Making Community in the Wilderness: A Case Study of Women's Land's Throughout the United States

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ABSTRACT

Over the summer and fall of 2018, I spent time at nine of the lands and two women's-only music festivals and interviewed 39 women. This dissertation is the result of those interviews and my copious field notes. Chapter one frames the question of community sociologically and examines why the lands often remained homogenous even though their goal was that every woman was welcome to come visit and live. It contrasts the lands to women's-only music festivals, which often included diverse women. Chapter two shows how lands not designed to support old women slowly, and unintentionally, become retirement communities. Families of choice, often consisting of the other women living in the community, help the women who need extra assistance, but within limits set by an unaddressed ageism. The lands are at risk if they fail to attract younger members. Chapter three explores the mutual mistrust between the women's land members and the academic community that I found myself navigating as I completed this project. It details the compromises all feminist communities must make to sustain themselves, and explores how the tension caused by my participation in both the women's lands and academic feminist communities yielded insights into both.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

As part of the American second wave feminist movement, a new group of radical feminists emerged. Instead of trying to work within the system, as the feminists before them had done, they decided to create an alternative system as best they could. This dissertation project focuses on the current iteration of these lands; to do this research I spent time at nine of the lands and two women's-only music festivals and interviewed 39 women during the summer of 2018. Part of creating these alternative systems included buying land in rural spaces across the United States and setting up new communities not beholden to any current way of doing things. A major ethos of their communities was that all women were welcome, regardless of race, economic, class, dis/ability, or other identities. The first chapter examines how, despite the women's best intentions, these spaces were and continue to remain today, homogenous, and contrasts the lands with other feminist organizations and women's-only music festivals that were able to diversify. Chapter two explores how women are aging on the lands and the struggles the women are facing in attracting new members. The last chapter examines the mutual mistrust of me I found within both the feminist and academic communities, how I navigated that mistrust, and ultimately that mistrust offers insights into how both communities make compromises to sustain themselves.

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Next, a huge thank you to the women who opened up their homes and their lands to me so I could complete this project. Your interview insights were invaluable and your conversation and friendship still sustain me. A huge thanks to Dr. Jean Bordeaux, known to the women's land community as Shewolf. Without her guidebook, this dissertation would not have happened.

Last, but certainly not least, thanks to Kelly for reminding me to grow through this process instead of resisting it, for the endless adventures and cups of magic bean juice, and for being a part of my island. Team McCrayers 4 Lyf!

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INTRODUCTION

> "When I was young I thought that stars were made for wishing on, and every hole deep in a tree would hide a leprechaun…"

In high school I spent each summer at Girl Scout camp as a junior counselor. The lyrics above, from a song called "Magic" we used to sing at each closing campfire, summed up my feelings about my time there. Surrounded by other teenage girls – leading activities, teaching younger girls to love the outdoors, looking up to the 20-something-year-old senior counselors, singing songs about Fred the Moose and the Princess Pat – these were some of the only times I felt at home and surrounded by a community of friends whom I knew had my back. Set apart from my mundane life in Southwest Ohio, my K-12th grade Catholic school training, and my awkward dates with boys trying desperately to make the straight label fit, I loved every minute of camp. I wished there was some way for camp to last forever.

> "As I grew up the grown-ups said one day I'd wake to find, that magic was a childish thing, I'd have to leave behind…"

After high school, I enlisted in the Air Force as a way to pay for college. Playing by stricter rules than I had known, following instead of leading, immersing myself in the patriarchy of the military, I learned to fit in, not make waves, and certainly not use my own voice. Even as I came into my identity as a lesbian while still enlisted, I learned to hide that part of me too.

I earned an ROTC scholarship that sent me back to Ohio from North Dakota, where I majored in Journalism and Women's Studies. I regained my voice and sought a

grown-up version of my camp community of girls. Women's Studies provided an intellectual community; but I still missed any space that felt like home.

> "Now that I am grown I've found that much to my surprise, magic did not fade away it took a new disguise…"

As it turns out, many someones had created that space. This introduction first provides an historical overview of the women's lands where I found my home and which I have now studied. It then explains how I found them and how that contact led to this current project. It then provides an overview of the chapters to come.

Those three chapters will assess first how a group of feminists that meant for their communities to include all women wound up homogenous by race, ability, sexuality, and age. It will then show how the aging of these communities is producing a crisis [too dramatic?] in care that may doom the lands to dissolution. Both trends result from a combination of rurality, informal organization, and an ethics of self-sufficiency [this is what I can recall from your main arguments]. I conclude by showing how the mutual suspicions maintained by feminist women on the land and feminist scholars in the university led me to walk a fine line of loyalties and finally to some insights about the compromises required of any feminism. These lands provided me more than a home in my young adulthood; they also gave me a sense of whole-life feminism that has reshaped my understanding of feminist scholarship.

Origins of Women's Lands

I have now been a part of women's-only spaces and communities, both permanent and as part of music festivals and gatherings, for close to 14 years. My

accidental introduction to these lands came in May 2006. That year, after my freshman year of college, I discovered one of my favorite bands would play the Virginia Women's Music Festival, at a place called Camp Out, an all-women's campground and event space in Kents Store, VA. I called the number I found on their website, Bobbie[1] answered, and I told her I was a broke college student but still wanted to come. She asked me if I had any interest in working backstage during the festival, hauling sound equipment and artists' instruments on and off the stage during sets in exchange for a ticket and food for the weekend. I readily agreed. Mustering all the 21-year-old butch lesbian bravado I could (wearing a guy's A-line tank top and cargo shorts and a backward Miami U. baseball cap and blasting my large selection of Indigo Girls' CDs at top volume), I loaded my Ford Ranger with camping equipment borrowed from my mom and drove eight hours from Ohio, where I was attending college, to Virginia. For the next 14 years, through my undergrad, master's and now almost all of a PhD program, I spent time becoming friends with the Camp Out women, raiding the bookshelves of their cabins for crash courses in whole genres of literature I never knew existed. Those ranged from lesbian romances set in space and written by astrophysicists, to entire series of lesbian detective novels, to second wave feminist and lesbian theory books. I also gained an appreciation for the genre of women's music.

At Camp Out, I met Flash and Gloria, a couple who had been to the legendary Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and who were sure I should attend because I would "get it" in the same ways they did. In 2013 I had my first opportunity and loved it so

[1] All names in this dissertation are pseudonyms unless otherwise specified.

much I also volunteered in 2014 for a month as part of the carpentry crew that built the wooden music stages from 2x4s and plywood, pitched in to raise the large event tents, lay woodchips along the walking paths, and nailed upside-down carpet to the grass so that women in wheelchairs could more easily navigate the uneven terrain. I attended, but did not work, the final year in 2015 with my partner whom I had met during the 2014 festival. MichFest was a much larger (640 instead of 96 acres), more politically aware version of Camp Out. It fought against "the continued erasure and disrespect for the specific experience of being born and living as female in a patriarchal, misogynist world."[2]

My first foray into non-music festival women's spaces happened as part of a cross-country road trip from my home in Virginia to my partner's home in Utah during June 2015. We knew Camp Out and MichFest existed, and through my readings I knew that there had been some permanent lands, on which women lived at some point. Maybe these lands still existed? And maybe we could visit?

After some online investigating in the spring of 2015, we stumbled on a website run by a woman named Shewolf[3], who explained that she did not know how to run a

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[2] For the full statement, see "Statement from Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," http://www.facebook.com/lisa.vogel.587/posts/10152163431086330:0.

