous bravery and bodily strength.

> As manufacturing jobs for unqualified young men [are disappearing] in particular regions of the industrial West, the opportunity for these men to develop that characteristic working-class masculinity - built around shared risks and hardship at work and communal solidarity - that [mark], for example, localities dominated by coal mining, ship building and steel or chemicals production [is vanishing] with them (McDowell 1999, 124).

Building community and fraternity around the ideals of shared risks and hardship, a number of male firefighters seek to maintain the popular notion that fighting fire is dangerous and laborious work suited for men. This pervasive notion does not accurately reflect the actual experiences of women fighting fire, many of whom encounter difficulties when dealing with the recurring boredom of red alert. Jessie Parks states, "it kind of drives me nuts when ... you have to sit around and wait.... There's a lot of waiting ... " (Interview 5). Responding to the question, "What do you like the least about your job," Gwyneth echoes Jessie's sentiments.

> Oh, it sounds really bad, but all the time that you have basically, to do nothing, ... the sitting around time. .... It just seems like it takes a lot longer for the days to pass, and you're on red and your just kind of sitting and looking at the wall ... for ... the whole day. It kind of kills me doing that... (Gwyneth Paltrow, Interview 3).

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[11] "Dead red" occurs when a crew is on red alert for an extended period of time without going to fight a fire. It can last anywhere from a few hours to weeks at a time. My longest 'dead red' stint was sixteen days in 1998.

When a crew is on yellow alert, they may be constrained by the same monotonous routines that characterize red alert. Allowed a "maximum 30 minute time delay" to respond to a dispatch (Regional Fire Staff Indoctrination Package 2002, 48), crews on yellow have a full suppression unit on their vehicle but they are not required to wear nomex coveralls. Unlike red, yellow alert is a highly negotiable alert status divided into two informal categories: 'yellow' and 'loose yellow.' On 'loose yellow,' crews bargain with the SRO, who often relents and allows them to leave the base. Conversely, a crew on yellow is expected to be able to meet the half-hour time limit imposed by fire guidelines. Most often, the crew invests in workplace activities that can be readily deserted in the event of a dispatch.

Blue alert, the lowest grade alert, allows crews a four-hour window to ready themselves for a fire assignment. A crew working a typical eight-hour shift "on blue" is not governed by the same regulations that define both red and yellow alert. Firefighters "on blue" are forbidden to wear their nomex coveralls, unless they are involved in a public demonstration authorized by the managers. Instead, crew people are expected to dress in "cotton/synthetic coveralls ... worn when assigned to equipment maintenance or retrieval, [and] painting" (Regional Fire Staff Indoctrination Package 2002, 60). Several districts have also introduced "visual wear" tee shirts in an attempt to crystallize the monolithic image of the professional firefighter. Where the option is available, crew people prefer to dress in the visual wear as opposed to the cotton/synthetic coveralls. The tee shirts do not restrain individuality to the same extent that coveralls do; firefighters experience

empowerment through the choice of pants worn with the ensemble[12] (Holliday 2001, 63).

Work duties assigned to the crews "on blue" further contribute to the empowerment of the worker. Firefighters, relatively free of the time constraints that define red and yellow alert, often leave the base to work in the field for the day. As a direct result of the lack of managerial supervision, supervision that influences daily activity on the base, much of the fieldwork is empowering for fire personnel. In a fundamental way, crews "on blue" have more control over almost every aspect of their workday than crews confined to the base and controlled by the managerial gaze.

Regimented Daily Routine - The Morning Briefing

The second regimented daily routine that facilitates the managerial gaze is the morning briefing. Held in the Response Room in Thunder Bay, the morning briefing involves a three-way conference call usually overseen by at least one manager who sits in on the proceedings and the SRO between Thunder Bay, Armstrong, and Shebandowan. In Thunder Bay, attendance is restricted to the Crew Leader and Crew Boss on each crew. Although allowing Crew Members to attend may be a common practice at other bases, it is known amongst the firefighters in Thunder Bay that they are not permitted to attend the briefing. "I know in Thunder Bay ... they shut the doors and everything.... Crew Members aren't allowed" (Ingrid, Interview 9).

[12] By the mid-summer of 2002, a number of firefighters in Thunder Bay abandoned the visual wear in

The morning briefing provides an environment where 'valued information' is passed on to the Crew Leaders and Crew Bosses (Spain 1992). During the meeting, the Crew Leader and Crew Boss are provided information regarding crew alerts, predicted fire behaviour, weather and safety issues. The knowledge received is often vital to the safe suppression of forest fires. As such, most Crew Leaders and Crew Bosses relay the information received to each Crew Member after the meeting has adjourned. There are instances where the 'valued knowledge' accrued in the morning briefing is hoarded to make Crew Members appear stupid or anxious. For example, Lisa feels that her Crew Leader withholds important information because "[he] likes to pretend that all rookies are just total idiots" (Interview 6). As Noel Hendrickson (2001) explains, the tacit assumption that rookies are overly excited about all things relating to fire is a long-standing belief within the Program.

> The green ones - "those damn rookies" - are excited about nearly everything. As a veteran, it's your job to appear unenthusiastic, outwardly complacent and unmoved. It's all too easy to forget how you became this thick-skinned lifer, and the pain you suffered as an FNG (Fuckin' New Guy) (Greer and Hendrickson 2001, 17).

Lisa refuses to play the role of the 'excited rookie,' even though her Crew Leader clearly expects her to. Instead, she opts to approach Crew Members on different crews for enlightenment on the present fire situation

> [H]e would go to the meetings that we weren't even able to attend and he'd find out stuff. But ... he'd come back and tell us nothing. We found out that other Crew Members ... were hearing all the stuff that we didn't know anything about (Lisa, Interview 6).

Yet, the Crew Leader who chooses to withhold information can place Crew Members in an awkward and dangerous position. Jones, who works at the Thunder

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favour of their own tee shirts.

Bay Fire Center where all Crew Members are entirely absent from the proceedings, has little recourse when trying to discover what has transpired in the morning meeting.

> ... [the Crew Boss] would come out of the morning meeting and I'd be standing here and [Pete - male Crew Member][13] would be standing here (indicates where on the table) by ...[my Crew Leader's] locker area. [He] would come out and he'd stand and talk to [Pete] with his back to me, every day. For about two weeks, that's how it went. He never talked to me like I was part of the crew. ... And it took him a long time to get respect for me. And I know it's cause I'm a girl and he's old school and he doesn't think girls belong (Jones, Interview 14).

In this instance, the Crew Boss can control Jones' access to 'valued knowledge,' thereby undermining her 'competence.' If she has no information regarding the crew alert status, assigned duties, and professional responsibilities, she could potentially seem incompetent.

Appropriating the Managerial Gaze

It can be argued that crew people appropriate the managerial gaze in order to portray incompetence as a condition that afflicts women only (see, for example, Tallichet 2000; and Greed 2000). When a legitimate manager enacts the gaze, he is ostensibly fulfilling a required supervisory role and applying its penetrating stare uniformly. To many of the managers in the Fire Program individual proficiency is not predetermined by gender. The appropriated 'managerial' gaze, however, imposes vastly different kinds of surveillance; it depends, to a much larger extent, on the gender of the individual being surveyed (McDowell 1999, 104).

[13] The name Pete is a pseudonym.

Unlike its predecessor, a legitimate manager never applies the appropriated 'managerial' gaze. Different crew people, regardless of their position on a crew or years of experience in the Program, become the surveyors of their colleagues in an attempt to imbue themselves with power. As McDowell (1995) reminds us,

> power, rather than being a totalising system, is diffused throughout the whole social order, and exists at all levels, from the micro-scale of the body, the home and the workplace to the structural institutions of society (1995, 78).

It is in this context that the appropriated 'managerial' gaze becomes a naked exercise in social control that is 'diffused throughout the whole social order.'

Although the appropriated gaze is potentially applied anywhere by anyone, my personal experiences and the interview responses suggest that crew people reify the traditional split between the active Male (the surveyor) and the passive Female (the surveyed) (McDowell and Sharp 1999, 104). By attaching an unexamined primacy to the construct of masculinity, some male firefighters establish a highly unstable hierarchical position from which they critique the competence of others.[14] In an environment where the focus is on criticizing others' mistakes, women and men are monitored in different ways that directly relate to their espoused gender.

The Crew Room, a workspace saturated with masculinity to the point where it is seen as an innocuous and neutral space, sets the stage for gendered performances in which men act and women appear (Berger 1972). Representations of women fighting forest fires, then, are part of a spectacle being played out. There is no real legitimacy attached to the actions of a firefighter who is not masculine and therefore, does not inherently belong in the space.

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[14] For example, a Crew Member who I outranked watched me sharpen a pulaski for fifteen minutes. He

> Despite recent arguments about the plasticity and fluidity of identity, material differences still have an impact and a masculine performance by a man is still more highly valorized than that by a woman (McDowell 1999, 139).

Women can expect the very fact that they are female, even if they feel compelled to mute their femininity, to be remarked on in a number of work-related situations.

> [Men are] not talked about, (pause) regardless of what they're doing. ... . It's just easier to jump on women because they, because there's so few of them, I think they stick out more. ...
>
> Q: Any idea what some of the other things are that make women stand out more ... ?
>
> A: Well, just the fact that they're not men.
>
> Q: Okay. (Zulu laughs) (pause) So ... do they sort of seem like they don't belong in the space, by virtue of the fact that they're not men?
>
> A: Umm, yes, because it's a very male-dominated ...work environment (lengthy pause) (Zulu, Interview 12).

As Zulu notes here, gender is central to the surveillance experience. Regardless of how closely women monitor the negotiation of a 'competent' identity, it seems that the quickest way to discredit them is to draw attention to the fact that they are women in a male-dominated environment. On some basic level, that appears to indicate that they can never truly belong.

As stated, drawing attention to perceived weaknesses and mistakes is a pervasive part of social interaction in the crew system (Tallichet 2000, 248). What differs between men and women on fire is the extent to which mistakes are seen as a 'natural' consequence of gender:

> One of the things that I've ... often said is that ... because there are so few women on the base ... we are amplified in the program. If there's a woman who comes on base who can't start a pump, everyone on that base knows that.

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interjected several times and tried to tell me how to sharpen it.

> But if there's a guy that comes on base and he can't start that pump, "Well, you know, there's fifty-nine other guys." He just kind of blends into the framework (Mia Sputnik, Interview 15).

If a woman makes a mistake, then, she makes it because she is a woman and it applies, somehow, to all other women in the Program. To escape the correlation, a number of the women interviewed attempt to eliminate the possibility of making a mistake, obsess over past transgressions, and shed the unwanted parts of their gendered identity that link them to incompetence.

> It seems like ... every little thing that goes wrong, we take to heart and we take personally. Whereas, some of the guys just sort of 'Huh, whatever,' brush it off. Whereas, if we feel like we didn't do something as well as we could've or something went wrong, it stays with us for two and three weeks and we feel like we always have to overcome it or go beyond it. Whereas, they're just like 'Ah, screwed up. Whatever.' (SLR laughs) Yeah. Whereas, we're stressing about it for, you know, months on end and always trying to like, do a hundred percent (Fiona, Interview 7).

In order to circumvent the likelihood that she will err, Betty Boop closely monitors her own behaviour by curbing her inquisitive nature.

> Well, if I were to ask a question that other people feel I should already know, or feel that it's a ... 'no-brainer,' so to speak, ... everybody would know that Betty asked a 'no-brainer' question. ... '[H]ere we go. ...These women are being put into these positions where they don't know what they should know.' ... .
>
> Q: Can we talk a little bit more about women being put into positions where they don't know what they should know?
>
> A: ... I felt that way at the S-300 course. ... it was intimidating because, I mean, I know there's a lot there lacking experience in the upper like, Crew Boss, Crew Leader positions. ... I was afraid to ask questions because we're in a room full of mostly men. There was maybe ... six or eight women. There was sixty students, roughly. .... And uh, I didn't want to ask a question because - and if I did, I really censored it. I really evaluated it first, before I asked it, think that 'Okay, is it logical that I would have this question to ask at this level? ... is it something that I should already know?' ... I, as much as I know that I'm moving up quickly, I don't want people to think that it's

> because I'm a woman. I want people to believe that I am competent, but I still have a lot of questions about the work that I do (Interview 1).

As a direct result of the strong subcultural reaction to asking questions, Betty ultimately tries to avoid scrutiny by imposing limitations on herself. She must carefully monitor what she says and in front of whom she says it. The expectation that firefighters should 'just know' the answers to certain questions often results in personal ridicule.

Although Sally Meadows repeatedly states that she feels comfortable with the jokes made at her expense, the nickname she is given for asking questions solidifies the subcultural edict that she should 'just know.'

> Actually, one of my nicknames in my first year was 'Phoebes,' as in 'Phoebe' from 'Friends.' You know, the blonde one who's just a little 'La, la, la.' When I would ask questions about things that I had no clue about, ... something as simple as the four-wheeler. Well, I've never driven a four-wheeler before, you know, I think that's pretty valid. Not everybody's done that .... But um, I don't think it was in a malicious way and I think I was able to kind of roll with it. But, that's not to say that would be the case for everybody, and I knew people well enough by that time that I was comfortable with them making those kind of jokes. Um, yeah that's kind of a horrible example because it sounds so like, degrading like, 'Phoebes, come on Phoebes!' ... but I was okay with it. I was comfortable with that (Sally Meadows, Interview 2).

The ubiquitous notion that mistakes should not be made does not foster a positive learning environment. Instead, a paralytic subculture emerges, one in which women consider the potential criticism and gossip they may be subjected to when working on equipment, asking questions, or trying to advance in the Fire Program.

Betty suggests that the most salient conviction of those who reinforce the paralytic subculture is the assertion that the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources must meet a quota. According to a number of men in the Program, the quota

emphatically states that management is obligated to ensure that women must fill a specific number of positions in the crew system.

