



Let's unpack an "uncomfortable" question: Why don't women in fire universally encourage more women to join fire?

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MAIN QUESTIONS OR ISSUES THAT YOU ADDRESSED

Why don't women in fire universally encourage more women to join fire?

LOCATION AND ECOSYSTEM INVESTIGATED

The wildland firefighting culture

KEY FINDINGS OF YOUR RESEARCH

Reflecting on eleven seasons as a wildland firefighter, I explore three reasons why women in fire don't universally encourage more women to join wildland fire by revealing personal, and often uncomfortable perspectives. Reason 1: Creating a Persona to "Fit In" for the Sake of Safety First, "fitting in" with the firefighter culture is essential for safety and a positive work environment. In order to "fit in" with the culture, I created a persona that was not my authentic self. Each time I moved to a new fire crew I found myself needing to prove my worth as a firefighter and working to be viewed a trusted member of the crew such that I would be included (and safe). The easiest way to do this was to create a masculine version of myself. This meant that I didn't contribute as many of the positive characteristics that females typically possess, such as providing: alternative perspectives on risk taking, alternative ways to get things done, and emotional safety for my peers. Work by Jennifer Taylor, PhD, at Drexel's Dornsife School of Public Health corroborates my experience. Reason 2: The Culture Limits Potential Benefits of Diversity The well-intended concept of "inclusivity" may be overrun by "exclusivity" of the fire culture. Cultural exclusivity likely defeats many of the positive aspects that are commonly attributed to diversifying a workforce. The current culture in wildland fire attracts people who either naturally "fit in," or are willing to conform to the hyper-masculine culture. Minorities who join fire, (women for example) stifle many of the unique perspectives they may otherwise contribute to the culture in order to fit in. Cultural exclusivity has limited perspectives and stifled diversity within the overall culture. When women act in masculine ways to fit into a culture for psychological and physical safety, they can't provide "diversity"—in effect they contribute to the culture the same way as men do. Reason 3: Pushing "Feminine" Females Away at Work I have pushed other female firefighters (particularly "feminine acting females") away, rather than bringing them into relationship and supporting them. Two theories suggest that conditions in the workplace might contribute

to this behavior. Theory 1: Tokenism-- In the late 1980's, Robin Ely, then a graduate student in the Yale School of Management, found that women in male-dominated firms believed that only so many of them would make it into the senior ranks, and that they were vying with one another for those spots. This dynamic is known as tokenism. Theory 2: Queen Bee--A Dutch psychologist, Naomi Ellemers, was trying to understand the near-total absence of senior women in academia. She found that senior women coped with gender discrimination by emphasizing how different they were from other women. She termed these women "Queen Bees." Ellemers provides conditions in which queen bees emerge: when women are a marginalized group in the workplace, have made big sacrifices for their career, or are already predisposed to show little "gender identification"— camaraderie with other women. According to Ellemers, Queen Bees, "learn the hard way that the way to succeed in the workplace is to make sure that people realize they are not like other women."

HOW DID YOU ANSWER THE MAIN QUESTIONS OR INFORM THE ISSUES?

Using personal experience (observation) as the impetus to do light research as a way to better understand if, and how, my experiences may be explained.

HOW MIGHT/WILL IT INFLUENCE FIRE MANAGEMENT DECISIONS OR PRACTICES?

Hopefully these thoughts/experiences, and the following questions will spur discussion about this important topic across multiple levels of the firefighting program. Concluding Questions for Discussion: Is there a tipping point of women firefighters that can be reached beyond which tokenism and Queen Bee syndromes disappear? Currently our firefighting system seems to support woman deciding to "do fire" on their own with some mentorship. These "self-made" female firefighters meet and accept other woman who made it on their own, but may be skeptical of helping others who didn't "make it on their own" to join.... The Challenge..... How can we find a way to get the ones who "made it" on their own to want to mentor others who may need a bit more help....? Or should we?

WHO IS THE MAIN END-USER OF YOUR RESEARCH?

Fire managers and social scientists

CONGRESS SESSION

Toward an Inclusive Culture, Lisa M. Ganio and Carrie Spradlin