[3] Shewolf was the land name of Dr. Jean Boudreaux, PhD in Speech Therapy. She spent years in academia working for equal pay for women faculty members before turning her

website but had produced some sort of guidebook to women's lands around the United States. The website promised that, if sent $16 to a P.O. Box in Florida, Shewolf would mail us a copy. Skeptical, we sent in our money and, sure enough, two weeks later received a copy of Shewolf's (2013) *Directory of Wimmin's Lands and Lesbian Communities*. The guidebook, which wound up forming the basis of my dissertation interviewee pool, had lands listed by geographical area of the United States; and usually each land had a contact name and either a phone or email address. Almost none had any sort of website. Using the guidebook, my partner and I mapped out a route, ultimately staying multiple days at lands in the Midwest and Southwest. The nights we were not on women's lands, we stayed with women we found through *Lesbian Connection* magazine's 2015 "Dyke Contact List," a listing of those willing to offer local information and sometimes housing or yard space for travelling lesbians.

At each of these lands and lesbian spaces, I felt instantly welcome. Through the magic of Facebook and private listservs, I fostered ties to the women I met and have visited with them since 2015, both at the lands and at music festivals. Part of the welcome I felt is due to my identity – a white, cisgender lesbian willing and able to do the work to support these festivals and lands through volunteer labor. For folks not like me, it is sometimes harder to feel included despite the general comment from the women in the communities that all women are welcome.

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efforts to preserving information about the women's lands she loved. She died in the spring of 2020, just before I finished work on this dissertation.

Bonnie Morris (1999) and Jamie Anderson (2019) have both written about these exclusions in the music festival and women's music worlds, but not much had been written about unintentional exclusions on the permanent lands, mostly because little has been written about the permanent lands at all. This is where the main thrust of my project, written as a series of three articles for publication, comes in.

The first article prepared for publication, titled "Making (Homogenous) Community in the Wilderness – A Case Study of Organizational Structure in Women's Communities and its Effects on Inclusivity," details how the organization of the nine lands I visited may have contributed to the unintentional exclusions that occur on them. I trace the history of the separatist women's lands movement from the 1970s through today, recount how the lands formed and why women came to live on them. I use feminist intersectional theory and sociology of organizations to explain why the lands remain homogenous even as most of the 39 women I spoke with agree they would like diversity.

My second article prepared for publication, "'They Don't Want to Go Back into the Patriarchy [Just] Because They're Old': Aging in Rural Place," emerged from my reflection on a curious detail that I noticed during my visits to the lands. The lands were created by women in their 20s and 30s, but as many of the women either aged on the lands or left them to return only in retirement, most of the women are now at least 60 and many in their 70s. The youngest women living on the lands are in their late 40s. Rather than serving as hotbeds of political activity, the lands are slowly becoming Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) for older lesbians. Chapter three examines the challenges of growing older in intentional communities, ones meant to include all

women but not designed to accommodate the needs of people with hampered mobility and needs for regular care. The lands themselves are often inhospitable, some with no electricity or cell phone service, most with no paved driveways or flat walking surfaces. All the lands are located in rural areas with small towns 20 minutes away and larger cities with healthcare facilities sometimes a drive of an hour or more. I explore the work that friends do as chosen family and as caregivers, the limits to the care that those on the land provide, and the way the organization of that care will likely shape the future of these lands.

Through this project, I have had to navigate uneasy relationships with both my academic and women's-land communities. My third article addresses the challenges of my research, using Collins' (1986) outsider-within framework to explore the social locations from which I do this work. I explore the compromises that both feminist groups must make to do their respective work. On one side, members of the women's community traded inclusivity, the comforts of less rural spaces, and sometimes economic security for the chance to live their feminism 24/7. On the other side, the academic feminist community has the material comforts, but makes compromises about what and where to research, publish, and teach as they are beholden to the patriarchal state and their peers for their livelihoods.

I use this last article to analyze the compromises that feminists make as they do their work and emphasize the ways neither community is perfect. This is not meant as a type of uncritical relativism, but rather an affirmation of feminism as a political movement that must accommodate itself to relations of inequality to operate. Ultimately, I want this project to build up a middle ground. I want to introduce the women's lands I

care deeply about to audiences that may have never heard about them and correct the record of the lands that they are somehow stuck in the past or in some one-dimensional version of a 1970s anti-fun feminist. I also want to offer suggestions to the lands, so that they can sustain themselves because I believe they are too important to disappear. To my academic community, I suggest dialing down the demand for ideological purity. At the end of everything, each feminist community makes compromises, and without feminists being able to recognize the ones we do make, we continue to insinuate and uphold the idea that only certain people belong as scholars, marginalizing those voices we claim we want to champion.

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CHAPTER 1 Project Methodology

I took a grounded theory approach to this project. (Urquhart 2013).[4] Because these lands have been under-researched, this project was exploratory and meant to help me get a sense of what I need to know when I do further research on these lands. Much of what has been published about these lands is in the form of personal memoirs (Kreiger 1983; Shugar 1995); as history projects each focused on one region of the United States (Burmeister 2013); or from an eco-feminist perspective (Anahita 2009; Herring 2010). Only Lewis (2018) attempted to capture a full picture of the lands, but spent her time at just four of them, one during a women's festival interviewing attendees rather than during everyday life on the lands, which draws a different set of women. Therefore, I designed

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[4] I followed the lead of Glaser and Strauss (1967, in Urquhart 2013:15) and attempted to "[discover] the theory from the data" I collected. Having done basic research into the lands before I visited and interviewed the women, I was not a "blank slate," as a common misunderstanding of grounded theory suggests that it requires (see Urquhart 2013:28 for discussion). I did however first collect my data without trying to prove or disprove any specific theories about the women I interviewed. Ultimately, through the analysis process, I began noticing patterns in my data that linked to existing theories. An example of this is Chapter 3 of my dissertation. When I first interviewed the women, I was not anticipating an entire chapter on aging, but as I analyzed my data, I began to connect the women's interviews with theories of aging in place, families of choice, and caretaking of older women which lead to enough material for a separate chapter.

my open-ended interview questions to capture a wide amount of information from a cross-section of women living on lands in the United States, rather than trying to validate or disprove other studies that had been done. Asking so many broad questions also allowed me to capture themes as they emerged, rather than comparing my data to previously known information. Though I entered the field informed by feminist scholarship on exclusions and inequalities among women, I remained ready to capture whatever themes eventually emerged in responses to my questions. That said, the very general questions I had upon entering the field were the following:

Research Question 1: Did an intentional exclusion lead to other unintentional exclusions?

Within that question, a few smaller questions:

Research Question 2: What types of women move onto women's separatist lands, in terms of sex, cis- or transgender status, race, age, class, sexuality, and ability?

Research Question 3: Why do women move onto the lands, and how does that vary by the same relations of inequality?

Research Question 4: How did these lands become havens for old women, when they were initially founded by women in their 20s and 30s?

Research Question 5: What effect does their various exclusions seem to have on the likely future of these spaces?

QUALITATIVE METHODS

For this project, I conducted 39 interviews with women who are or have been involved with women's lands. I defined *involvement* as residence on women's land or service on a decision-making board for one. Some respondents had previously lived on a land and moved off; others supported lands that did not have permanent space available for them. An example of this is Birchland in the northeast, where the land had only one house; and the house is suitable for a single woman caretaker or her and her female partner. The land is mostly a daily-use facility and is overseen by a board of directors. Only one of the four I interviewed at Birchland did, or ever had, lived on the land; but all had been involved for many years. Each woman signed a consent form indicating her willingness participate and to be recorded, as required by Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (Protocol 18-303, approved 5/1/18). To increase anonymity, each woman chose a pseudonym or left it to me to assign one post hoc. I asked for a legal name at the beginning of each interview, but then never spoke it again. All in-person interviews were recorded using a hand-held audio recorder. I paid a service to transcribe the audio recordings. I have stored all data in accordance with IRB requirements (see appendix).