> ... it's my understanding that the MNR wants to uh, promote women because ... they have some sort of quota to meet. And I think that there's a lot of men that feel that the women will be moved up the ranks before the men because they're a woman. And that creates hostility. That creates a lot of resentment because they feel these women don't deserve those positions. ... I've had people say it to me. ... the only reason I went to the S-300 was because I'm a woman and they need to fulfill that ... quota of so many women to men in upper management (Betty, Interview 1).

Although she responds to idea that there is 'a quota' with anger and frustration, Betty does not waver. She elects to go to the S-300 training course.

In contrast, Jodi refuses the S-300 training course the first time she is offered an opportunity to go. She feels that her professional mobility is constrained by the paralytic subculture.

> I was asked to do S-300 course like, a couple years ago and I ... had to say 'No, I don't think I'm ready for it.' And partly, it was true. Like, I would have been more comfortable getting a few more years experience. But I know that if I had to, I would have been able to do the job; like, especially having taken [the S-300] now.... .... But I think one of the main reasons for holding myself back was cause I didn't want people to say that about me. I wanted to earn it.... And it would really bother me if people were saying that about me (Jodi Smith, Interview 4).

Unfortunately, Jodi is not unique. She advances in the Fire Program at a pace deemed appropriate by other firefighters applying the appropriated 'managerial' gaze. It is more important to hold herself back to escape the potential backlash that follows advancement.[15]

[15] Jodi informs me in 2005 that after eleven years in the Fire Program (and three separate promotions) she still experiences moments when people look right past her because they cannot believe she is in charge.

Siren's experiences are similar. When discussing her promotion with her significant other, he expresses a befuddled sense of disbelief that she has waited so long to assume a position she easily could manage.

> I think it takes [women] twice as long ... to reach a goal that we set for ourselves. ... when they asked me if I wanted to go to [a different base for a promotion] ... [my partner] said to me, 'I can't believe you waited this long to want to try this.'
> And I told him, I said, 'Well, I finally feel, (louder) I finally feel like my confidence level's high enough that I can do it and not be a failure.'
> And he said, 'You could have done that job ... years ago.' He says, 'You got out of college and you ran a bush camp with a hundred and seventy-five men, and you did a great job. Why would you - '
> I said 'Because, fire's different. Fire's different.' I said, 'You fought fire. you know what it's like' (Interview 8).

Conclusion

The initial discussion focuses on the ways that employment in the Fire Program is sought and obtained. Responsible for the completion of the S-100, an introductory course in basic fire suppression techniques, candidates for a limited number of Crew Member positions are required to expend considerable time and money attempting to secure employment.

Once the neophyte firefighter has completed training, s/he joins a four-person initial attack fire crew comprised of a Crew Leader, Crew Boss and 2 Crew Members. The Crew Leader is situated as the hub of crew cohesion and interaction; in this context, the effectiveness of the crew is directly impacted by the managerial style the Crew Leader espouses. If s/he is a "go getter," the crew tends to fare considerably better than one with a "power tripper" at the helm.

From fire crews, the chapter examines the spatial environments that crews confined to the base inhabit. Of these, the most popular is the Crew Room – a relatively expansive space that contains retrieval benches, crew lockers, makeshift tables, and magazines like Maxim, Guns and Ammo, and FHM – which is constructed and maintained as a masculine space.

It is within the Crew Room, however, that fire personnel are most often targets of the managerial gaze. Utilized as a supervisory tool, the managerial gaze is applied by a legitimate fire manager in an attempt to extort compliant workplace performances. For the most part, many of the women interviewed suggest that the presence of managers who are consistently monitoring individual productivity make workers feel uncomfortable. These women feel that they are unnecessarily labeled as 'incompetent' if they are spotted taking a break. Fear of receiving a negative label motivates them to escape the confines of the base.

It becomes readily apparent, when both men and women on the crews appropriate the managerial gaze, that these women are unable to escape constant scrutiny and harsh judgement of their colleagues. Firefighters, who have no legitimate claim to a supervisory role, have no compunction applying the appropriated 'managerial' gaze; it seems that the surveyor has even fewer reservations when monitoring a woman.

The notion that female firefighters are surveyed in a different manner because they are women is well documented in Chapter 3. The depth and breadth of male scrutiny of the female firefighter is much more expansive and broad, making it difficult for women to fashion a 'competent' identity.

In Chapter 4 the appropriated 'managerial' gaze continues to shape women's experiences on the actual fire line. Although the managerial gaze in its purest form is no longer prevalent, women still strive to maintain 'competent' identities in the male-dominated, male-defined work environment.

Chapter 4 - The Fire Line

Introduction

Just as examining the way in which gendered identity is negotiated at the Thunder Bay District Fire Center is an important part of understanding women's experiences, so too is describing the geography or spatial layout of the fire line. As the previous chapter indicated, there are several mechanisms of control in place to monitor individuals working in forest fire suppression. These mechanisms, such as regimented daily routines and varied forms of the 'managerial' gaze, compel women to adopt a 'competent' workplace identity.

This chapter will explore the varied ways in which women continue to negotiate 'competent' workplace identities on the fire line. Initially, the focus is on an ethnographic sketch of the standard procedures that characterize an initial attack. From there, the discussion examines the fire line as a construct of hegemonic masculinity. I demonstrate how, in order to maintain the fire line as a masculine construct, women are subjected to the appropriated 'managerial' gaze, the pervasive subcultural assumption that women need to prove themselves, and immense pressure to perform their assigned duties expediently and flawlessly. Finally, the chapter explores the destabilizing presence of women in fire and myriad challenges they make to the existing hegemonic framework. For many women, the fluidity of the fire line provides an ever-changing workspace in which they feel more comfortable to assert themselves as distinct individuals who offer varied solutions to the problems encountered when fighting forest fires.

Defining the Workspace

Forest fires vary in accordance with a number of environmental factors - topography, time of day, time of year, weather, available fuels, soil drainage - that make fires geographically distinct from one another. It is difficult, then, to 'map out' a typical fire in the same fashion employed to describe the layout of the Fire Center in Thunder Bay because the geography of each blaze is so fluid and unique. What remains relatively constant over time, however, are the standard procedures crews follow during a typical initial attack (IA). In order to acquaint the reader with the fire line as a space, the standard procedures that characterize a single-crew dispatch to a fire are explicated.

A dispatch, most often issued in the form of a verbal command or blaring siren, signals to our crew that we are going to suppress a forest fire. The seemingly straightforward process is actually a highly elaborate production involving the District housing the fire and the Region. In order to facilitate a dispatch within the Thunder Bay District, the Sector Response Officer (SRO) must contact the Regional Fire Duty Officer (FDO) in Dryden and provide information on the existing fire. Before deciding how many resources to commit, the FDO must weigh a number of factors such as the alert status of the crew in question, fire indices, predicted weather, number of active fires burning, need for water bomber support and crew availability. The FDO makes the decision, after some consideration, to dispatch a crew with water bomber support.

Upon receiving formal instruction from the Regional FDO, the District SRO furnishes my Crew Leader with a basemap number and suggests that he "Get

going." On red alert for the last 2 days, the helicopter is already loaded with all the necessary equipment; the crew need only take our seats inside the machine. Contributing to the unequal distribution of valued knowledge, seating arrangements in the helicopter are often problematic. The Crew Leader - without exception - sits in the front seat availing himself the clearest vantage point and greatest comfort. As the Crew Boss/Saw Person, I sit directly behind him to share his visual perspective and discuss suppression strategies through the headphones. Crew Members with the least experience are relegated to positions in the helicopter which deprive them of crucial sensory knowledge gained through sight and sound, a "subtle form of spatial segregation" (Spain 1992, 18). These individuals - who would most likely benefit from a window seat or the use of headphones - are often incommunicado; they rely, instead, on my gesticulations to convey detailed fire information.[1]

En route to the fire, radio communication is the locus of information for our Crew. The Crew Leader, in constant contact with the Radio Operator in Thunder Bay, discusses additional fire information provided by the Bird Dog. Accompanying the CL-415 water bombers, the Bird Dog is a smaller plane that acts as a liaison between the bombers and fire personnel. Since the bombers often commence suppression first, the pilots possess valuable knowledge relating to the fire. Before the helicopter ferrying the crew arrives, the Bird Dog relays the suggestion that a viable pumping source is roughly two thousand feet from the fire's edge. The estimate allows the Crew Leader ample opportunity to devise a plan of attack and

[1] Having been on the receiving end of the exchange, I know that much is lost in the translation between Crew Boss and Crew Member. The result is often a confusion that cannot be clarified over the sonorous drone of the helicopter.

determine whether or not there are enough lengths of hose onboard to adequately surround the fire.

Upon arrival at the conflagration, it is necessary to make several passes in the helicopter to scout the fire.[2] Scouting allows the Crew Leader time to determine fire size, fuel type, rate of spread, fire behaviour, and communicate the initial fire report to the SRO. In response, the SRO asks if any additional support - in the form of crews or equipment - is required at this time. Measuring 0.1 hectares in size,[3] the fire has been "hammered on" by the bombers; it is decidedly a job for one crew only.

While the exchange on the radio takes place, I peruse the ground below to ensure the terrain facilitates a safe hover exit. In this instance, the ground seems suitable and the tree line does not pose a problem; a heli-pad will not need to be cut with the saw. The disclosure is a welcome relief; I do not relish the prospect of exiting a hovering helicopter to get soaked up to the waist while cutting. Even though I am technically the Saw Person on the crew, the Crew Leader continually ignores my requests to reacquaint myself with the chain saw in training; he focuses, instead, on the young man being 'groomed' to take over the position.

After determining that it is not necessary to cut a pad, the Crew Leader radios the Fire Center to confirm that H-3[4] is preparing to land. The Radio Operator in

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[2] When estimating ground distances from the air, some water bomber pilots provide the crew with erroneous measurements; others have a tendency to overlook an acceptable pumping source considerably closer to the fire's edge. As such, most Crew Leaders use the information relayed as a guide.

[3] A fire measuring 0.1 hectares is anything from a single burning tree to approximately 100x100 feet. Provided the campsite is idyllic and the fishing is good, many Crew Leaders joke about extending their stay on smaller fires; the refrain "It's burning deep. Send worms," is quite common.

[4] H-3 is the helicopter call sign. The number designates the size of the machine. For example, even numbers are given to larger helicopters like 212's and 205's, while odd numbers are assigned to smaller machines like the A-Star and 206. Without fail, most crews prefer the larger machines which afford individuals more space for their personal gear.

Thunder Bay confirms that this is Thu 45, naming the blaze for the district it is located in and the sequential order in which it is "actioned." Confirming the fire number, the Crew Leader states that H-3 is landing and the crew departing the helicopter.

Turning our collective attention to unloading the numerous compartments that house suppression gear and personal packs, we begin the futile struggle of attempting to keep both person and gear relatively dry in a swamp. Firefighters spend a considerable amount of time, money and energy trying to devise a successful plan to keep their feet dry. It is a very rare fire, indeed, when exiting the helicopter is not followed by the immediate gush of tepid water into the boots.[5] The "squirrel cheeks," named because these two compartments closely resemble a squirrel with food stashed in its cheeks, are unloaded first. I notice the tail boom is not on solid ground and juts out above what is affectionately referred to as "Loon shit," a concoction of decaying organic matter, water, and soil. The most unsavory items to reach - located in the tail boom - have yet to be unloaded; one of the Crew Members and I finally capitulate and unload the compartment ourselves.

After unloading the helicopter, each individual does a cursory check to verify that all the equipment is accounted for. Asking the machine to return with a forgotten pump tool kit or intake hose is an embarrassing and costly prospect. Since the pumping unit seems to be in order, the Crew Leader gives a "Thumbs up" to the

[5] In northwestern Ontario, attempting to keep feet dry is an exercise in futility. Having tried full rubber boots, plastic bags over the socks, and half-rubber boots, I can unequivocally state that wet feet - and physical ailments like Athlete's Foot that plague chronic wet feet - are very much a part of the job.

pilot, indicating that he can depart. The pilot then informs the Radio Operator that he is "Off Thu 45 bound for Thunder Bay" with just himself on board.

Left to commence fighting fire, each member of the crew performs a task that assures expedient water application to the fire. In this instance, a little creek filled with 'Loon Shit' is both the water source and hub of the fire line. On the bank of the creek, the Wajax Mark 3 Pump[6] is set up. Repeatedly demonstrating mechanical proficiency and grace under pressure, both Crew Members are responsible for setting up the pump.

From the pump, lengths of hose measuring one hundred feet are laid out until the edge of the fire line is reached. Most crews develop a routine in training and assign each member of the crew specific tasks to hasten the process of getting water up the fire line. Although there is some variation, my Crew Leader immediately heads for the fire while laying a box of hose; instead of returning to the pump site, he continues flagging a path to the fire's edge. I follow - grabbing a nozzle, set of stranglers,[7] and an additional sixty-pound bag of hose - knowing that the rest of the crew is not far behind.

At the fire's edge, the crew works in a group of three to manipulate the hose with greater ease. With a three-person hose lay, the first hose handler follows ten feet behind the nozzle person carrying the weight of the hose; the second hose handler lays hose and works the much larger second loop that forms once the hose is

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[6] The Wajax Mark 3 Pump weighs approximately sixty-five pounds. Mounted on a board of half-inch plywood, it is a cumbersome object that is meant to be carried like a backpack. Although the plywood often provides a level surface for the pump to rest on, it makes carrying the equipment daunting.

[7] The Stranglers allow a firefighter to temporarily arrest the flow of water through the hose in order to add another length, or repair a blown hose.

out of the box. Much of the time the Crew Leader or Crew Boss will do the "first pass" to knock down the flames, arrest the spreading fire and get hose around its entire circumference. If it is feasible, crews use a "y," a tool used to splice the main hose line so two nozzles simultaneously apply water to the fire's edge.

When the fire has been surrounded, the crew does a back pass that basically consists of retracing the existing line while working deeper into the burn. Depending on the depth of burn, the nozzle person may have to spend considerable amounts of time applying water to "hot spots." The obvious intention is to drown the fire with water; some Crew Leaders train people to "make soup," a phrase used to describe the way in which water must be applied to the fuel layer. Using the volume and pressure generated by the pump, the nozzle person applies copious amounts of water to the organic material; the concoction ends up looking like frothy soup.