Sample

Most of my sample was comprised of women between the ages of 45 and 85, although I tried to include a variety of ages within and below that range. One woman was 34. In my interviews, I have identified a first generation of women (those who started lands in the 1970s and early 1980s); a second generation (who moved onto the land from the late 1980s-90s); and a third generation (who have moved to the lands in the last 15 years). All of the women I interviewed are cisgender; a trans woman from a land in the

Northeast initially agreed to be interviewed through email but then never returned my questionnaire. I have personal ties to many of the women who made up my initial sample and used a snowball sampling method to find others through them.

I served the aims of the study by limiting the sample in the following ways:

1) Must be women - Given that the lands are open only to women as permanent residents and the project is focused on the ways that women relate to the lands, the participants must be women – either cisgender or transgender. Historically, the lands have included only cisgender women; and, although one transgender woman (who currently serves on the board of a land in the Northeast) was invited to participate, all those who ultimately agreed interview were cisgender women.

2) Length of Time at Women's Lands – The women must have lived on or been involved with a specific land as part of its governing board for 3 months of 1 year or more either currently or previously; this ensures that the women I interview have personal investment in the women's land culture, rather than merely be the "weekend converts" that Browne (2010) describes. Much of the research done on women's lands and land communities, here I mean land bought by women for the express establishment of and use by groups of women and girls, was done at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, a now-closed, annual, women-only, music and arts festival occurring for a week each August. This has been a popular research site because researchers could gain access to interviewees for the price of a ticket. Many of the women who attended the festival were not involved in women's land communities outside of that timeframe, and as such may not have fully internalized women's land culture. The weekend converts Browne (2010) speaks of used this festival week as a way to recharge their body batteries for heading back into "Area

51," festival speak for the patriarchy they encountered the other 51 weeks of the year. For this project I was interested in women who fully embraced women's land community culture by choosing to live on or be heavily involved with one or more of the lands.

Participant Recruitment

To collect an initial sample of 25 "women's landers," I reached out to my personal connections on lands in Ohio, Oregon, and New Mexico, as well those involved in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. From there, I recruited a snowball sample of friends of the initial women interviewed. I also sent an IRB-approved message to the 23 lands listed with contact information in the 6th edition of *Shewolf's Guide to Womyn's Lands and Lesbian Spaces* (2013), with whom I did not yet have any connection. During 2018, I interviewed a total of 39 women, to reach a point of theoretical saturation, which Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) define as at least 12 interviews using the same interview schedule, after which the answers to each question often start to sound similar. In my data collection experience for this project, many answers were similar after I had visited the first three lands and a music festival and interviewed eight women. Interviews were conducted from May through November 2018, on nine lands in Alabama, Arkansas, Ohio, Oregon, New Mexico (2), Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. I also conducted some interviews at a national women's music festival and through email. The two interviews conducted by email were done for ease of response, but it is possible that the responses may have been more guarded and less polished had I conducted the interviews in person. All of the names of the lands in this project, with the exception of Camp Out in the introduction and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival mentioned throughout, are pseudonyms.

In an effort to guard against any systematic bias by use of my personal connections, I visited all but one land for a minimum of two days, most between three and five, and met and/or interviewed *all* the women at each land. I used my personal connections as entrée onto the lands, and then made a point to get to know new acquaintances. Even still, upon entering the lands I was often not fully trusted as either a community member, because I was a visitor to their particular land, or a researcher, because they were unsure of what I would do with the information they provided me (I address both of these concerns in Chapter Four of this dissertation). To increase trust among the participants both at the lands and after leaving the field during my data analysis and write-up, I engaged in a few different practices:

1. I was clear about my motives for the research from the outset. Women on the lands expect each other to be direct in conversation, to avoid comforting euphemisms. As an example, when asking questions about aging on the lands I would ask about "getting older" and be tactful about asking their ages, following the gendered convention that it is rude to ask a woman her age. Respondents often met hedging questions with confusion. One asked me to clarify: "do you want to know what it's like to get old here? And what my age is? … Well, next time just ask that. Age is reality, not something to be ashamed of." Some of the women took pride in growing old, to the point of hosting "croning ceremonies" (Payerle 2016). I learned to take it in stride when women asked pointed questions of me (often in person, even if we had first made contact via email or over the phone) before they agreed to an interview: *why* I was interested in their community and in them personally, *what* I was planning to do with the information they gave me,

and *who* was going to see their raw interview information? Most women wanted assurances that my first allegiance was to them and the lands, with my academic research a far second. I quickly learned that hesitation on my part to state my professional goals looked like deception and made it less likely that they would agree to a formal interview.

2. I extended formal interviews with informal chatting before, during, and afterward. I was genuinely interested in the women and their communities, so this was never a problem; but the interviews and interactions did take longer than they may have if I had conducted them in the manner of a strictly professional, unimpassioned observer. For each women's land, I knew much of the time would be spent in informal relationship-making– volunteering to help with small projects, participating in events like a summer solstice gathering or four-day music festival, or sharing meals and conversation. At three of the lands, I rescheduled my flight home the night before I was originally leaving because the women asked me to stay longer on their land. Those conversations were never tape recorded – it was what I considered to be fun or "off duty" time and recorded as moments in my field notes– but looking back it had the effect of making the official interview process go smoother.
3. Because some of what I learned was intimate, personal, and sometimes vulnerable, this decision to not record certain conversations also served as a type of refusal by me to serve my women's community up to my academic community in an exploitive way (Tuck and Yang 2013:223). By the time I sat with a woman to do an interview, it almost seemed that she viewed giving information to me to

use for my project as secondary to my having it for use as someone interested in the community for personal reasons. The requirement to sign the IRB was mostly met with a shrug, and I assigned pseudonyms to the women after the interview because most either insisted I use their full names or thought it was weird and unnecessary that they had to be anonymous and asked me to do the work of creating names for them. Even so, I was careful to protect their anonymity in an attempt to protect the whole community.

4. After leaving the field, I made choices during my data analysis and dissertation write-up phases to protect some of what I learned from the women, both formally and informally, in an effort to hold their trust. I know that I am embedded in a settler colonial history of research that has exploited underserved communities (Tuck and Yang 2013). Because of this, I excluded from my write-ups personal stories I had learned from women that might reveal embarrassing details in a refusal to turn stories of pain or embarrassment into "objective" fodder for academics (Tuck and Yang 2014:814). By leaving out conversations or situations that are immediately striking but difficult to contextualize without very long backstories, I tried to protect whole communities beyond the ways the IRB consent process protects those who sign the forms (Tuck and Yang 2013:223).
5. I did not return for follow-up interviews or reach out for additional information, even if it would have served me as a researcher. During my time on the lands, it became clear that the women were providing information to help a friend do a school project, not a researcher who felt entitled to stories from their lives, and I had one shot at asking what I wanted to know. I used the skills from my time as a

journalist to recognize how much good will I was being given, and I made sure not to overstep that allowance. This means I may have missed out on some nuance or not have elicited all the answers that might have been helpful to me; but earning and keeping the women's trust remained the priority. When I return to the lands with this completed project, I hope that it will once again be fully as a friend and community member.

Interview Content

I conducted interviews in a semi-structured format, where I asked a list of pre-written, open-ended questions, which the women answered in as much or as little detail as they desired. I also asked follow-up questions, based upon their initial responses, to solicit more in-depth information. The interviews with the women's landers focused on 1) how they came to participate in women's lands; 2) what ideals led them to the lands and what made them stay or leave; 3) what types of diversity they see on their lands; 4) how they feel they about the future of their land and the women's land movement in general; and 5) their thoughts on aging on women's land – some challenges they face and how it seems different than aging in a mixed community space. The interview schedule is listed in Appendix A.

Technology and Transcription

I recorded each interview using a hand-held digital tape recorder. To increase anonymity a pseudonym was assigned to each woman at the beginning of the interview, and her legal name was not used for the remainder of the interview. Upon completion of each interview, I sent the recording to Rev, a professional transcription service, and paid

them to transcribe each interview. I used the computer program Dedoose to code my interviews, the codebook is attached as Appendix B.

In Dedoose, I employed the qualitative analytic coding strategy described in Urquhart (2017:45-50). I conducted the first round of coding of my interview data and field notes in an "open coding" fashion, noting any and all descriptive themes I saw in the data. After the initial coding, I went through my data again and began lumping myriad codes into more selective codes as I started to notice relationships between the codes. Analysis continued so long as new patterns kept emerging. The final analysis occurred as I chose specific interview quotations to include in each article.

As a coding example, I initially had 15 codes that included some explanation of why the women ended up on the women's lands – everything from "a sense of peace" (4 interview or field note excerpts) to "leaving male-dominated societies" (16 excerpts) to "a return to a physical life" (10 excerpts). After another round of coding, I lumped these 15 codes into the general category of "Why Women Come to the Lands," and ultimately the three mid-level categories I detail in the first article of "freedom," "refuge," and "finding a community of like-minded women." From those three codes, I chose the representative quotes from my respondents that I use in the article.

Similarly, I initially had 12 codes around the idea of aging on the lands – including codes like "caretaking of each other" (11 excerpts) "aging in place" (25 excerpts) (with a subcode of "moving away from the lands" (4 excerpts)), "physical limitations" (22 excerpts) and "aging mindset" (15 excerpts) (with subcode "age discrimination" (4 excerpts). After a second round of coding, I created the larger category of "Aging" and eventually the categories I use in the aging chapter, "aging in place,"

“health,” and “caretaking of each other” (including “end-of-life care”). From these codes, I chose the representative quotes I use in the chapter.

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CHAPTER 2 Making (Homogenous) Community in the Wilderness – A Case Study of Organizational Structure in Women's Communities and its Effects on Inclusivity

ABSTRACT

Women's communities that aim to include all women often fail to do so. Without a formal organizational push to avoid or rectify exclusions, groups tend to remain homogenous. Analysis of interviews with 39 women involved with nine rural, women's-only communities in the United States shows how they explain their current homogeneity in terms of race and ability, even though the lands were intended to exclude only people assigned male at birth. Contrasted with women's music festivals that use a more formal organizational structure, this analysis examines what happens when well-intentioned women's groups rely on an ad-hoc organizational structure to govern their lands and adds to the discussion of feminist organizations.

Keywords: qualitative methods, sex and gender, social movements

Introduction

Feminists founded women's lands to challenge patriarchal exploitation. They would live in open defiance of compulsory heterosexuality and thereby create a more perfect society. However, while doing all of that, women's lands have also remained homogenous in terms of race, ability, and class. This research takes an intersectional approach to the question of how they wound up that way. Collins (2004) suggests that focus on a single axis of oppression may lead a community to exclude even if they mean not to.

Books about cultural feminist organizations tend to be personal memoirs rather than scholarly studies (eg. Krieger 1983; Shugar 1995). What has not been given much serious academic study are the permanent women's lands that many radical feminists created during the rise of cultural feminism. Burmeister's (2013) master's thesis in history focused specifically on the lesbian land communities of Southern Oregon, but not the women's land movement as a whole. Some authors have studied women's spaces as an offshoot of Ecofeminism (see Anahita 2009; Herring 2010); and Lewis (2018) studies the lands through a gendered lens; but none have used a theory of intersectionality to look at the ways in which women's separatist lands became so homogenous, whether that resulted from the founding intentions or as unintended outcomes of organizational structure.

To address this question, I draw upon years of archival work that reveal the organizational histories of these lands, fieldwork that provides a snapshot of the current population and organizational routines of these lands, and upon interviews with residents and supporters who reflect upon the lack of diversity that they see around them.

Review of the Literature

Radical and cultural feminism as bases of exclusion

During the 1970s and 80s, some feminists tired of trying to change the broken system of patriarchy. They bought cheap, rural land and founded separatist communities on them. Espousing a utopian vision of sisterhood predicated on women's oppression based only on dimorphic sex, these lands were an outgrowth of radical feminism in the early 1970s. These moments within the second-wave feminist movement fostered the development of women's lands and prefigured the homogeneity that we find there today.

The second wave women's movement grew from several confluences, including discontent with women's narrow professional opportunities and readiness for collective action developed in anti-war and civil-rights activism (Freeman 1973:797-802). Instead of reforming institutions to include women in established jobs and offices as liberal feminists did, radical feminists formed such goals as the "complete elimination of the sex role system" (Koedt, Levine, and Rapone 1973:vii), and did this in part by excluding men from much of their activism.

The treatment of women as a homogenous group had roots in the organizing of radical feminists through consciousness-raising (C-R). The goal of the C-R sessions was to recognize that "women's experience was somehow universal, and that gender, not race or class, was the primary and defining contradiction" (Echols 1989:90). Members sought to recognize the similarity of oppressions between women regardless of race, class, sexuality, or other differences, and work to form a collective political movement to combat those oppressions (Barbara Susan 1969). Their critique of taken-for-granted exclusions of women failed to prevent radical feminists maintaining exclusions of their own.

hooks (2000) argued that, at least initially, white women in second wave feminist movement who sought to reform society rather than escape it were aware of class only in that these upper-middle class women wanted to gain equality with the men in their class. Often, when confronted with class divisions among activists, women with privilege would assert that they were in charg When lesbians, working-class, and other women challenged the universal sisterhood model, "the [radical feminist women's] movement was temporarily paralyzed, thus proving to some that some differences were inevitably

crippling" (Echols (1989:11). Echols argues that efforts to move past the challenge that threatened to end what they saw as a unified feminist movement, the radical feminists created feminist infrastructure –women-run nonprofits, feminist health centers, rape crisis centers, credit unions, bookstores, presses, publishing companies, as well as the permanent separatist lands that are the focus of this study. Echols (1989:272) describes this *cultural* feminism, and the organizations that grew within it, as a depoliticized version of radical feminism, meant for sustained living rather than for activist confrontations with institutions that need to change. This cultural feminism was centered on an essentialist view of men and women, of dichotomous sex, and included the strategy of dropping out of the mainstream culture to form a separate women's culture that would "offer a refuge from male supremacy…and, seemingly, a conduit out of subordination" (Echols 1989:269).

Many radical second-wave feminist groups distinguished between people designated female and male at birth and treated humankind as composed of those two stable, polarized groups. They followed a radical feminist construction of this dichotomy as a matter of biological "sex," distinguished from "gender," the social forces that teach the bifurcated species how to dress, speak, and otherwise behave as women or men (Oakley 2016:125-135). This radical feminist construction of women, defined in terms of *sex* as assigned at birth, pushed to gather women around that unifying identity. Biological women could then work to resist to *gender* oppression, which they viewed as sex stereotypes designed to keep subordinate to biological men. Such radical feminism thus worked to loosen *gender* ideals, even to the point of making gender irrelevant, while still taking binary (female/male) biological *sex* as natural and unchallengeable. Founded on

this constitutive exclusion of sex from the terrain of social construction (Butler 1993: 28, 189), radical feminism challenged cultural dictates of "gender" while naturalizing "sex" as assigned at birth, as a way to solidify "women" as a universal rallying point around which feminism could form.