Maintaining a Gendered Fire Line

The preceding ethnographic description of the workplace elucidates standard operating procedures that characterize a single crew 'initial attack.' Without delving deeper into the social processes that inform the spatial environment, however, the picture that emerges is necessarily partial. What needs to be addressed is the extent to which space, constructed and maintained along masculine gender lines, impacts upon the negotiation of a 'competent' fire fighting identity. For the most part, hegemonic masculinity facilitates the acceptance of a very limited conception of space, one where legitimacy is conferred upon a singular gendered performance.

> The concept of 'hegemony,' deriving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 1995, 77).

Within the relative safety of hegemonic masculinity, dominant members of the fire fighting subculture maintain 'a leading position in social life.' They assert the primacy of their position by reinforcing prevailing notions of space, notions that solidify the dominance of men and the subordination of women.

As a spatial construct, the fire line is not a benign territory devoid of social processes. Instead, social processes that reify hegemonic masculinity inform the spatial environment in a manner that gives the production and maintenance of gendered space the appearance of neutrality (Spain 1992).

> Of themselves, the physical characteristics of the woods have no meaning, but they cannot exist independent of the language, discourses and practices through which societies construct meanings for nature (Burgess 1998, 120).

It is through the use of 'language, discourse and practice' that 'meanings' regarding a woman's "proper place" on the fire line – or lack thereof – are constructed.

According to Reed (2003), women are often seen as "caretakers or nurturers" (13) of the environment, a position contrary to many aspects of the masculine fire fighting identity. This depiction, decidedly at odds with the experiences of most women in the crew system, reinforces the ideological distinction between public and private spheres. In this context, it implies that women and nature are linked in a distinctly private fashion and that women's participation in fire suppression lacks

serious intent[8] (Reed 2003, 13; Domosh and Seager 2001, 40). The linkage squarely places women's motivations for being on the fire line within the private sphere, thereby negating their public contributions to the space.

Although "the distinction between the public and the private is constantly shifting and blurring" (Domosh and Seager 2001, 34), men operating within the same space - indeed, working in the same positions on a crew - appear to occupy the fire line in a vastly different way. They tend to assume a role defined by their relationship to the public (read "working") sphere, while simultaneously asserting their ownership over the fire line as a space (Maclean 1999). How, then, does masculine ownership of the fire line become a reality?

McDowell (1999) argues that "informal workplace practices ... are in fact saturated with gendered meanings and practices that construct both gendered subjectivities at work and different categories of work as congruent with particular gender identities" (McDowell 1999, 135). The fire line, saturated with masculinity, is maintained as a gendered construct through the application of various forms of discipline. Of these, the appropriated 'managerial' gaze, the inexhaustible need to prove individual proficiency and pressuring fire personnel to perform, are the most pervasive means of extorting compliance amongst crew people.

Appropriated 'Managerial' Monitoring

As stated in Chapter 3, the appropriated 'managerial' gaze is a central form of discipline applied to solidify and maintain existing ideals of gendered space (Bartky

[8] When completing my Pre-Fit, one of the testers speculated that I was just fighting fire until I got

1990; Foucault 1977). Primarily undertaken as a demonstration of masculine power, the appropriated 'managerial' gaze is often indiscriminately applied on the fire line. In this environment, both women and men become objects to be scrutinized.

> When choosing my section, I make sure it's long enough for me to stay there for awhile. I do this because I love to finish my section, then leapfrog the entire crew and check out their work on my way to the front of the line. I like to see how much progress we've made, and I like to critique, cajole and encourage my crewmates on the way (Greer cited in Greer and Hendrickson 2001, 43).

According to Greer (2001), it would appear that he affixes each member of his crew with the same universal stare. Yet, the experiences of women in the Fire Program refute the suggestion that a monolithic conception of the appropriated 'managerial' gaze exists. Instead, myriad gendered nuances shape the monitoring process, a process marked by the internalization of disciplinary practices (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993).

For the most part, women are subjected to – and impose upon themselves - a far more rigorous form of surveillance than men. Betty notes, "men talk about the women. ... [T]he men look at women overall and say 'She's the smartest with this.' Or 'She knows her way around this.' ... And then, all of a sudden, you're ... the 'top dog' among women ... (Interview 1).

Although women are essentially graded on overall performance, their skill with the machinery is often centered out. A woman 'who knows her way around' the pump and the chain saw can advance to the position of 'top dog' amongst the

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married.

women. Implicit in the statement is the notion that she will never be equal to - or 'top dog' - amongst the men. Kirstine Brown echoes this sentiment in the literature:

> What I have accepted is that I cannot use men as a benchmark from which to judge myself, especially on a physical level (Brown cited in Greer and Hendrickson 2001, 49).

According to Brown, men and women are not competing on the same level when working in the male-dominated environment of fire suppression.

During an initial attack, the most prominent way in which the workplace is 'saturated with masculinity' is through the daily use of two formidable pieces of equipment. Powered by mixed gasoline,[9] both the Wajax Mark 3 pump and the Husqvarna 359 chain saw are indispensable fire fighting tools. The pump is consistently used to expediently convey large quantities of water to the fire's edge, while the chain saw is sporadically used to cut heli-pads, clear escape routes, or cut down dangerous trees. Although both men and women handle the equipment in the crew system, the cumbersome size and shape (Cockburn 1985) of the pump and the chain saw lead some firefighters to suggest that these suppression tools are for men.

Often considered the personal property of dominant men on the crew, both the Wajax Mark 3 pump and the Husqvarna 359 chain saw constantly remind 'others' of the apparent naturalness of the bond - the definitive link - between a man and his tools.

> Today, even a big chainsaw like a Stihl 066 weighs under seventeen pounds with a forty inch bar[10] and a chain speed of a hundred kilometers per hour, it has the same searing attention-grabbing power as an AK-47 or a Gibson "Les Paul." Like a machine gun or an electric guitar, a chainsaw is a handheld *deus*

[9] The gasoline is mixed with oil.
[10] The Husqvarna 359 has a twenty-inch bar.

> *ex machina*: a supercharged extension of masculine will that is impossible to ignore (Vaillant 2005, 132).[11]

The connection between man and machinery - that "natural" mechanical aptitude thought to be an immutable truth - is part of the hegemonic masculinity that governs fire suppression (Thoele 1995).

As such, women assigned a role requiring the use of machinery are often subjected to the appropriated 'managerial' gaze. Firefighters who subscribe to the edict that men are mechanically gifted may think it necessary to monitor the performances of women. By virtue of the fact that women are not men, it cannot be assured that women are particularly savvy with tools. The tacit assumption that men possess a mechanical aptitude, however, is marked by general acceptance amongst many of the women.

> [I]t's something I think I kind of accept - in this male-dominated profession - that ... it's just ... one assumption that will be made quite often is that if there's a guy, and if there's a girl, the guy probably knows more about the pump or the chain saw, when that's not always necessarily the case.
>
> Q: So why do you accept that tacit assumption?
>
> A: Um, just cause I can see where it comes from. Just ... society. ... [G]uys in High School, they're taking the Auto Mechanics courses. ... [T]he girls are taking their Home Ec. ... . But yeah, it's just easy to see how those assumptions would be made (Jodi, Interview 4).

Although Jodi recognizes that ideals surrounding gender stratification are deeply embedded within our cultural framework, she appears to be comfortable with her mechanical competence and usually dismisses the issue.

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[11] The equipment is personified along masculine gender lines when it works and feminine gender lines when it does not; it is not uncommon to hear crew people refer to equipment that is not working as a "bitch" or a "slut."

In direct contrast, Lisa answers the question "Have you ever encountered difficulties or felt uncomfortable because you are a woman?" with the following:

> Well, one thing I'm not comfortable about is ... mechanical knowledge. I think I could probably learn more about that. ... [M]ost guys just have, just from the way they're raised, just have a step above you (Lisa, Interview 6).

As a rookie Crew Member, Lisa's response indicates that she has a burgeoning awareness that she is without the required knowledge and skills male Crew Members 'naturally' possess. Instead of questioning the assumption that men in fire are mechanically gifted, the awareness leads her to conclude that her knowledge base is somehow deficient.

The appropriated 'managerial' gaze is also invoked as a means of controlling women who hesitate to use the equipment. In particular, some of the female firefighters waver when utilizing the saw. "I never use the chain saw. .... That's my choice" (Anne, Interview 10). Some men regard the hesitancy as a confirmation that women are mechanically stunted, a condition that cannot be remedied with instruction, patience, or time.

> I don't know if ... the guys are nervous to see women use chain saws, or don't think we can do it. But I think [some are] a little hesitant [to train women] on the chain saw. Some of those Crew Leaders on my base are fantastic. Like, 'Yeah, let's do it up, you know,' and laugh and giggle at things. But I think women are just different too. Like, there are women who show that hesitancy with wanting to touch it. And [some] Crew Leaders almost immediately support it, 'Oh, well. You know, she doesn't want to learn it' (Mia, Interview 15).

Mia states that a number of Crew Leaders are inclusive and believe that women are capable of handling the chain saw. Others simply circumvent potential problems by completely removing women from the equation. For Shanti, only given the

opportunity to use the saw as a "last resort," the biggest male on the crew is assumed to be the best candidate for saw person.

> I can handle the saw and I know the saw. But if a big guy is on our crew, automatically - cause of his size - he's given the saw. Which I finds (sic) kind of funny because - if he's a first year Crew Member, never seen fire before, never been in a helicopter, even if he's touched a saw, those emotions are going to be flying like no tomorrow. Why do you want to put that on somebody's shoulders for the first initial attack, when they could be doing the pump - or something else - and develop ... the skills that they need to be saw person (Shanti, Interview 13)?

Instead of appointing the largest male on the crew by default, some Crew Leaders advocate equal time on the saw. As Sally observes, a supportive Crew Leader and Crew Boss often mitigate the experience of being monitored. She finds, in contrast to the experiences of Shanti, that both supervisors on her crew foster a positive learning environment.

> My crew has been really good in that my Crew Leader and Crew Boss are certified, and they're really good about getting me on the saw and ... letting me have some practice..... And, they've been very, kind of encouraging, and would like to get ... me certified soon. And, I love working on the saw too. It's great (Sally, Interview 2)!

In the absence of surveillance imposed upon her by supervisors, Sally approaches the chain saw with confidence. She has "no qualms about the chainsaw at all" (Sally, Interview 2).

Proving Herself

The second way in which the fire line is constructed and maintained along masculine gender lines adds to the clout of the appropriated 'managerial' gaze. By promoting an environment in which workers strive to continually prove their

competence, domineering Crew Leaders and Crew Bosses protect their hierarchical position within the subculture and reify existing conceptions of space. Ultimately, the taken-for-granted nature of this ideology is revealed when a female firefighter in British Columbia makes the anachronistic statement that she does not need to prove herself in fire.

> I do not feel as though I have to prove myself here as a woman in a male-dominated environment. I am no different from any of my other crew mates. We all have to show our strengths and contribute to the crew. Sometimes I find my actions are scrutinized differently because I am a woman; maybe my lack of aggression is taken as a lack of desire to prove myself (Brown cited in Greer and Hendrickson 2001, 49).

Although Kirstine Brown seems to represent the lone voice of dissent, the assertion that she does not need to prove herself is fraught with contradiction. While acknowledging that she is 'no different' from any other firefighter, Brown admits that her 'actions are scrutinized differently' because she is a woman.

All fifteen of my respondents stated that women expend a considerable amount of energy attempting to prove themselves in the male-dominated environment of forest fire suppression. This internalized sense of surveillance is a veritable gold mine from the perspective of management. In front of them, they have a gendered workforce that, at times, feels so out of place, so inadequate that the need to work harder than anyone else drives these women daily.

> I always [find] that the women ... seem like they're out to prove something.... They're the first ones to jump up and say 'I'll do it.' And they're the first ones to take the initiative and they always seem like they're trying to prove themselves.... And they always ... are encouraging other, each other and pushing each other to work harder and go the distance and always, sort of, be one step ahead. .... Yeah, I definitely feel like sort of out to prove, I don't know if it's out to prove myself or out to prove that women are just as competent and are equal or what it is. But I think, yeah. I definitely see that

> trend with the women that I work with. 'Give er' (starts to laugh) (Fiona, Interview 7).

Proving individual competence, then, is a central aspect of identity formation and shapes workplace performances for women in a fundamental way. Fiona notes the identities of many of her female coworkers are influenced in a similar manner.

Jones' position is mostly introspective; she focuses on the personal impact fighting fire has had on her. Initially hesitant to admit that she feels the need to prove her competence, Jones begins by discussing the physiological benefits of picking up the 'heavier thing.'

> I always go for the heavier thing, always. ...
>
> Q: Why do you do that?
>
> A: Um, sometimes because I want to get a good workout. And sometimes because - you know what, I'll just admit it that probably because I'm a girl, I have to prove myself. And my Dad says that, the first year I started fighting fire my Dad said that I was so defensive in every aspect of my whole life. And he attributes it to me having to - all the time - be defensive about working in fire. I think it's made me more defensive; not defensive but, more umm, more like I have to prove myself (Jones, Interview 14).

It is very telling, however, that after some time in the crew system many women resent the fact that they have to work so much harder. When discussing her feelings about having to prove herself, Fiona confides "I think it's frustrating" (Fiona, Interview 7). In comparison, Siren appears to have reached her saturation point, a point when her attitude is influenced by the strain of a protracted workplace battle for respect.

> I'm tired of constantly having to re-invent my own wheel. You know, every time I go to a new position, I'm constantly faced with the same ... 'Prove yourself. Prove yourself. Prove yourself.' ... my personal feelings are that if

> I was a guy, that um, my capabilities, my skills, my knowledge, or any of the good things about me ... would run ahead of me (Siren, Interview 8).

Eventually, brooding resentment strengthens the resolve of some women to do minimal amounts of work or leave the Fire Program altogether. Judy, resolute in her response to a manager who dismisses a WDHP complaint suggesting "'this type of thing never happened when women weren't in fire'" (Judy, Interview 11), experiences a tremendous shift in her attitude.

> I'm a slacker and it doesn't matter who's around me. On fire? No, of course not. I work hard. But otherwise, you know, I take my time; have a coffee, have a smoke ... (pauses) I used to[work harder], definitely. I think I worked harder than people on my crew just to prove that I could do the job, ... I never asked for help, even though I may have needed help, kind of deal. And just kind of ... stick it out, just to prove I can do it (Judy, Interview 11).

The notion, crystallized in the preceding quotation, that women in the Fire Program eventually tire of trying to prove their competence is an important observation advanced by many veterans on crews.

Pressure to Perform

The third way in which the fire line is constructed and maintained along masculine gender lines is through the use of pressure. Much of the recent literature on fire suppression supports the assertion that women continually strive to prove themselves without contextualizing analyses within the lived experiences of the women (Maclean 1999; Pascucci and Pascucci 1998; Magnuson Beil 1999). "Such stark depictions [of identity] provide fertile ground for challenge (Reed 2003, 11). These accounts suggest that the construction of a viable workplace identity takes place within a vacuum, while simultaneously failing to examine the myriad pressures

which impact upon the gendered subject in powerful and varied ways. Although women do, indeed, expend a significant amount of energy to prove they can excel in fire suppression, it must be stated that the pressures faced in the workplace inform their mindset. It becomes impossible to ignore the definitive link between these factors and the conviction that women must 'do more' to be recognized as acceptable additions to the crew system.

> Zulu: ... it's like you have to work extra hard. Like, you have to be really exceptional before you get any credit -
>
> SLR: Okay?
>
> Zulu: when you're a woman. Like, it's like you're ... constantly, always having to prove something (Zulu, Interview 12).

The pressures, seemingly innocuous to some, deter women from being completely comfortable on the fire line. In an environment defined by time objectives and stress, some Crew Leaders expect a hastened and flawless work performance of their subordinates. Several attempt to elicit the performances by employing a managerial approach that often induces frustration and anger amongst crew people. What emerges from this particular model of management is a subculture of blame. For example, Fiona discusses a Crew Leader quick to anger if the water is not up the line in time.

> [O]nce something [goes] wrong - this person I'm thinking of, their favourite expression [is] 'Shit rolls downhill' which is [a] pretty awful expression - he just put all the blame onto us (Fiona, Interview 7).

In response, Fiona feels like she "constantly" has to "watch every step" to keep from being admonished. She suggests that the pressure imposed on both Crew Members

places them in a marginal position, one in which their workplace performance is influenced by the melodramatic displays of their supervisor.

Unaccustomed to the subculture of blame implemented by her Crew Leader, Ingrid experiences feelings of vexation when she is blamed for blowing hose.[12]

> ... maybe it was my fault. But every time after that, we never ... blew hose. But ... from then on, [my Crew Leader said] 'Oh, let me do it because the last time you just kept blowing hose.' .... He kept going back to that at the beginning (Ingrid, Interview 9).

Ingrid is further insulted by the declaration that she is entirely responsible for the incident. Other factors, like the condition of the hose, are not even considered by the Crew Leader who seizes the opportunity to patronize Ingrid.

> 'Okay, quick, quick, quick Ingrid. Okay, strangle. You know you can't do it - you know you've gotta take the strangler off. You know you gotta be quick, gotta be quick' (Ingrid, Interview 9).

The preceding quote typifies the experience of crew people whose supervisors subscribe to the ideals of the subculture of blame. In this context, Ingrid's Crew Leader – having attached blame to her for the blown hose – begins to question her competence.

Many Crew Leaders and Crew Bosses place the most pressure on the pump person. Some Crew Members can expect to hear "'We could lose the fire. Blah, blah, blah. No water'" (Jodi, Interview 4), as a method of motivating them to perform. Getting water up the line is "... an important job, definitely. ... you gotta get water up the line. More important than the crew leader. (SLR snorts/Judy laughs)" (Judy, Interview 11). Yet, that fact is often appropriated to exert pressure

[12] Blown hose occurs when the hose is too weak to withstand the pressure, or the stranglers are applied too long. When the stranglers are applied too long, there is a build-up of water pressure emanating from the

on individuals responsible for pump set up. In order to alleviate potential stress, an astute Crew Boss will pair both crew people together allowing them to work as a team. For Anne, the experience of being pump person involves extensive criticism.

> ... [I] had a few experiences where I'd ask for help and I was basically shot down because I asked for help. I didn't like that. It seemed like - in certain situations - it was a bit too much of a competition, as opposed to a teamwork thing. ....
>
> Q: So were you, in a sense, competing with your other Crew Member?
>
> A: No, more like competing with the, with the clock, like competing with time, trying to get it done as fast as possible. And apparently, asking for help wastes time and I did not like that approach at all. I thought it was - yeah - ridiculous, in my mind (Anne, Interview 10).

Her Crew Boss declares that asking for help wastes time, a notion that is counterintuitive to anyone that fights fire. In reality, most mechanical difficulties are remedied in a far more punctual manner when two people work to solve the problem. Yet,

> [T]his duty was mine and mine alone and I was not supposed to need to ask for help. I was supposed to be able to do it on my own... (Interview 10).

Although Anne recognizes that the parameters in place to measure her performance as pump person are ridiculous, she indicates that she is deeply troubled by her supervisor's response. Essentially, she is unable to meet his expectations because she asks for help. However, the Crew Boss could conceivably be posturing and trying to adhere to the "normative definitions of masculinity" (Connell 1995, 79) that govern the supervisory role, "normative standards" that very few men actually meet (ibid.).

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pump.

The Destabilizing Presence of Women

As stated in Chapter 3, the fire fighting subculture attaches an unexamined primacy to the construct of masculinity. What results are highly unstable gendered performances, performances that must be continually fortified by repetition and consistency (Butler 1999). It is on the fire line, however, that "[masculinity is] plunged into inconsistency and anxiety; it is aggressive because it is insecure" (Valentine 1996, 148).

> [H]egemonic masculinity embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy. When conditions for the defence of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony. The dominance of *any* group of men may be challenged by women. Hegemony, then, is a historically mobile relation. Its ebb and flow is a key element of the picture of masculinity (Connell 1995, 77-78).

On the fire line women are a destabilizing presence, transgressing established boundaries of masculine space and threatening the fragile construct of hegemonic masculinity. Female firefighters daily threaten the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity by rejecting traditional supervisory models, demonstrating that they are comfortable on the fire line, and challenging the taken-for-granted assumption that pornographic material is a 'natural' part of the fire fighting experience.

Raising vexed issues for women and men alike, female firefighters initially destabilize the masculine construct by challenging the pervasive assumption that men are the only individuals capable of supervising a fire crew. While women manage volatile workplace identities that deviate from 'acceptable' articulations, men harbour fears that their supervisory positions will be usurped. As Betty asserts,

> [S]o many men - older men - have grown up with their self-worth, (pauses) part of their self-worth being that they're a man and this is their role. And when women start to encroach on that, it threatens their own uh, self-esteem, and self-worth, and who they are, and their masculinity. And I think that that holds them back from teaching women (Betty, Interview 1).

From their experiences on the fire line, female supervisors glean valuable pieces of information that threaten the existing subcultural template. As opposed to adopting traditional managerial practices, these women destabilize the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity by refusing to perform their supervisory role in an 'acceptable' manner (Greed 2000, 189). Once they occupy the position of Crew Leader or Crew Boss, many women recall the unnecessary frustration and added stress they felt.

> I can remember back to my first couple years being really nervous about having to set up the pump. ... I've come to realize that it might have just been ... the way that we were trained. ... just the way [the Crew Leader] trains people, just kind of throws you into it. And like, there's something wrong with the pump and you have to figure out what it is. ... I think I was just nervous at any time I'd have to start the pump, just because I thought like, 'There's going to be something wrong with it and I'm going to have to figure out ... what's wrong.' ... For some reason, it was just kind of uh, scary sometimes (Jodi, Interview 4).

Instead of perpetuating the cycle, they employ techniques that focus on minimizing individual frustrations and self-doubt. Contrary to her personal experiences, Jodi informs Crew Members that the pump should be in working order. Refusing to consider potential mechanical difficulties a foregone conclusion, she challenges people to repair troublesome equipment without the attendant anxieties that are cultivated by other Crew Leaders.

> I've kind of used that ... when I've come up into the ...Crew Boss and Crew Leader role - as a way that I don't want to train people ... . making them all nervous about starting the pump. It's more like 'Okay. ... there should be

> nothing wrong with the pump right now. Just set it up ... correctly and then, start it.' And when I know they can do that well, then I'll start doing the trouble-shooting thing (Jodi, Interview 4).

In comparison, Judy attempts to steer Crew Members away from anxious situations. She recognizes the futility of trying to do a job well when frustrated and feels that part of her job involves helping people to defuse tense situations.

> ... as a Crew Leader, ... I don't give people hard times ... . If they're having trouble, I just stop them and say 'You know, ... take a deep breath. Look around. And ... start from the beginning. Find out what ... went wrong.' Especially in pump set-ups, ... you don't want people to get frustrated when they're doing pumps. You want them to be ... comfortable and be confident. And, I mean, sometimes, [the pumps] don't always work the way you want them [to]. So, you gotta be able to... take a deep breath and look around for fifteen seconds. And you'll be able to (snaps her fingers) just start fresh again (Judy, Interview 11).

When firefighters are immersed in a supportive environment, learning about machinery does not seem so difficult a task.

> [H]ave the patience to be with them, to let them learn at their rate. So they don't get their chain saw in the first summer. Big deal. ... it's a goal she's got to work for, if it takes her three years to get comfortable. ...[W]ith equipment like that ... be... supportive because it can cause serious damage to a body (Mia, Interview 15).

Using their own detrimental workplace experiences as a cautionary tale, a number of women in the Fire Program perform supervisory roles in a manner markedly different from the 'acceptable' articulations supported by the dominant members of the subculture.

Comfort on the Fire Line

The prominence of hegemonic masculinity is challenged – for a second time – by the very presence of women on the fire line. Long a central tenet, the belief that

wooded areas are sites fraught with peril has traditionally been maintained to keep women and children out (Vaillant 2005, 84). In this context, fables of monsters that dwell in the forest serve as a reminder that the boundaries between domesticated space and the untamed natural environment must be upheld. Movies such as The Blair Witch Project illuminate the extent to which these deep-rooted fears still exist and can be capitalized on (ibid.).

Burgess suggests that fear, however, is only part of the equation. She argues that the natural environment evokes strong feelings of ambivalence.

> More naturalistic settings, especially woodlands, are among the most highly valued landscapes, in terms of personal pleasures, sense of well-being and contact with nature they afford people. But they are also the setting in which many people feel anxiety either for themselves or their loved ones (Burgess 1998, 115).

Contrary to the received wisdom that portrays wooded areas as sites 'in which people feel anxiety,' the majority of women interviewed indicate that they feel most comfortable fighting fire.

Quite often, individual comfort stems from the notion that fighting a fire is a source of continuous activity. As such, women are able to avoid the liminal period of downtime, that period "sandwiched" betwixt and between productive work and stultifying boredom (Nippert-Eng 1996, 120). On the fire line, there is always something to do.

> Well, in terms of the job as a whole, I enjoy being on fire a lot more than I enjoy being on the base. [I] like being busy all the time (Fiona, Interview 7).

In stark contrast to the monotony of red alert, crews that 'initial attack' (IA) forest fires are often embroiled in an exercise that demands a tremendous amount of

physical exertion for a limited amount of time. These two places – monotony versus the intensive work mode – "demand what are often acutely different, if not antithetical, rules for thinking and acting" (ibid.). As the following quotations illustrate, fighting fire tends to be a job far more preferable to working at the base because it allows women to 'keep busy.'

> [I enjoy] the duties that come with being a Crew Member on initial attack; hose laying, setting up pumps. I like that stuff cause I'm comfortable doing [it]. I know what I'm doing and its continuous work, you know. There's not a lot of down time. I like that (Anne, Interview 10).

> I think just generally, fire fighters like to be out on fire. That's the best part of the job, just being out there ... laying your hose ...cutting a line through the blow down ... . And going after smokes ... camping, and cooking even, and just being out on a fire. I prefer that much more to being on base; be that our base or a forward attack base and just doing other things to kind of keep busy. I think fire's the best part about the job (Sally, Interview 2).

Sally notes that there are myriad ways to stay occupied while in the bush. The discomfort that punctuates daily interaction on the base is not prevalent on the fire line; women do not fear "being caught doing nothing," primarily because they can easily find something to do. In this context, women derive a certain satisfaction from being completely absorbed in their daily routine believing that if engaged in work, they cannot be subject to the scrutiny or ridicule of the appropriated 'managerial' gaze.

A second reason why women feel more comfortable in the bush is linked to the dynamics of their crews. Siren enjoys the close connection that takes place when two people are working on a section of line together.

> ... probably the places I was most comfortable was (pauses) working with ... the second person on a section of the fire, just the two of us working. ... I wouldn't analyze the situation. I wouldn't analyze it in terms of, 'Do I feel

> like I'm part of this conversation?' Or 'Do I feel like I'm a worthy ... contemporary of my coworkers' (Siren, Interview 8)?

Knowing that she is involved in a reciprocal relationship where a coworker is depending on her is of tremendous significance. "When you're working with a second person on a section of a fire, ... you know... you need each other" (Interview 8). A strong bond of interdependence is formed, one that does not require Siren to second-guess her position or abilities as a firefighter. In the opinion of Sally, the kinds of bonds Siren discusses are forged by fire. She expresses the opinion that only during a fire do members of a crew truly become cemented as a cohesive unit.

> I'm] probably most comfortable on a fire because that's ... what brings your crew together, I always find, at the beginning of the year. [You can be] training forever on base but, you need to get out and have a fire and ... see if you can get the line around the fire, and cook and that kind of stuff before you see if you really gel or not (Sally, Interview 2).

For Sally, attempts made to emulate the experience of fighting fire through training often fall considerably short of the actual fire line experience. The fire line is a litmus test that determines the extent to which members of the crew are able to function as part of a team.