This sex exclusion was deliberate, though its long-term consequences may not have been. Feminist scholars have long theorized exclusions that result from intersections of gender with other inequalities, as they operate in communities of feminists and other women (Collins, 2004:11). Gender inequality had different effects on women who were not white and middle class, for instance, such as the exclusions largely ignored by many second wave feminists (Echols 1989:90). Writing in their Black Feminist Statement, the Combahee River Collective (1977) noted the need for a new group in 1973 – the National Black Feminist Organization – as a reaction to "racism and elitism" within the second wave feminist movement. While white women in the feminist movement were looking to bond as women around the common oppression of sexism, women of color at times felt alienated from the movement by its lack of concern with racism (Combahee 1977). Likewise, Black separatist Anna Lee (1988:84) embraced separatism but struggled "to remember who my real enemy is," because to be a separatist "puts me in conflict with each of the groups from which I could reasonably expect support, nurturance, and sustenance." Although committed to seeing sexism as the root problem, Lee was still aware of racism and classism within feminism:

> I challenge separatists particularly white ones to actively participate in the anti-racist struggle in our community and to some extent in the larger society. We

must not lose our own goals in this process nor can white separatists forego sisters' [Black women] input in this struggle (pp. 89-90).

In her critique of the exclusions facilitated by white feminist thought, Collins (2004) describes the theory of a single axis of oppression, such as that based on sex and being born female, as a "but for" model. "But for" gender," or "but for" class, a person would be as equally privileged as someone who did not share that characteristic. Often in feminism, and specifically in separatist feminism, this "but for" model was applied to sex (Echols 1989:90), which creates what Gloria Anzaldúa (2009:131) calls a "blanked-out racism," one in which white women choose not to "see" race as a divider in favor of looking for a universal sisterhood. hooks (1986:133) notes that even as white women are asking women of color to join "the" feminist movement, one built on an assumed common oppression against men, the same white women are unaware they have taken ownership of the movement and that they "are the 'hosts' inviting us as 'guests'." Sisterhood could be achieved across lines of racial difference, but white women had to do the work of acknowledging *and* unlearning their own racism (p.133).

This coalescence around sex and being born female can exclude on bases beyond race. Focusing only on sex can foster ableism, which designs spaces only for particular kinds of movement (Campbell 2009:4; Jaeger and Bowman 2005:63). Class exclusions have also been built into women's organizations. hooks (2000) argued that, at least initially, white women in second wave feminist movement looking to reform society rather than escape it were aware of class only in that these upper-middle class women wanted to gain equality with the men in their same economic class. Often, when confronted with class divisions among activists, women with class and/or race privilege

would assert that they were in charge, and that the feminist agenda would run according to their needs (p. 104).

Feminist Organizations as bases of inclusion

Feminist scholars of organizations have suggested that internal governance can affect membership by forcing diversity where homogeneity might be the path of least resistance for many groups. Women's service providers (e.g., rape-crisis centers, childcare co-ops, the Chicago Liberation School) have struggled with the challenges of inclusion as they have distanced themselves from hierarchical organizations that they associated with patriarchal oppression. Initially, both urban organizations and early music festivals tended to be non-hierarchical, eschewing what many women saw as a "male" leadership model (Riger 1994:276). Collective governance ruled, the idea being that all women should have equal participation in how the organization was run (Staggenborg 1989:81). At first, this participatory democracy model left women excited about new organizations that aligned with their values. Many were willing to work long hours for low (and sometimes no) pay, masking feelings of discord over unequal leadership roles in an organization's early days (Riger 1994:278-80). Eventually, as each organization began to plan its future, it was faced with the decision of whether or not to formalize its operations.

Riger (1994:283) notes that formalizing leadership can bring such advantages as external legitimacy, which in turn can bring in donations and grants to sustain an organization long-term. Often, legitimacy and increased donations lead to organizational growth and even diversity. Women's communities, urban feminist organizations, and women's music festivals were founded with good intentions toward such diversity by

many white women who would rally around the idea of "sisterhood," allowing sex to supersede race in importance even if the women of color, working-class women, or women with different abilities may not have agreed with that order of priority (Sealander and Smith 1986:335-36).

In her study of two rape crisis centers which both struggled around issues of racial diversity, Scott (2005:249) found that, when the organizations formalized and then deliberately installed women of color into positions of power, they relieved each woman of being the "token minority," allowed more recruitment of volunteers of color, and enabled the organization's leadership to more accurately represent the types of women they served.

Likewise, Morris (1999: 147-176) found that the rural women's music festivals were able to find compromises because the festivals had formal leaders to whom a group in conflict could turn for answers. When heterosexual women at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival felt outnumbered and out of place one year, a support group for the straight women emerged the next year (pp. 150-151). When women of color came to the festivals only to realize they were still a minority but now "in a sea of now-topless white liberals" who sometimes said and did racist things, festivals organized "Unlearning Racism" workshops, spaces were created for women of color only, often with a "front porch" for white women staffed by white women to sit and have conversations about race and racism, and specific "anti-oppression staff" were sometimes hired (Morris 1999:159-161).

In her study of women's music of the 1970s and 80s, Anderson (2019:122) notes that festivals also worked to expand entry to women with different physical accessibility

needs. In one instance, the East Coast Lesbian Festival's 1989 event attracted protestors because the festival grounds were not accessible to women using wheelchairs or motorized carts. The festival switched locations in the following years as a result. Mary Bryne, longstanding producer of the National Women's Music Festival, recalled that Indiana University (home to the festival for years) installed curb cuts for wheelchairs as a result of the festival's advocacy which came largely from the wishes of the festival attendees (Anderson 2019:123). In all of these examples, organizations addressed diversity by using their formal structures, including top-down leadership hierarchies that could create the required tools: authority to head up labor-intensive diversity initiatives and implement suggestions from constituents; budgets to pay for improvements to access or to hire more staff; a push from outside funding agencies to account for their levels of diversity; and connections to more diverse organizations, from which they could learn. Through formalization, in answer to pressure from donors, government funding agencies, or attendees and volunteer staff, an organization may come to detail the ways in which it works to create or increase its diversity. In this way, urban feminist organizations and rural women's music festivals may have become more inclusive over time (Riger 1994:283; Scott 2005:249).

Women's Lands as homogeneous

Contrary to the more formal urban organizations and women's music festivals, the early women's communities generally remained homogenous. Some of this appears to have stemmed from early conflict, as noted in published studies. Cheney's (1985) ethnographic memoir of the lands recounts fractures along lines of race, ability, and class that were apparent from the earliest days. Maria, a Native American woman, founded the

women of color land she called Arco Iris in the 1970s outside of Fayetteville, Ark., after an unwelcoming experience with Sassafras, a neighboring women's land.. At ARF, close to Santa Fe, NM, the issue of economic class came to a head in 1978 when a group of 15-20 travelling women showed up to live at the land and assumed that prior residents of ARF must be rich because they owned the land outright, while the landowners saw themselves more as working class.

Disabled women came, and then left, Dragonwagon Outpost because it was too rocky, hilly, and undeveloped for them to live safely. Disabled lesbian activist Connie Panzarino (in Cheney 1985:41-42) notes that the lands could have been designed to accommodate all bodies. Before her death, Panzarino established a women's community called Beechtree in New York, designed as a space in the country for disabled women to live autonomously. If the unstated norm is able-bodied people, then feminist organizations are in danger of either marginally including women with disabilities, including them only when they speak up to suggest a redesign, or leaving them out altogether.