Pornography on the Fire Line

In order to destabilize the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity, women need not feel that they are part of a cohesive team. Many of the challenges to the masculine construct originate when marginalized women "cut into and disrupt the 'normality' of [the subcultural space]" (Valentine 1996, 148). Female firefighters

work in an environment in which the ubiquity of pornographic and objectifying material is constitutive of the 'normal' fire line experience; pornography can be found in all the geographic spaces that firefighters inhabit. They become a visceral disruption - a flesh and blood threat - to the prevailing discourse of male privilege (Eveline and Booth 2002, 570) by contesting the pornographic imagery rampant within the Fire Program.

> I can say I'm not fond of the porn in a tent.[13] And there have been times when I'm like, 'You know what? I'm not, I'm not happy with you guys looking at that. Just put it away. Put it away. Look at it when I'm not here cause I know you have it. But you don't need to point out the certain attributes of a woman and pass the magazine between each other, when I'm sitting here. That doesn't need to be said' (Mia, Interview 15).

In stark contrast to the women who "[try] not to contravene the constitutive norms and conventions that [benefit] men" (Eveline and Booth 2002, 570), Mia voices concern and obvious discomfort regarding the circulating pornography. A direct confrontation ensues in which she utilizes her position as Crew Leader to lend her demands more clout. If the magazines provoke such divisive tensions amongst the crew, perhaps the individuals 'rating' women may see the confrontation as an impetus to (re)examine the suitability of pornographic and objectifying material on the fire line.

As a rookie, Lisa's form of recourse in a similar situation differs considerably. Her first night in a prospector results in a poisoned work environment when her Crew Leader and Crew Member begin to 'rate' the women in Maxim magazine. The social dynamics markedly shift when Lisa physically removes herself from the

[13] For a more detailed discussion of the tents, and the social interactions that take place within them, see Chapter 5.

space to change clothing,[14] a strategy observed (and remarked upon) by the other members of the crew.

> I'd get up and walk down the hose line in the morning to get changed. Cause ... I don't want to change in front of a bunch of strangers who were ogling over Maxim magazines the night before rating girls. Like, I'm not going to be rated ... We're all filthy here. Just look how you look and not worry about it. But it is different cause your body looks different because you are a girl. So, I'll just go change down the hose line. (slight laugh) (Interview 6).

In comparison, Ingrid employs the technique of "blocking out" men looking at pornography on the fire bus. She estimates that "ninety five percent of them" peruse magazines featuring "fourteen and fifteen year old girls" (Interview 9).

> I think that's a lot of the reason that I was maybe the snob who sat with my headphones on the bus, but I don't necessarily want to hear it. And that was my way of blocking them out (Ingrid).

Also a rookie, Ingrid is seen as a "snob" for refusing to engage with members of the subculture. The application of a nickname, however rude, implies that at least some of the men recognize that Ingrid reacts strongly to the use of pornographic material.

These examples directly contradict the assertion that "the more obvious and direct forms of sexualization [and objectification] have become less prevalent" because the men fear sanctions (Tallichet 2000, 241). Within the Fire Program, it appears that male supervisors in a position to thwart the damaging behaviour, fear the informal sanctions imposed by the subculture over and above formal regulations like WDHP. The onus, then, is on the women to destabilize the male-dominated, male defined space in varied and contested ways such as directly confronting

[14] The move to change down the hose line is quite out of the ordinary. Other respondents change in their sleeping bags (Interview 11), or ask crew people to turn around (Interview 7).

individuals with offensive material, physically leaving the area, and showing disapproval by ignoring members of the subculture that engage in offensive behaviour.

Conclusion

The initial discussion, which surrounds the standard operating procedures that regulate a single crew dispatch to a fire, provides an ethnographic description of the fire line as a fluid workspace. This account presents an important but necessarily partial representation of the crew dynamics while fighting a fire. The topic requires a deeper investigation of the social interactions that inform the lived experiences of firefighters in the bush, social interactions predominantly influenced by the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

In practice, the concept of hegemonic masculinity reinforces the dominant position of men and the subservience of women on the fire line (Connell 1995, 77) by reifying the existing conception of space as a masculine construct. Bolstered by preconceived notions that women and men occupied the workplace for vastly different reasons (Reed 2003, 13), dominant members of the subculture imposed constraints like the appropriated 'managerial' gaze, the need to prove individual 'competence,' and pressure to perform suppression tasks upon women.

For the most part, women develop varied strategies to contest the efficacy of training individuals by employing techniques that focus on inducing anxiety in the subculture of blame. Instead, female supervisors glean valuable information from their own negative experiences, information that they are able to relay to crew

people they train. The marked differences in supervisory style, however, reveal that "normative standards" (Connell 1995, 79) governing masculinity on the fire line are "plunged into inconsistency" (Valentine 1996, 148) because women refuse to adopt traditional managerial practices.

Contrary to the received wisdom on the subject of women and children in the woods (Vaillant 2005), female firefighters threaten the concept of hegemonic masculinity by demonstrating increased comfort on the fire line. Much of the time the women see fighting fire as an opportunity to engage in frenetic activity, activity that reduces the penetrating stare of the appropriated 'managerial' gaze and allows them to escape some of the unsavory aspects of crew interaction.

Finally, women threaten the masculine construct by challenging the legitimacy of pornographic and objectifying material on the fire line. With the onus placed squarely on their shoulders to act, a number of women find ways to embody a flesh and blood challenge. In Chapter 5, the notion of the female body as a visceral threat - briefly explained in this chapter - will be expanded upon to include the ways in which the female body is constructed and maintained as the 'wrong body' on the fire line.

Chapter 5 – Private Bodies

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the ways in which the fire line constructed and maintained along masculine gender lines, is influenced by the concept of hegemonic masculinity. It is also important, however, to examine the impact that women in the crew system have on the fire line as a spatial construct. After all, firefighters could conceivably spend nineteen days at a time on the same stretch of line.[1] For the most part, it appears that the influx of women has a destabilizing effect on the taken-for-granted assumption that the fire line is male space (see Moore and Kleiner 2001 for a discussion of this phenomenon in structural fire fighting). Yet, how do dominant members of the subculture – who may conceive of women's presence in fire as an encroachment – respond to the female body and its destabilizing effect? To explore this question it is imperative that the linkages between the gendered organization of work and the female body be discussed.

"Recent feminist accounts have ... drawn attention to the control of women's bodies and the gendered organization of work as intimately connected" (Tyler and Hancock 2001, 27). In the male-dominated field of forest fire suppression, dominant members of the subculture assert varying degrees of control over women's bodies and shape the manner in which these bodies are received. This chapter explores the ways in which their "particular constructions of labouring [female] bodies ... signify anxieties about the changing nature of work and employment"

[1] The nineteen-day guideline, implemented by management, suggests that firefighters work nineteen consecutive days in a row before receiving a day off. The guideline is used when the fire situation warrants it.

(Wolkowitz 2001, 85). Central to this discussion is the ideological notion that the female body is considered the 'wrong body' for fire suppression. This chapter commences with a brief ethnographic description of life in the tents and the ideological distinction between public and private spheres. The second section discusses the (re)production of familial relations when the crew becomes a stand-in for the nuclear family. Finally, I examine the 'private' female body that is associated with bursting sexuality and embodied incompetence. In order to understand why representations of the 'private' female body are so troubling, however, the distinction between public and private space must be examined.

Defining 'Private' Space

> The private *as an ideal type* has traditionally been associated and conflated with: the domestic, the embodied, the natural, the family, property, the 'shadowy interior of the household', personal life, intimacy, passion, sexuality, ...care, a haven, unwaged labour, reproduction and immanence. The public *as an ideal type* has traditionally been the domain of the disembodied, the abstract, the cultural, rationality, critical public discourse, citizenship, civil society, ... waged labour, production, ... the state, action, militarism, heroism and transcendence (Duncan 1996, 128).

As stated in Chapter 1, there are several contradictions between the ideological separation of spheres and the daily realities of most men and women. Nowhere are these contradictions more apparent than on the fire line where a thin veneer of canvas or nylon separates the public from the private. The tent, quite literally, becomes a boundary separating 'the shadowy interior of the household' from its 'ideological antithesis' on the other side of the flap. In order to discuss the "highly problematic" (Duncan 1996, 127) binary distinction between the public and

private spheres, an ethnographic description of a typical line camp and the social interactions that inform the space are described.

As the natural light begins to fade, our crew meanders down the hose line to the heli-pad. There, amongst the unused equipment, are the personal packs,[2] the dining tent and the camp bag. Limited by weight restrictions when flying in H-3, each crew person carries a twenty-four hour personal pack weighing a maximum of twenty pounds and housing a sleeping bag, therma rest, toiletries and change of clothing. Firefighters, who spend approximately one third of their summer on the fire line, need to be prepared to camp out at all times.[3] Our camp bag – complete with a cook stove, twenty-four hour food kit, lantern, cookware, propane cylinders, and personal tents – weighs approximately sixty-five pounds.

While the Crew Leader searches for level ground to set up his tent, I shoulder the camp bag and my personal pack to the chosen campsite. To the right of the heli-pad, a large rock formation protrudes; on the left, a relatively flat piece of land extends approximately fifteen meters before it is bisected by the tree line. It is with tremendous excitement that I realize the ground - covered in moss and Labrador Tea - is dry and close to the heli-pad. The physical discomfort of "having to get up at four thirty in the morning and put on wet boots" (Fiona, Interview 7) is mitigated by a warm and dry place to sleep.

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[2] The Fire Incident Pack (FIP), most commonly referred to as the personal pack, is a two-part bag that can weigh a combined total of forty-five pounds. In Part 1 crew people carry the basic necessities for a twenty-four hour stay. Part 2, which readily detaches from Part 1, is for an extended stay on the fire line.

[3] Although firefighters sometimes fight a fire and return to base the same day, it is a rare occurrence. Most fires require an overnight commitment of at least 1 night.

First to set up his tent, my Crew Leader chooses a spot closest to the heli-pad. Armed with the knowledge that he smokes inside his personal tent, I select a site an appreciable distance away and bordered by the tree line. The Crew Members, on the other hand, give both of us a wide berth and pitch their tents together. With some trepidation, I notice that my tent is situated on the periphery of the camp. After experiencing years of subtle exclusion within the subculture, I am concerned by the extent to which my actions may perpetuate that exclusion (Yoder and Aniakudo 1997, 330).

The personal tent, however, is not conducive to social interaction. It is a one-person domicile no taller than 4 feet at its apex and its floor measurements provide just enough room for a single person and their gear. As an ostensibly private space, some dominant members of the subculture feel that the personal tents promote individual segregation while damaging crew morale.[4] In this context, setting up a personal tent when a prospector is available is tantamount to a willful boycott of crew interaction.

Limited by helicopter weight restrictions that determine the amount of gear we can carry, our crew does not have a prospector tent[5] on the fire line. In its stead, the whole crew erects our dining tent - the hub of crew interaction - approximately 10 meters from camp. Nowhere near as involved as setting up a prospector, which requires 9 wooden poles to solidly construct, the dining tent has a single ridgepole

[4] One of the well known characters in Thunder Bay Fire told me that the light weight tents were introduced in response to the influx of women into the Fire Program, a rumour that was debunked by a manager in Thunder Bay.

[5] Made of heavy canvas, the prospector tents measure twelve by fourteen or fourteen by sixteen feet. The tents, a welcome addition to the fire line during the shoulder seasons, trap heat better than their nylon

that forms the apex and allows room for crew people to stand upright. Mesh screens fortify our defences against the black flies, mosquitoes and sand flies that constantly besiege us on the line. "The bugs here are brutal. If you stop moving for even a second in these woods you'll get eaten alive" (Greer and Hendrickson 2001, 53). Putting the finishing touches on the tent, each Crew Member rolls up the nylon flaps on the exterior to air out the musty smell of cooked food, wet moss and cigarette smoke.

Returning inside the dining tent, both Jake and Ryan[6] rummage through the twenty-four hour food kit. Sifting through the veritable cornucopia of processed food, Jake settles on a chocolate bar and flatly states that we should "start dinner." He and I exchange a withering look, both of us embittered by the knowledge that meal preparations are almost exclusively our responsibility.[7] Although his reluctance fosters considerable tension on the crew, my Crew Leader very rarely deigns to prepare a meal or clean up after one.[8] In comparison, Ryan - a self-proclaimed "bad cook" - washes dishes after every meal and even attempts to cook on occasion.

As Jake boils the water - we are having a freeze-dried concoction commonly referred to as "skag in the bag" - I ask Mack[9] what time we are "working" until. Technically, the crew is only supposed to receive payment for suppression work on the fire line. In this context, "*where* [our] work occurs has [a] considerable influence on whether it is considered to be "work" or not and on whether it is

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counterparts.

[6] "Jake" and "Ryan" are pseudonyms for my Crew Members.

[7] After verbally challenging my Crew Leader, he made one meal the entire summer.

[8] To add to the insult, my Crew Leader rouses early enough in the morning to make breakfast and leaves the dirty dishes for us to clean.

counted as work or not" (Domosh and Seager 2001, 37). For the tasks carried out within the tents, we do not receive monetary remuneration. As a result, work traditionally conflated with 'the domestic' on the fire line is devalued in a way that reflects societal attitudes towards women's labour inside the home.

When we have finished eating our "skag in the bag," Ryan and I clean up the dishes. Crew dynamics are markedly different tonight; the stresses of extended absences from home, often forcibly muted, are starting to erode crew cohesion (Greer and Hendrickson 2001, 71). The strain manifests itself in varied ways. Our conversation focuses on topics like overtime, flatulence and fire stories that appeal to the lowest common denominator. Many of the exchanges are terse and unenthusiastic, a sure sign that members of the crew are suffering from fatigue.

By the time the dining tent is cleaned up, most of us are ready to go to bed; the first day on a fire is exhausting. Saying "Good night" to the crew, I head to my tent and fall asleep rather quickly. Awakening in the middle of the night to the sound of what I initially think is rain, I realize that it is actually mosquitoes hitting the tent fly. Distracted by the bugs, I grope around the tent for my watch. It's 3 o'clock in the morning! In a few short hours it will be time to do the breakfast dishes my Crew Leader is bound to leave behind for us.

Crew = Family

The preceding ethnographic description focuses on the 'highly problematic' distinction between public and private space; a binary distinction articulated much

[9] "Mack" is a pseudonym for my Crew Leader.

more clearly at the level of ideology than it is practiced in daily routines. It proves difficult, in this instance, to neatly compartmentalize fire line spaces as either public or private when the material boundaries that separate them are almost invisible (and highly contested).

> Both private and public spaces are heterogeneous and not all space is clearly private or public. Space is thus subject to various territorializing and deterritorializing processes whereby local control is fixed, claimed, challenged, forfeited and privatized (Duncan 1996, 129).

Within this framework, the very presence of women poses a threat to existing conceptions of space traditionally associated with men and masculinity. That female firefighters present themselves as 'part of the family' confounds some members of a subculture rife with ambivalence about a 'woman's proper place' in the bush.

> [Y]our crew kind of becomes pretty close and they're kind of like your own little tiny nuclear family; at least in my experience (Sally, Interview 2).

Implicit in the preceding quotation is the idea that Sally's relationship with her crew has transcended the standard workplace camaraderie that typifies most work environments. Drawing strength from the familial bonds on her crew, Sally challenges the received notion that women are 'out of place' in the male-dominated, male-defined field of fire fighting (McDowell 1995; Cassell 1998).

Betty asserts that the support of her crew - a stand-in for the nuclear family - contributes to her sense of belonging on the fire line. "It's like a family when you're working out there as a team" (Interview 1). She continues:

> When you're out on the fire line, you work as a ... team and uh, you become very close with the people. And you, you work as a family. Like ... a family, brother and sister, sister /sister ... mother/daughter. You ... forgive people. You make ... allowances for ... who they are. .... You work with the person

> and who they are. And not everybody is going to be um, perfect at everything they do. And in a family, you work with that (Betty, Interview 1).

For Betty, women on the line promote an environment in which forgiveness is commonplace, a character trait that stands in stark contrast to the subculture of blame discussed in Chapter 4. She suggests that women in the "highly interdependent" (Tallichet 2000, 234) field of fire suppression shape crew dynamics in powerful ways.

Jodi agrees. She suspects that the fire line is a unique workplace setting where crew people "depend on each other for their collective safety and productivity" (ibid.). Frustrated by the realization that she will likely be unable to relive the experience of being in a 'crew family' again, she expresses sadness about leaving the Fire Program.

> I think it's going to be hard for me to find another job where I ... get to work with ... people so closely and get to know everyone. ... [Y]ou pretty much come to depend on each other. It's ... more like another family (Jodi, Interview 4).

The fact that women are able to foster such strong bonds - bonds that mirror family relations - supports the argument that women feel they inherently belong in forest fire suppression. Almost in spite of pervasive subcultural attitudes that frame women in the Ministry as "incapable intruders" (Tallichet 2000, 235-236), many of the women do not see themselves as interlopers on the fire line. Instead, they see their presence in the crew system as a natural outcome of social progress.

There are times, however, when the 'family model' tends to reify traditional conceptions of the fire line as a masculine construct. "When a woman goes to work [in fire], she is expected to carry her share of the paid work. But she is also

implicitly situated as the locus of affectivity, which places her as responsible for care [of] her male colleagues" (Eveline and Booth 2002, 565). In this context, female firefighters fulfill the role of 'caretaker or nurturer' (Reed 2003, 13) on the crew.

> Yeah, they almost become like your family. And I think too, like, ... my behaviour towards them is - I am a nurturing person. So ... it's like I sometimes do take care of them [and] they give me that leeway of saying, 'Okay guys. You know, let's just not be stupid today. Let's have a decent conversation' (Mia, Interview 15).

Mia, a Crew Leader well situated to offer maternal support to the members of her crew, defines herself as a 'nurturing person.' As such, she is more comfortable 'mothering' the crew by determining what constitutes an acceptable conversation topic in her space.

Others, like Siren, are distinctly uncomfortable with the traditional expectation that women naturally fall into the category of nurturer on a crew.

> You do ... an initial attack on a fire and always ... I got the sense that the responsibility for the camp, where the camp went, how the camp was set up, dinner, meals, cooking, food order, all that stuff sort of fell on my shoulders. Is that because I was a woman? Could've been, I don't know. I never really gave it a second thought (Siren, Interview 8).

The tacit assumption, made by both women and men, that women are naturally inclined to fulfill the duties typically associated with the home and family pervades the fire line. Although their performances reify existing conceptions of gender and space, many women do not critically reflect upon the ways in which they daily perform the role of 'caretaker or nurturer' on their own crew.[10]

Often fraught with contradictions, the concepts of gender and space are daily negotiated and contested in the Fire Program. In some cases women claim the fire

[10] For example, one woman who I did not interview told me that she daily picked up her crew's lunches

line itself as a site of resistance from which the socially progressive result of 'belonging' in the space is achieved (Duncan 1996, 129). Other women uphold conventional roles in order to achieve the same end using more traditional means. Yet, how do members of the subculture who object to the presence of women on the fire line respond to their determination to stay in the Fire Program? Do they attempt to deter women in any way? Are they resigned to the fact that the presence of women, a defining feature of the crew system, is inevitable?

Once again, the binary distinction between public and private space is highly instructive when discussing the ways in which subcultural malcontents deal with the influx of women in the Fire Program. As Johnston and Valentine (1995) remind us:

> [A]lthough the home may be a more or less private place for 'the family' it doesn't necessarily guarantee freedom for individuals from the watchful gaze of other household members: 'the public world does not begin and end at the front door.' Rather, the ideology of 'the family' actually emphasises a form of togetherness, intimacy and interest in each others' business that can actually deny ... privacy (Johnston and Valentine 1995, 100).

The dominant idea that 'home and family' represent some form of sanctuary from scrutiny and the gaze is shattered when discontented firefighters seize upon 'intimate knowledge' of women's bodies and disseminate their findings in public spaces. In this context, women are linked to and conflated with the myriad shortcomings and failings of the 'private' body (Cockburn 1991; Weitz 1998). The representations of women that emerge "disrupt the ... lines of [public space] by bringing the domestic, the intimate ... sphere into the public domain" (Ainley 1998, 96).

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before they went out on the fire line.

Making the 'Private' Public

However counterintuitive the process may appear, the intent is to saturate ostensibly public spaces with destabilizing images of the 'private' female body. "The visual working of [the female body] functions as a depiction of the domestic, the interior, the feminine, spilling out – threateningly ... into the public sphere" (Ainley 1998, 96-97). It is the female body itself that 'troubles' the space and nothing short of removing women from the fire line will remedy the problem.

This efficacious strategy works, in part, because it panders to firmly established ideals about the female body. However, the strategy does little to facilitate a clearer understanding of why there is such a marked emphasis on women's bodies within the Fire Program.

> The body is the primary site of social experience. It is where social life is turned into lived experience. To understand the body we have to know who controls it as it moves through the spaces and times of our daily routines, who shapes its sensuous experiences, its sexualities, ... who controls its performance at work, ... and also influences how it is dressed and made to appear in its function of presenting us to others (Fiske 1993, 57).

It becomes clear that dominant members of the subculture shape the embodied experiences of women on the fire line. They influence the ways in which others receive the body of a female firefighter in two very distinct ways. By sexualizing the female body, women's workplace integration is contingent on the reproduction of an identity devoid of active sexuality (Tallichet 2000, 236). It is also presumed that women, by virtue of their 'feminine' bodies, are incompetent. Thus, women are defined - sexually and physically - by the bodies they inhabit more than any other aspect of their identity.

The Sexualized Female Body

As demonstrated by the presence of pornographic material in the tents in Chapter 4, the commodification of the 'private' female body as a sexual object is part of the subcultural discourse. Although "it is usually assumed that sexuality is (and should be) confined to private spaces" (Duncan 1996, 137), the notion that specific women inhabit a body bursting with sexuality pervades the fire line. For the most part, there are two narrowly confined sexual identities women can 'successfully' assume. To assume the first identity, it need only be implied that a woman is sexually active with any male in the Fire Program and the moniker "Fire Slut"[11] is attached to her. The second identity, often unknowingly assumed by women who fail to declare their (hetero)sexuality, look the part, or show no interest in dating their male colleagues, is that of the 'lesbian.'

In this context, there is no room for the legitimized enactment of female sexuality on the fire line. Both of the 'acceptable' articulations of sexual identity, highly devalued within the subculture, are intended to punish women by making a public spectacle of 'private' matters.

> '[P]unishment is a spectacle' ... intended as a form of instructive deterence for the wider, non-transgressive audience, while actual reform or rehabilitation can relate only to the small number judged in need of punishment (Ainley 1998, 90).

Female bodies infused with sexuality are bodies in need of punishment and control. Although the destabilizing presence of the 'private' sexual body is necessary on the fire line, it must be consistently regulated.

Of the existing sexual bodies that women can inhabit, the "Fire Slut' receives the most lip service as a devalued body and cautionary tale for women considering a sexual relationship with an individual in the Fire Program.

> [O]ne man is all it takes. And everyone knows she's a "Fire Slut." One man. And it's just like, "You know what? She could genuinely enjoy that person and his company. And if they weren't in the same job and just dating, then they're just dating. But on fire, because she's a fire girl and he's a fire guy, she's a 'Fire Slut' (Mia, Interview 15).

Mia notes that the space in which the relationship occurs defines the essential nature of the woman engaged in it. Were it not for fire, she would simply be "dating;" instead, it takes the combination of one man and the Fire Program to transform her into a 'Fire Slut.'

Some women, often pressured into the role of 'Fire Slut' because of geographic isolation, receive the derogatory name when the relationship they find themselves in is terminated. For this reason, Judy thinks it a mistake for women to date male firefighters.

> And that's ... unfortunately a mistake for any woman, I think. Cause if you do have a relationship with a guy and ... people know about it and you guys break up.... It's just bad news. You get called a 'slut' and a 'whore'.... That's just a guy thing, I think. Boys are just like that (Judy, Interview 11).

The sexual intimacies in a relationship are thrust into the public sphere, thereby making ostensibly private issues like passion and care a public concern. Hackneyed expressions like "slut," "whore," "knob gobbler," and "base bicycle"[12] are descriptors in place to describe a sexually active woman in the Fire Program.

It is also fairly common to hear some subordinate men malign women in

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[11] The term "Fire Slut," a derogatory epithet, originated within the subculture.
[12] Women are referred to as a "base bicycle" when "everyone has had a turn."

managerial positions by making suggestive comments about how they received their promotion in the first place. Offhand comments, such as "'Oh, she [must] not give very good blow jobs'" (Jodi, Interview 4) and "'Well, we all know how she got that job'" (Interview 4), explicitly link a woman's promotion in the Fire Program to her sexual performance. The linkage becomes a way to trivialize the myriad reasons why women occupy positions of power.

Most subcultural impressions of the sexualized female body suggest that it exists for the pleasure of men. Lisa indicates, "[M]y Crew Boss told me... 'On fire, you don't go for the good looking girls, you just go for the girls that seem like they're easy'" (Lisa, Interview 6). The body most at odds with these tacit impressions, however, is that of the stereotypical lesbian. In a very literal sense, the 'lesbian' is a threat to the heterosexual dynamic so painstakingly constructed and maintained. As Cream suggests,

> The point at which a person's sexual identity comes under scrutiny reveals the times and places in which corporeality is specified, as well as the places where weaknesses, and possible entry points for change, exist (1995, 35).

To protect the heterosexual dynamic and maintain the 'lesbian body' as a cautionary tale, some of the most dominant members of the subculture go to great lengths to shape the way in which the threatening body is publicly received.

The threat is most often neutralized through the use of derisive epithets that are applied as a warning or commentary on the lifestyle. Gwyneth, who has friends that are experimenting with their sexuality, hears some of her coworkers refer to

lesbians as "'carpet lickers'"[13] (Interview 3). She notes that her attempts to modify established beliefs about lesbians are met with sharp vituperations.

> [Y]ou can't really change people's minds, really. And if you say things, then they might say ... 'Well, what are you like, a muff diver or something?' (Gwyneth, Interview 3).

Reactions to the 'lesbian body,' both degrading and insulting, serve as a reminder that sexual dissidents are not accepted in the Fire Program. Women associated with the 'lesbian body' are reduced to a base sexual function that is the most conspicuous part of their public identity.

Members of the fire fighting subculture often advance the argument that 'lesbian bodies' are readily identifiable. Following the basic premise of habitus (Bourdieu 1977), specific women on the fire line appear to (or are taken to appear to) embody lesbianism.

> ...habitus explains the "intuitive," "tacit" cultural knowledge we have about those we meet: the way people stand, dress, move, act, react, and physically interact communicates wordlessly their social and sexual location and self-image (Cassell 1998, 40).

Therefore, one particular woman who has short hair, "[dresses] like a man," and is "not very well-spoken," is called "the 'Dyslexbian'" (Judy, Interview 11). Another is ridiculed behind her back as a direct result of her "eating habits, size, structure, [and] the way she performs" (Shanti, Interview 13). Even though she does a "phenomenal" job, "[the guys] always cut that up" (Interview 13). The explicit message is that active female sexuality exists to service men, either as a spectacle or a means of satiating sexual appetite

[13] I have also heard that I have been referred to as a "Slit Licker" behind my back.

Some men, noting that the most salient aspect of a woman's public identity is her sexualized body, cannot fathom the idea that she may fight fire for reasons entirely independent of sexual desire. To them, it seems only natural that there would be a romantic motivation behind a woman's attempts to become a member of the crew system. When a woman shows no interest in dating,

> they just assume that you must be a gay or a lesbian or that you don't like men. Because ... in their minds, obviously, I must be interested in one of them. .... And there's ... all these options. Like, why am I not going for it (Zulu, Interview 12)?

When she refuses her male coworkers advances, the tacit assumption is that Zulu must be a homosexual. Responding to the possibility that she may be a 'genuine lesbian,' some men tell her "All you need is a good stiff cock" (Interview 12).