I now turn to an examination of the state of these lands today, and the ways Collin's (2004) theory of single-identity exclusions may combine with feminist organizational sociology to explain what has occurred there. They were organized around a single identity (woman-born-woman),[5] without any pressure to diversify as more formal

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[5] The women founding these lands viewed cisgender woman as a single identity, that of cisgender woman vis-à-vis cisgender men as defined by biology. Now, as the

feminist organizations had. Again, my questions are, what did these women intend, how did they organize themselves to achieve that, and how do they account for what has occurred instead?

Methods

For this study, I conducted 39 semi-structured interviews with women who are or have been involved with women's lands in the United States. I defined involvement as having resided on women's land for at least three months or served on the decision-making board for one. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes; all but two face-to-face interviews were recorded with a hand-held recorder, while the other two were recorded via handwritten notes. One interview was conducted at a women's music festival. Three interviews were conducted over email; I sent a list of questions and the women sent in their responses. I followed up as necessary for clarification. All names of people and lands are pseudonyms to protect the women's anonymity. Most of my sample was comprised of women between the ages of 45 and 85, although I tried to include a variety of ages within that range. One woman was 34. In my interviews, I identified a first generation of women (those who started lands in the 1970s and 80s); a second generation (who moved onto the land in the 1980s-90s); and a third generation (who have moved to the lands in the past 15 years). All of my interviewees were cisgender women;

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understanding sex and gender has shifted in the academic scholarship, inclusion of cisgender women only could be understood as a double exclusion, cisgender woman vis-à-vis cisgender men as defined by biology *and* cisgender identity vis-à-vis transgender identity.

a trans woman from a land in the northeast initially agreed to be interviewed through email but then never returned my questionnaire.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format and each participant sat for one interview. Each of the lands that I visited permitted participant observation; and I stayed from one to four days at each. Interview questions with the women's landers focused on 1) how they came to participate in women's land; 2) what ideals led them to the land and what made them stay or leave; 3) what types of diversity they see on their lands; and 4) their thoughts on aging on women's land – some challenges they face and how aging in women's-only space seems different than it might in a mixed community space. Topics one through three are the focus of this article; response to queries about topic four turned out to be more robust than I expected and is addressed in a separate article.

Between 2014 and 2019, I attended five different women's music festivals a total of 11 different times and took extensive fieldnotes at each festival. The organization of these festivals ended up unexpectedly serving as a comparison to the organization of the women's lands I visited. I typed up my field notes and they became part of my data analysis, along with the interviews I conducted.

Following interview transcription using a paid transcription service, I coded and analyzed the written transcripts and typed field notes using the qualitative data analysis software DEDOOSE and employed the qualitative analytic coding strategy described in Levy (2014:584-589). I conducted the first round of coding of my interview data and field notes in an "open coding" fashion, noting any and all descriptive themes I saw in the data. After the initial coding, I went through my data again and began lumping the themes into more focused categories as I started to notice patterns within the themes.

Analysis continued so long as new patterns kept emerging. The final analysis occurred as I organized my interview excerpts into the broad themes contained in this article.

As an example, I initially had 22 codes that included some explanation of why the women ended up on the women's lands – everything from "a sense of peace" (4 interview or field note excerpts) to "leaving male dominated societies" (16 excerpts) to "a return to a physical life" (10 excerpts). After another round of coding, I lumped these 22 codes into the general category of "Why Women Come to the Lands," and ultimately the three slightly more specific themes within that category I detail in this article of "freedom," refuge," and "finding a community of like-minded women." From the themes, I chose the representative quotes from my respondents that I use in this article.

I had visited women's lands prior to beginning my research and used those connections to begin sampling on lands in three states as well as the now-defunct Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. From there, I recruited a snowball sample of friends of the initial women interviewed. I also sent email to the 23 lands listed with contact information in the 6th edition of *Shewolf's Guide to Womyn's Lands and Lesbian Spaces* (2016) with whom I did not yet have any connection.

Interviews were conducted from May through November 2018, on nine lands in eight states in all geographic sections of the continental U.S. (I am aware of no women's lands in Hawaii or Alaska). The smallest land community I visited had two permanent residents, one of whom agreed to participate in my study. The largest land community I visited had 21 permanent residents, eight of whom agreed to participate.

Terrain varied with the location, but all were located in rural settings with the closest small town some five miles away and the closest large city 45 minutes or more

away; none of the lands were accessible by public transportation. Most of the lands' geography reflected the surrounding landscapes – Red Cedarland in the northwest was full of overgrown pine trees and featured a grass and natural mulch forest floor on the path through the woods leading to a creek; Aspenland in the southwest was dry, rocky, and hilly with no potable water. Each of the lands, regardless of size, had one space designated as a central community gathering space.

Five of the nine lands filled their community gathering spaces with libraries of books written by lesbians or other women, films featuring women, and a shelf or two full of women's music tapes and records, mostly all from the 1970s-late 90s. Sometimes there was a collection of drums, rattles, or tambourines left over from earlier gatherings. Only one land had Wi-fi available for visitors, although at four of the nine lands some women had internet in their private homes. Cell phone service was unreliable on all the lands; city water, sewer, and electricity were available at four of the lands. There were also varying degrees of rusticity within each land: some women opted for flush toilets and wi-fi if those were available and some lived as close to nature as possible, using battery or solar operated lamps and propane gas for their cooking fuel.

Sleeping accommodations varied I stayed in guest bedrooms with hotel amenities in the community houses of two lands, guest cabins on two lands (one with electric and well water, one without but with a propane two-burner stove and collected rainwater available for cooking and bathing), and camped the rest of the time. The price per night varied, anywhere from $3 at Aspenland with no amenities to $30 at Magnolialand for a room in the community house with running water, shower, and full kitchen. I was always expected to bring my own food and often my own bedding, although typically I would

share a meal with at least one woman during my visit. Often, I volunteered to help with some sort of land project during my visit – everything from clearing a fire pit and setting up chairs for a summer Solstice ceremony to participating in a twice-yearly land workday where we repainted the siding on the community house, split logs, and tidied the garden. These acts were not meant or understood as payment for interviews, but rather as ways to get to know the community and make myself useful.

Sample

Based on scholarly literature and the women I knew from prior visits, I expected that most women in my sample would be white, economically advantaged, able-bodied, and lesbian; almost all the women would be cisgender. This mostly turned out to be the case. All of the women in my sample were white; three of them gave descriptors of "WASP" (white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant); two disclosed that they were Jewish; and one refused to answer my question about race and ethnicity although she appeared white to me.

None of my participants at the time of the interviews had any obvious difficulty walking, although some commented on the fact that their age slowed them down and that they preferred to drive, rather than walk, to distant buildings on their lands.

Thirty-seven of the women identified themselves as lesbians, with one woman qualifying herself as a "butch lesbian," and one as a "femme lesbian." Two of the women identified themselves as bi-sexual; one of those women noted she kept that identity quiet because the land she lived on was designated specifically as "lesbian land."

The economic situation of the women varied, and often the women who first started the lands were in a more precarious position than the women who came later to

live. When first starting out in the 1970s and 80s, the women in my study told me they had to pool their money with friends or negotiate with private landowners to buy inexpensive land, which was often rural and sometimes unimproved; later waves of women could often move onto an already-established land. Most of the women I met were retired and living on some type of Social Security. The jobs the women held throughout their lives were various and included an OBGYN, community college professor, photojournalist, national park worker, a few masseuses and reiki instructors, some artists, and one Wiccan priestess, among others. Only one indicated she had worked mostly under the table and therefore did not qualify for Social Security, but now supported herself on savings and with help from other women. Some of the women had held jobs (both paid and unpaid) that allowed them to acquire the skills necessary for survival on the lands, including carpentry and home maintenance, but often women came to the lands and learned the skills through trial and error.