It appears, then, that there is something inherently wrong with a woman who chooses to circumvent the entire dating process. Initially, Shanti argues that "show[ing] no interest" (Interview 13) in male colleagues is not problematic for her. She later admits, however, that "I've been asked if I was asexual before" (Shanti, Interview 13). For some men, Shanti's bodily performance must be identifiable.

What emerges from the study of workplace sexuality, then, is the notion that a finite number of 'acceptable' articulations of female sexuality are available to women in the Fire Program. Both of these articulations of active female sexuality are essentially flawed in some way, making their embodied enactment a futile exercise. Depending on the message they choose to embody, most women are going to be seen as deficient women or deficient workers.

Femininity = Incompetence

When 'femininity' and 'competence' are constructed as mutually exclusive terms, women are recognized as deficient workers. Once again, 'the feminine spills out threateningly into the public sphere' (Ainley 1998, 96-97) and influences the ways in which others receive the 'private' female body on the fire line. The notion that femininity begets physical weakness and incompetence has a long and detailed history in forest fire suppression.

In the early 1970s the head of fire operations for the Pacific Northwest in the United States (Thoele 1995, 139) gave a speech entitled Should Firefighters Wear Petticoats? to critical acclaim. Its content suggested that 'truly feminine' women did not belong in fire. "'I simply cannot imagine a truly feminine woman even considering fire suppression work, and all the adversity, filth, and hazard it entails'" (Hickerson cited in Thoele 1995, 140).

The preceding quotation is illustrative, not just for its sexist content, but rather for the fact that it could just as easily be uttered by firefighters in the twenty-first century. On the contemporary fire line, many firefighters uphold the binary distinction between male/female and masculinity/femininity. In this context, "male and female are posited as mutually exclusive categories and although their meaning may change over space and time, what stays constant is that women and men have to be distinguishable" (Cream 1995, 33).

It is not particularly surprising, then, that some firefighters reject the idea that female bodies – conflated with femininity, weakness, and the private sphere – belong on the fire line. The bodily comportment of a 'real woman' does not allow for

'competent' performances in the male-defined workplace. Instead, she embodies a kind of 'feminine might' that is incongruent with the hegemonic descriptors of masculine strength required to fight fire.

Pink argues that the enactment of physical strength must maintain gendered stereotypes in order to be legitimated.

> Exhibitions of feminine strength [are] considered appropriate whereas a woman who demonstrates masculine strength [is] thought 'unnatural.' While women are strong enough to do housework, lift heavy objects, and, in the past, do manual labour in the fields, these activities do not challenge gender stereotypes (Pink 1996, 58).

The spaces in which identities are performed shape the way in which gendered performances are interpreted (Butler 1999). As such, a strong woman may be recognized as physically capable in feminine spaces and 'unnatural' in masculine spaces (ibid.).

Women in fire suppression are often either associated with femininity and incompetence on the line or masculinity and 'unnatural womanhood.' Visible signs, such as wearing make-up and revealing clothing, signal to members of the subculture that women involved in such ostentatious displays have no interest in fighting fire. The prevailing belief amongst most men and women is that these individuals emphasize rituals that maintain stereotypical beauty while shirking the laborious tasks that characterize fire fighting.

As Sally notes,

> [T]here is kind of an assumption that [if] you're very girly, that you won't be able to do the job. But I think some of that goes down to what's associated with femininity too. It's just, you know, being ... kind of thin and smaller, and um, maybe not as physically strong, maybe not as comfortable being in a very rugged situation. ... . I could see that (Sally, Interview 2).

Drawing upon her own interpretations of what it means to be feminine, Sally indicates that the perceived link between femininity and incompetence is valid.

A number of respondents who are able to identify its embodiment, support the notion (albeit, indirectly) that feminine incompetence is a valid concept on the fire line. For example, Lisa describes a woman who exemplifies the ideal.

> She was probably more just a pretty face to have around. ... she's a nice girl, just not really useful, from what I saw .... She didn't really do too much (Interview 6).

The collective belief is that these women find it easier and more beneficial to reprise traditional gendered performances. After all, these 'pretty' and unproductive faces still earn over fifteen dollars an hour.

For Ingrid, a woman who embodies the ideal likes to pretend "she doesn't know anything. And, she's like 'Oh, can you show me how to do this'" (Interview 9). When performing simple tasks like hauling brush,

> she basically just stood there ... and pretended that she had no idea what to do and how to do it and wanted everyone to explain it to her. Just 'flaky.' You know when you can talk to a 'flaky' girl (Interview 9)?

In this context, women who embody the identity of a 'flaky girl' are often "laughed at" (Anne, Interview 10) by their male colleagues. "Well, either they get laughed at or they get hit on; (slight laugh) one or the other" (Anne, Interview 10). The belittling responses serve as a reminder that women who embody feminine incompetence are seen as "a joke" (Zulu, Interview 12) within the subculture.

As an ethereal presence incorporated into urban legends, however, feminine incompetence is a far more powerful and instructive image. Women can expect to

hear about the specter of feminine incompetence even before they take the job fighting fire. "[B]efore I came to fire I [heard] ... the guys talking about girls that have been in the crew and they whine and they complain and stuff and kind of give a bad name" (Jessie, Interview 5).

When asked to elaborate, Jessie talks about one particular woman that "just didn't want to take her weight" (Interview 5).

> she told [her Crew Leader] where to go. .... [she] refused to hold this or take this or that or carry the hose pack.... .... That's the stuff that would stand out (Interview 5).

Tales of feminine incompetence, continually reiterated from one year to the next, make women's negative experiences in the workplace a more salient and ongoing feature of their collective identity. Those women who inspire tales may decide to leave the program, but their reputations haunt those who stay.[14] Siren discusses a specter in Thunder Bay.

> She made us all look crappy. ...We hired five brand new girls in the spring. And one of those girls [was] unable to do her job. And all five of those girls were earmarked for 'useless wonders' that we had to put up with for the summer (Siren, Interview 8).

It is undeniable that some women in the Fire Program do not carry their weight and, by extension, are not respected by their coworkers. However, there are ways in which a number of firefighters - particularly men - exhibit a very poor work ethic. Why, then, do they lack a corresponding specter of masculine incompetence to complement the existing one? The reason: Men are seen as individuals. Women are part of a monolithic workplace identity/collective sex.

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[14] Four years after leaving the Program, the men still mention a specter they disliked. Yet, they fail to mention a male firefighter who got so drunk on the fire line that he urinated on his sleeping Crew Boss.

> Q: ... when a man can't do the job -
>
> A: 'That's just that one individual. ... that 'bad apple' is not contaminating the whole basket.' No, certainly not. 'That's just ... a mistake we hired the guy. We'll get rid of him' (Siren, Interview 8).

It is very clear to most of the women interviewed that there are different sets of lenses through which the actions of men and women are interpreted.

In stark contrast to the constraints imposed upon women, the actions of one man are not generalized to other men in fire. Although she recognizes that exceptionally incompetent men are gossiped about, Jessie feels that the gossip surrounding their work performance is nowhere near as commonplace.

> Q: Did you hear ... the same sorts of stories about men being unable to do the job...?
>
> A: Well, of course that's ... not usually said as much. I've heard stories about stupid guys too, you know. It goes both ways. But the girl ones, of course, stand out (Jessie, Interview 5).

Jodi agrees. She states that, "Any time you hear something bad about a guy that's up in [a higher position], it's all based on the job that they do. It's not based on anything having to do with sex" (Jodi, Interview 4). The cumbersome restraints of the sexed body are not readily applied the male work performance.

The end result of the specter of feminine incompetence is that women who occupy a female body are at a decided disadvantage; the perceived shortcomings of femininity in a male-dominated workplace cast a pall over women attempting to construct a 'competent' identity. Although the body is viewed as one of the core territories of the self (Squires, 1994, 399), it is patently obvious that women in the Fire Program do not have control over the ways in which their bodies are received.

Women as 'Conceptual Men'

When negotiating a viable workplace identity, many female firefighters attempt to avoid conflation with the 'private' female body, a body inscribed with notions of overt sexuality and physical incompetence. It follows, then, that women must daily manage feminine subjectivity while simultaneously occupying the 'wrong body' on the fire line. Placed in this contrary position, women closely monitor their workplace performances in a manner that reproduces the act of being watched by dominant members of the subculture.

> In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other (Bartky 1990, 72).

The influence of the 'panoptical male connoisseur' significantly shapes women's identity construction (Wakewich 2000, 239) in fire suppression. In this context, many women feel compelled to construct and maintain a 'competent' workplace identity based on the ideological supposition that they are 'conceptual men' (Ranson 2005). Presenting themselves as a harmless addition to the space, female firefighters emulate male styles and behaviour which "are presented as organizational expectations and simultaneously proclaimed as gender-neutral" (Ranson 2005, 150).

Women who make it abundantly clear – through style of dress and attitude – that they do not pose a visceral threat to these 'organizational expectations,' mute the salient aspects of their femininity. As Mia states "I strive, at work, to have like,

a non-entity. .... [J]ust see me as a worker. Let me get through my four months" (Mia, Interview 15). Reading like a supplication, the preceding sentiment indicates that becoming a 'non-entity' on the fire line removes Mia from the unenviable position of having a body primarily marked by sexuality and incompetence.

Other women in the Fire Program seek to mute aspects of stereotypical femininity through their style of dress. As Shanti explains, she wears baggy clothing,

> Just to gain that respect from most of the guys I work with - or persons, let's just say - yeah, for sure. I make sure I don't dress like ... I'm going to the bar (Interview 13)!

Wearing clothing which accentuates the female body appears to result in a diminished level of respect. As Bartky states, "To succeed in the provision of a beautiful or sexy body gains a woman attention and some admiration but little real respect and rarely any social power" (Bartky 1990, 73). Recognizing this, Shanti feels that the best way to respond is to dress 'like a guy.'

In order to be 'one of the guys,' Shanti dresses for comfort in a way apes masculine styles of dress (McDowell 1995, 88). "[F]or me to be 'one of the guys,' I dress like one of the guys. And I'm comfortable with the way I dress" (Interview 13). She suggests that muting different aspects of femininity facilitates the transition from a 'private' female body into a 'competent' firefighter.

Sally acknowledges that "you lose a sense of ... femininity... doing this kind of work all the time" (Interview 2). In contrast to Shanti, however, she feels an acute desire to feel feminine, a desire that is clearly out of place in the Fire Program.

> [W]e were working outside and it was very ... physical labour and you were wearing work boots all the time. And um, like I said, I don't feel like I'm very girly, and I don't wear make up generally. But we would get what I would

> call 'Ranger Syndrome.' And when we would take those girls to [town] ..., everyone would just get so dressed up and feel so feminine. And the things they bought were dresses and shoes and things that maybe you wouldn't necessarily buy. But just that feeling of "Wow, I need to feel feminine here for a moment here cause I'm kind of losing that." Um, I think that that is valid (Sally, Interview 2).

Until provided the opportunity to unleash femininity in a suitable spatial environment, Sally regulates her feminine subjectivity.

In this respect, the legitimized enactment of femininity requires an additional space outside the workplace. Although she is finished working, Gwyneth admits she thinks it inappropriate to wear dresses.

> [S]ometimes I feel like you can't be ... really girly. [A]fter work ... I wouldn't feel comfortable putting on a dress and ... hanging out in the staff house. [At home], I probably would put on a dress and hang out at home or go see my friends and stuff. ... . But after work sometimes, it's like: 'Oh, I wouldn't mind ... (laughs) dressing up and looking girly.' And I'm sure you could. I just wouldn't do it up here (Gwyneth, Interview 3).

Showing up for work in a pink tee shirt and pigtails, Gwyneth receives the message relatively quickly that femininity and fire suppression do not mix. As a direct result of the clothing worn, she learns that assumptions are made about the physical abilities of the 'private' female body inhabiting the clothes.

In a workplace in which both men and women are equally embodied, it is women's bodies which are seen as problematic, disruptive and unruly (Jackson and Scott 2001, 13). It is not surprising, then, that women in the Fire Program often adopt the image of 'the worker,' one of the sterile body completely unfettered by the messy restraints of sexuality and overt femininity.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have explored why dominant members of the subculture intentionally saturate ostensibly public spaces with representations of the 'private' female body. To facilitate a greater understanding of the reasons why the visual working of the 'private' female body spills out threateningly into the public sphere (Ainley 1998, 96-97), it is imperative that the ideological distinction between the public and private spheres be examined.

Although individuals experience the separation of spheres on the fire line in varied and contradictory ways, the ethnographic description of life in the tents suggests that the nebulous concept is not brought into specific relief. The physical barrier that separates the public and private – a thin veneer of nylon or canvas – becomes a formidable way to uphold the tenuous distinction between 'masculine' public space and 'feminine' private space.

It is in this context that disgruntled members of the fire fighting subculture shape the ways in which women's bodies are received on the line. As Pink (1996) cautions, "the obvious visual presence of a female body [on the fire line], precisely in place of a male body is blatant and unforgettable" (49). In response to the 'blatant and unforgettable presence,' representations of the 'private' female body emerge, representations that conflate the female body with the domestic, the interior, and the feminine (Ainley 1998, 96-97). These associations mark women's bodies as either highly sexualized or incompetent, both of which situate the female form as 'out of place' on the fire line.

Although individual reactions to the received view of women's bodies differ, a salient theme emerges. Several women attempt to become 'conceptual men' (Ranson 2005) in order to facilitate a seamless transition from feminine subject to 'competent' worker. They carefully monitor their gendered performances at work and pay specific attention to their dress and demeanor. The strong reactions indicate that women are deeply impacted by the conflation of 'private' female bodies with highly devalued sexuality and incompetence.

Chapter 6 - Drawing Conclusions

Conclusions

This study has focused on the myriad ways in which female firefighters daily negotiate gendered identity across varied spatial settings constructed and maintained along masculine gender lines. Whether situated in the confines of the Thunder Bay District Fire Center or out on the fire line itself, the thesis has primarily discussed how women maintain 'competent' workplace identities in the face of formal and informal barriers in the workplace. In part, the study was motivated by my response to the contemporary literature on women in forest fire suppression. For the most part, I was unable to come across any literature that adequately reflected my experiences in the crew system. I was also puzzled by the extent to which the myth of the heroic male forest firefighter, popularized by Maclean (1992), Thoele (1995), and even Greer and Hendrickson (2001), failed to distinguish between the plurality of gendered identities operating in the Fire Program at any given time. Instead, the authors generally asserted that a monolithic image of the firefighter as an 'adrenaline junkie' adequately encapsulated masculine identity on the fire line, an image that rarely acknowledged the presence of women. By contrast, I argue that the existing literature, while helpful and informative, does not incorporate female firefighter's daily experiences in forest fire suppression in the limited articulations of fire fighting identities.

To develop a clearer understanding of how female firefighters negotiated gendered identities in northwestern Ontario, this study examines - through four months of participant observation and fifteen in-depth interviews - the impact

different spatial locations had on women's workplace performances. By focusing on a variety of different work sites, like the District Fire Center in Thunder Bay and the fire line, I was able to examine how particular spaces were maintained as masculine constructs. As McDowell (1995) suggests, these gendered spaces are maintained through everyday activities like unreflective speech, jokes, lascivious comments, homophobic rhetoric, and stereotypes (1995, 82) that ostensibly 'normalize' or 'neutralize' highly gendered environments.

In this context, it was perfectly 'normal' for female firefighters - often outnumbered 3 to 1 on a crew - to work amidst men who publicly perused pornographic material, rated women's bodies in Maxim magazine, personified equipment that failed to work along feminine gender lines, and joked about the 'old lady'[1] at home. Although several men in the Fire Program did not participate in the activities, these hyper-masculine displays defined the spaces in which they occurred as male domain and objectified the women who occupied the space. The presence of women in these spaces, then, was often conceived of as an unwelcome intrusion (Tallichet 2000) by the same dominant members of the subculture who influenced the ways in which spatial locations were perceived.

Female firefighters, subjected to closer and more intense scrutiny than their male colleagues, were constantly reminded that specific members of the subculture regarded them as interlopers. The appropriated 'managerial' gaze - the most common form of discipline invoked to remind women of their 'otherness' within the Fire Program - was readily applied by men and women alike (Bartky 1990; Bordo

[1] A number of dominant members of the subculture refer to their significant other as the 'old lady.'

1993). In direct opposition to the managerial gaze enacted by a fire manager, those who applied the appropriated version were often without legitimate claim to a supervisory position on a crew (Berger 1972). Part of the appeal of the appropriated 'managerial' gaze, however, was that it could be enacted by any crew person regardless of their hierarchical rank. The object of the gaze, in most instances, was a woman. Men applied the appropriated 'managerial' gaze to women as a demonstration of their hegemonic power. Women applied the appropriated 'managerial' gaze to other women out of fear, fear of being seen as the 'other.'

Aware that they were under constant scrutiny, women who applied the gaze often did so with the hope of compelling other women to exercise caution when performing a workplace identity that was conceivably associated with incompetence (Foucault 1977). Unlike their male colleagues who were recognized and assessed as individuals, female firefighters were part of a collective identity based on their gender. The failings and shortcomings of an individual woman became the failings of the generic woman in forest fire suppression. Women, who were amplified in the Fire Program, were not free to make mistakes as they learned. For example, Mia provided the example of a female firefighter unable to "start a pump" (Interview 15) in Chapter 3. She recognized that "everyone" on the base would know of the difficulties that the individual woman had and associate those difficulties with all the women on the base. In order to avoid the association with incompetence, women felt that they had to carefully monitor their own workplace performances and the performances of other women as well.

Almost in spite of the fear of being branded incompetent, the presence of female firefighters in the crew system had a destabilizing effect on the construct of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy (Connell 1995, 77) for maintaining a very specific patriarchal framework. With the destabilizing presence of women in the Fire Program, the hegemonic matrix became particularly insecure. Whether they recognized the inherent changeability of space or not, women challenged the existing ideals of masculine space and knowledge on the fire line. In this context, women leveled the challenge that they inherently belonged in forest fire suppression. Most female firefighters, who saw themselves as 'part of the "dysfunctional [crew] family" (Greer and Hendrickson 2001, 24), confounded dominant members of the subculture bent on maintaining the masculine fire line.

Although the women echoed the musings of Greer and Hendrickson (2001) and Thoele (1995), the accounts in both texts appeared somewhat nostalgic. It seemed as though their reflections on crew cohesion were written at the end of the fire season when the 'petty frustrations' of the previous summer became largely inconsequential. On the other hand, most female firefighters suggested that while many of the social issues that punctuated a fire season were readily resolved, others became constant problems that dogged women's workplace integration.

Of these problems, the most pervasive was the conflation of the female body with the private sphere (Duncan 1996; Ainley 1998). The separation of spheres, articulated much more clearly at the level of ideology than it was daily practiced (Domosh and Seager 2001, 5) on the fire line, became a flexible strategy of social

control. In this respect subcultural malcontents saturated the ostensibly public fire line with destabilizing images of the 'private' female body, a body traditionally conflated with overt sexuality and feminine incompetence (Bartky 1990; Tallichet 2000).

To expand on the salient theme of the 'private' female body, Tallichet's (2000) examination of women in the male-dominated field of underground coal mining was highly instructive. The suggestion that the sexualization of work relations led male colleagues to "stigmatize women as inferior workers" (Tallichet 2000, 234) became a starting point for my study. I began to ask questions about the ways the 'private' female body 'troubled' female firefighters attempting to negotiate a 'competent' identity. For the most part, women were tremendously impacted by the destabilizing influence of the 'private' female body and spent considerable time and energy attempting to avoid the association.

In contrast to the work of McDowell (1995) and Cassell (1998), both of whom discuss the female body in disembodied professions, I have focused on the workings of the female body in the embodied profession of forest fire suppression. It is important to note that my findings support the notion that the very presence of the female body in a designated male profession (or space) produces actual "visceral ... horror" (Cassell 1998, 41) in some men. This serves as a glaring reminder that it is specifically the female body – and not embodiment in general – that is highly problematic in male-dominated fields.

As stated, there are two major weaknesses with the existing literature on women in the male-dominated occupation of forest fire suppression. Part of what

has allowed me to recognize the shortfall in other studies is my own experience on the job and the ethnographic insights that experience has enabled me to bring to the study. From this position, the first weakness is that the presence of women on fire crews is often dealt with in a very marginal way. The second is the assertion that the construction of monolithic fire fighting identity can somehow adequately convey the varied experiences of identity negotiation on the fire line. In reality, there are a plurality of gendered identities operating at any given time and in any given space.

I have focused specifically on the ways in which female firefighters daily negotiate gendered identity in male-dominated and male-defined workplace settings. As such, I have presented an examination of how women are impacted by dominant notions of space, gender and knowledge that inform social interactions in the Thunder Bay District Fire Center and on the actual fire line. In future research this study could be expanded to include a closer examination of the impact of hierarchy and crew location. Are there fundamental differences in individual experiences across the Northwest Region? Also, a larger exploration of the ways workplace sexuality is constructed and maintained would be helpful. Future explorations might explore the varied ways in which men respond to the influx of women in the Fire Program. It would also be interesting to discuss the varied ways in which men daily negotiate identity. While my study is partial, it makes a very important contribution to sociological and feminist analysis of women in non-traditional work sites. It further emphasizes the importance of looking at gender and the body in space, while recognizing that occupations and work sites themselves are not homogeneous and static. In short, this thesis represents an account of women's experiences in forest

fire suppression in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Just as Thoele (1995) offers a singular representation of the fire fighting subculture, so too does this study. To facilitate an even greater understanding of the negotiation of gendered identity, further work needs to be completed in the field.

Appendix A

Key Informants' Profiles

Key Informant 1: Betty Boop[1]

Age: 33
Position: Crew Boss

Betty has been in the Crew System for four years. She pursued employment in the Fire Program because it sounded exciting and paid well. Now that she has graduated from University, Betty intends to examine other career paths.

Key Informant 2: Sally Meadows

Age: 20
Position: Crew Member

Sally is a second year Crew Member. Through work in other Ministry fields, Sally discovered that fighting fire was "something she wanted to try." She thought that it would be a real challenge. Enrolled in University, Sally sees Fire as a break from the "Rat Race," an escape from the daily grind of University. She finds it hard to say whether or not she will continue to fight fire when her studies are complete.

Key Informant 3: Gwyneth Paltrow

Age: 21
Position: Crew Member

For a number of months, Gwyneth has been fighting fire. She is one of several rookies on her base. Initially, her interest in the Fire Program was piqued by a friend already in the Program who felt it was an exciting summer job. Another factor, the amount of money to be made in a summer, helped ease the financial burden of being a University student. Because fighting fire is such a lucrative enterprise, Gwyneth will continue in the Crew System until she finishes University.

Key Informant 4: Jodi Smith

Age: 27
Position: Crew Leader

A seasoned veteran in the Fire Program, Jodi has been fighting fire eight years. She is the only female Crew Leader on her base. Like Gwyneth, Jodi had a friend fighting fire who made the job 'sound awesome.' For Jodi, a job in the outdoors

[1] All of the names given are pseudonyms chosen by the women interviewed.

that paid well allowed her to do work she loved in the summer while putting her through University in the fall and winter. Though she readily admits that she loves the job, Jodi is just as quick to state that she will not make a career out of fire; she does not feel that the rigors of the job - physically demanding, long hours, at the beck and call of management and very few days off - are what she wants in the long run.

Key Informant 5: Jessie Parks

Age: 20
Position: Crew Member

Jessie is a rookie Crew Member who is particularly subdued during the interview process. Exposed to the Fire Program by a teacher in College, Jessie found the prospect of fighting fire 'sounded cool' and 'challenging.' Having just graduated from College, Jessie is "not sure if [she'll] make a career out of [fire]." She wants to explore other options.

Key Informant 6: Lisa Monroe

Age: 19
Position: Crew Member

Like Jessie, Lisa is a rookie Crew Member. For her, the prospect of fighting fire for the summer seemed to be a great way to make a fair amount of money. She took the job to enable herself to go to College and travel. Even though it is her first year, Lisa unequivocally states that she does not intend to continue in the fire; in her estimation, fire is an overrated job that very quickly gets repetitive.

Key Informant 7: Fiona Firefighter

Age: 22
Position: Crew Boss

Fiona has been on a Fire Crew for five years. She felt that fighting fire would provide a unique opportunity to perform a job very few people ever got to accomplish. In short, the job 'sounded neat.' Once in the Fire Program, Fiona hastily points out that the people in fire make her want to return year after year. Having finished a University Degree, Fiona recognizes that she will not stay in fire. She cites the strain placed on interpersonal relationships - being away all summer and collecting Unemployment Insurance - as the main reason why an alternate career path is advisable.

Key Informant 8: Siren

Age: 42
Position: Crew Leader (no longer in the Fire Program)

Siren was in the Crew System for seven years. Unlike the other women interviewed, Siren found herself in a position where she was forced, by downsizing, to take a position on a crew. With two different College Diplomas, Siren knew that the Fire Program was not permanent. Like Lisa, she needed more variety and new challenges that fighting fire could not give her.

Key Informant 9: Indecisive Ingrid

Age: 24
Position: Crew Member

Ingrid, like a number of other fire personnel, is a rookie in the Fire Program. In order to finance her studies at University, Ingrid decided that the challenge of fighting fire was best. Fire, then, is a means to an end that will never become her career. She feels that Crew People complain too much and nit-pick about trivial matters.

Key Informant 10: Anne

Age: 26
Position: Crew Member

Anne is a fourth year Crew Member. Her singular motivation for joining the Crew System, which she emphatically stresses, is money. The monetary rewards of fighting fire, which allow Anne to attend University without crushing financial concerns, are a stopgap measure that will help her accomplish other career aspirations.

Key Informant 11: Judy in the Sky with Diamonds

Age: 27
Position: Crew Leader

Judy is another seasoned veteran in the Fire Program. For eight summers she has continually returned to fire suppression while taking the winter to travel and attend University. After working in the Ministry for a few years, Judy was tempted to join a crew in order to continue working outside. She has found that the combination of money, the people she works with, and the challenges associated with fire keep her coming back. Though she freely admits that she is 'addicted to the job,' Judy does not see herself in the Program for much longer. She feels that the job exacts a tremendous toll on the body and expresses utter disdain for the management.

Key Informant 12: Zulu

Age: 22
Position: Crew Member

Zulu, a second year Crew Member, is one of four women on her base. Having a number of friends in fire, Zulu recognized that it was an interesting job in the outdoors. A University student in the off-season, Zulu openly admits that she feels isolated on the fire line; the subculture that surrounds her is a radical departure from her personal life. As such, Zulu does not wish to continue on in the Fire Program.

Key Informant 13: Shanti

Age: 26
Position: Crew Boss

Shanti has been in fighting fire for three years. Initially, she had a desire to be outside and to witness fire behaviour first-hand. After spending some time in the Program, however, Shanti knows that she needs a more fulfilling job. Her studies in College and University have fostered a desire to have a number of varied work experiences.

Key Informant 14: Jones

Age: 27
Position: Crew Member

Jones, a Crew Member for four years, loves fighting fire. Like so many other respondents, she was drawn to fire by a friend already in the Program. After being on a crew for a number of years, Jones states that the money, the people, and the food are the incentives for her to return. Just finishing University, she knows that a part of her is captivated by the romance of fighting fire. In stark contrast, Jones is certain that she will not make a career of fire but cannot provide a concrete reason why she has arrived at that decision.

Key Informant 15: Mia Sputnik

Age: 29
Position: Crew Leader

Mia, a first year Crew Leader, has been in the Program four years. She felt that fighting fire would be a challenge; it would help Mia develop different skills, such as working under pressure, that she wanted to foster. With a University degree and a College Diploma, Mia does not feel it is necessary to put her body through the

physical discomfort of fighting fire. She further admits that she finds it difficult to 'deal with the bullshit' that often characterizes workplace interactions.

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