Results

Making Community in the Wilderness

Women on the lands account for their unintentional exclusivity with a language of personal friendship networks and need for self-sufficiency. I situate these accounts in the context of what drew them to the lands: freedom, refuge, and like-minded women. All respondents described their lands and occupants in essentialist terms, ascribing their

feelings and their ability to draw energy from their communities as inherent to them as biological women juxtaposed to biological men.[6]

Frankie, whom I met at a women's music festival during the summer of 2018, summed up the value of women's-only space for her in the first theme of freedom. For Frankie and others, the space allowed a freedom *to* create a new world that better worked for them, not a freedom *from*, as in running away from oppression: "I don't give a shit about freedom from. Freedom. Freedom, not in reaction to, not freedom from. Freedom. Just freedom…Men didn't matter. It's not about them. Nothing about them."

Ten other women I interviewed spoke of freedom to create new lives, to act as they were not allowed to do because of their sex while living mainstream. Lisa, at Walnutland, noted that the land gave "equal opportunity to learn and to be skilled, and to do everything. And so there are no limits on me based on my sex." Among documents of the lands, I found a two-page drawing in purple pen, of a chainsaw and detailed instructions for its operation, including starting, using and servicing it. This appeared in a community journal at Balsamland in the Midwest, in which women would write when they visited. From the top of the page: "folks…this is a chainsaw…yes it really is…" On

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[6] Only Birchland was intentionally open to transwomen; the others had either an official or unofficial policy that the land was for cisgender women only, although some residents on a few of the lands were open to having a conversation about trans inclusion. This distinction matters because, unless a woman told me that she was including transgender women in her definition of womanhood, it was unstated and assumed by the woman I was interviewing that the term "woman" meant cisgender woman.

the bottom of the page, a reminder: “one more thing: wear gloves, wear glasses, wear boots.” Another woman wrote just underneath and probably from experience: “wear long sleeves and pants.”

Women who came to the lands were looking for, and created for themselves, what they saw as an insular place of safety and refuge from men. In this second trend in the interviews, women turned their focus inward, toward loosely organizing the communities of which they were a part while they remained unconcerned with promoting themselves to the public at all, much less as havens for diversity. There was an unspoken belief throughout my interviews that men are inherently unsafe because they seek to harm women. Amy lived on Birchland women’s land in the northeast. She explained that on open women’s land, women could show up unannounced and stay for as long as they needed without any requirement to formally join the community. For the land to remain an open community, Amy explained that it must remain open to women exclusively:

In some ways I don’t think that would be a safe thing to me personally, or to women in general, if that was extended to men. Like, I don’t feel comfortable welcoming any random man into my house. I just don’t. We do not live in that world. So, if we’re going to have the element of truly open and have it be safe for women, it has to be women’s land.

A number of women mentioned that the value of the land was the safety to undo the behavior learned as children that girls were supposed to be afraid of the dark. Tammy, at Hickoryland in the southeast, spoke of her first time at the Midwest Wimmin’s Festival:

> I remember walking around in the first night, walking in the woods, going from here to there and somebody walking towards me. And it was like my whole body was panicked because you don't know if it's a man or not. And then "O, that's right. I'm on this women's land." And I could relax. That was the first time in my life I had experienced feeling safe.

At times, women were called to defend these safe spaces from men. Frankie told of an experience at the first Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1976. Because a women's-only music festival was an oddity in rural Michigan, anti-feminist men lined up along the sides of the entrance road with telescopes to gawk and rifles to intimidate the women who entered. Organizers told women that, if these men tried to breach their space at night, women should turn on their car headlights and gather at a pre-determined gate. When men did show up and try to enter in the middle of the night, Frankie said:

> Those of us from Louisville, we just went to our gate. I remember looking down the road and there was a pickup truck down there with its lights on, shining at us at the gate. They started revving their engines and so, with the other women that had come to that gate, we just stood up and we locked arms.
>
> I just actually, just this year [2018] ended up talking with my friend Mary who stood beside me. We had never discussed that night, but those men in that pickup truck, they revved their engines and they revved their engines. Then they started coming and they started coming

> faster and faster [toward us]. There was a double-barrel shotgun barrel hanging out the passenger side window. We stood there. At the last second of course, they came so close, and swerved right past us, but barely. I could have grabbed that shotgun.
>
> In that moment I'm standing there, I can still feel Mary's arm. I can still feel the sister over here. I don't know her name. Not one of us moved. I found something in one day that was worth dying for.

In a third trend, women spoke of seeking a community of like-minded women who shared their desires to put energy into other female relationships and back into the land itself first and foremost. As the women turned their attention inward and focused on relationship building inside the communities, this had the effect of allowing an unintentional homogeneity to settle across the lands through a low-level approach to organization. Because there was no push from outside groups to diversity, they often attracted women from their own friend groups and other women similar to them in age, race, and ability

One example of this third theme is Eleanor from Aspenland who mentioned that, as much as possible, women wanted to remain on the land, rather than going out to work in "the system" every day. She noted that "We wanted to be what I called free Amazons, which is, just live in a women's community, and all your energy's going [into the community] rather than going out." Donna, a 70-year-old living at Walnutland, offers another example of this theme, when she spoke about the certain type of energy women share:

It's nurturing, it's loving, it's supportive in ways that you can't get with men. They don't have the capacity to do that. They don't have the capacity to live that way and there's a lot of power or things going on. And, if I was in a community of mixed [people], the focus of the women would be on the men. So, my whole preference is to be around women who focus on women and it doesn't mean that I have to… There's not a love fest going on here and all of that, but it's more like we understand each other. We live from childhood up dealing with things that men could never understand.

As a result of creating spaces with like-minded women, often pulled from their personal connections in the communities in which they lived, the land women created only what they needed and were able to, which may have inadvertently left out women not in the communities at the time of their initial creations. One woman heavily involved in the early days of these lands articulated why this might be so. In an off-hand comment at a music festival in 2018, she mentioned that she and others created the spaces they needed in the 1970s to save their own lives. Whoever came after them was not their concern. In that way, it is plausible that these spaces were only ever meant to support the specific women involved with them at any given time, not truly be a space where all women were welcome. Instead, because these lands were created for the women who inhabited them at the time, the "All Women Welcome" rhetoric had a caveat: "Self-Sufficiency Required." In what follows, I trace the rhetoric of self-sufficiency through interviews with the women living on the lands, to explore its effect on the (1) racial, and (2) physical and mental health makeup of the lands.

Diversity and Exclusion

Respondents acknowledged that, at least initially, women on the lands had met and discussed diversity in community meetings. Colleen, who had lived on several lands in the northwest in the past, noted that, in the 1970s and 80s diversity was discussed "to death" in her communities.

> … to the very death. In my experience, the consciousness level was very high about class, race, age, ableism, adultism, et cetera, et cetera. We kind of policed each other to death around this stuff. A kind of gleeful spite when you could call another dyke out on her insensitivity to some -ism. I remember when white women were told we could not play African drums or digeridoos… It was exhausting to be so aware all the time.

The continual "exhaust[ion] of being so aware all the time" may have kept women from sustaining the diversity conversation and inviting actual diversity among the women on the lands over the years. Many women I interviewed noted that now diversity comes up for discussion seldom if at all. Joyce, who lives at Hickoryland, said that diversity is mentioned "once in a while" at the community's monthly meetings, but "our meetings are more about the ongoing needs of a collective to make decisions. I have been focused this last four years in getting our [legal] paperwork in order." Only Amy, at Birchland, mentioned racial diversity as a goal worth cultivating.

Land residents' explanations of exclusions: Race and ability

Race

All of the women in my study were white, although many of them mentioned that women of color and indigenous women had come through their lands at some point. No one mentioned that there was a person or group within their individual land community who was accountable for ensuring that racial diversity was enacted or maintained, even if at the outset the women wanted to create a space where all women regardless of race or ethnicity felt welcome.

Respondents explained the whiteness of their lands in three ways that act as a sort of circular logic: (1) that they have few friends of color they could invite to their lands, (2) that their fear of using the small number of women of color they might knew and could invite would amount to tokens of an ideal diversity that remained out of reach, and (3) that women of color may not feel safe while traveling to the lands. Some also bristled at being asked to account for the racial makeup of their lands and/or to try to become more inclusive; there is a belief among some residents that women who need separate women's space will find a way to get there and live and that it is not up to the folks living on the lands to advertise for inclusivity specifically.

Eleanor, a 75-year-old woman, lives at Aspenland. She noted that her land had become whiter after its initial inclusion of women of color in the 1970s. As those women moved off, the white women stayed but

> didn't have women of color friends to invite here. A lot of people come here because they have a friend already here that says, 'Come on, come visit, come see us.' And then they [white women] get here, and they like it, and they stay.

Eleanor and other respondents suggest that the residents of the lands are white because women invite their friends who just all happen to be white and those women tend to stay, even though there have been women of color who have visited the various lands through the years

Faye, a retired college professor living at Hickoryland, illustrates the second explanation of the persistent whiteness. She was worried about making tokens of women of color by inviting only one or two of them. She explained about her time sitting on "a lot" of hiring committees:

> Under the "we need diversity" box…It's such a difficult and in some ways obnoxious question inviting all sorts of tokenism. And yet [there's a need] to examine the roots of why you do not see here anything other than a bunch of white women for example.

Marion, who was part of Magnolialand in the southeast, was also afraid of including women of color just for show. She recalls diversity in her community in the 1970s but no discussion of it because "we were dealing on an emotional level with each other's feelings and needs and not labeling [people]." When two new white women joined the community, they immediately demanded that the group "deal" with their race and economic class biases. Marion said that, at the time the new women came,

> We didn't have any women of color. But we tried and [the women of color] didn't want to come. They had their own communities. The new women really put a trip about that. But we said, "we're not gonna try and get a token black here just to make these two women happy."

Marion's comments also represent the second theme that emerged when women talked about race. Many grew resentful when they felt asked to be inclusive simply for the sake of it and pushed back against what they saw as intentional recruiting efforts for certain groups of women. Thia, from Walnutland, explained this sentiment, saying

> Lesbian women of color, yeah, they're in cities I guess. They're not in too many lesbian land communities, you know, and I personally I don't know how to do that. Because what do you put on your ad in *Lesbian Connection* – "we're especially looking for women of color?" That seems weird to me.

Safety, both off and on the lands, was a final reason the women I interviewed offered to explain why many women of color did not visit or live with them. Wendy, at Walnutland, spoke of building a house on the land:

> They hired this guy to do cement work and he called and said, "would we come get him?" We pick him up and bring him up the mountain. Well, it turns out, we didn't know when we hired him that he was black, and he was afraid. He was afraid to come up the mountain by himself.

Wendy went on to wonder whether, if safety was a concern for a black man, how much more intimidated might a woman of color feel, both driving through small, rural towns perceived to be unwelcoming and living on the land as a minority among white women?

As the above examples show, and as respondents confirmed when I asked them about racial diversity, the women may be sincere about wanting diversity in all forms on their lands have deliberately tried to encourage it. Much of what they said in interviews seemed like unintentional justifications for their lack of diversity First, on one hand, women learn about the lands through their friend networks; and if, as some of the women I interviewed suggest, they do not have many women of color in their friend groups. Also, the lands tended to grow slowly over time, adding members and living spaces as women show interest. Then comes the justification on the back end about how women of color may not want to come live on the lands anyway - if a woman of color decided to live on the land, she may be the only one for a period of time, resulting in token status, which the women I interviewed are trying to avoid. By not initially focusing on intersectional diversity, the lands I visited often were and still remain racially homogenous.

Ability

Ten respondents mentioned disabilities as reasons women might not come to the lands and specifically noted self-sufficiency as a skill that women who want to live on the land or visit must possess. The communities are often organized into individual households, and long-term help to any woman from beyond her household is limited. In my travels, I noticed that often the rural lands are hilly and rocky; the drivable roads, if there are any, were not paved; and the available paths were not wide, flat, or smooth enough for wheelchairs. The lands have no public transportation, and healthcare is usually a half-hour or more drive away. Judy, at Aspenland, gave an example of how a sudden physical limitation affected another woman on the land:

> She broke her ankle a couple years ago. She had to go live in town. She just couldn't live here. She went to stay with a friend in town. So I know, I'm very aware that being here is dependent on being able-bodied.

Some communities, like Red Cedarland and Walnutland, have made it easier for women with disabilities to visit and live, out of necessity for the fact that the women currently living on the land are aging and need support. Mary described that how, after a fire destroyed the main community/visitor's house at Red Cedarland, they had a new house built which included ramps at the entrance doors and grab bars in the bathroom and shower areas. However, forest paths to women's homes still remain inaccessible to wheelchairs. Marion explained that Walnutland, which looks and functions like a gated HOA community with gravel roads and land subdivided into clearly marked 2-acre home lots, was purchased by women who had initially lived with her at Magnolialand in the South. As the women aged, she explained, they sold their Magnolialand to purchase a new space that could accommodate their health needs. The property has a community house currently used for visitors, which the women hope one day to turn into an assisted-living facility for lesbians. Modifications have been geared toward helping old lesbians remain on their land and stay as self-sufficient as possible, rather than accommodating disabled women of all ages.

Two themes surrounding self-sufficiency and health emerged in my interviews. The first was that mental health challenges could disrupt the long-term group's sense of community. The second theme was that the lands were not set up to accommodate women who needed extra help.

Smokey, interviewed at Walnutland but who lived for a time at Balsamland open women's land, voiced the first theme. With her degree in psychology, she felt she understood how women with mental health challenges could hurt the group.

> Definitely there were women who stayed there longer. I remember, and they'd come in there, and they'd be messed up. You know? Mentally ill. I could classify 'em really fast. And that always stirs and disrupts. So that's also a reason why open women's land is a hard place to live on, you see? To live it out. Because you get the stress of whatever anyone brings into your space.

Mary, interviewed at Red Cedarland, gave an example of this disruption in her experience helping a woman who had moved from to the United States from a commune in another country:

> She didn't last long. She did not last long. She also wasn't a lesbian. I ended up taking her to a mental health place a few times in [a local town]…She ultimately needed more mental health services that she couldn't find at [the local town]. She needed a good therapist in [a larger city].

Patricia, at Aspenland, noted that, even if the land women wanted to help other women with mental health, they were not equipped to do so. This is representative of the second theme:

> You can't go and expect us to take care of you. Although we'd like to in some ways, you know, we need that space [mental health clinic], too, but it's not here. It's gotta be some facility, some functioning lesbian mental health clinic, you know, or institution.

These women speak of their lands as places of healing, safety, and sanctuary from the patriarchal, male-dominated world. At the same time, the rurality of the lands, purchased cheaply with whatever money women could initially pool together, ill serves those who do not fit conventional ideals of health. As shown in the interviews above, because of the harsh landscape, land women expect other women to be able to traverse the space and contribute to the community. While it is okay to ask for help from others to do things like make repairs to their homes, women must also give help when asked. For instance, Hickoryland holds monthly and twice-yearly workdays. Once a month, a member is chosen (in rotating order) and the women gather at her house for the day to help with any projects. During the other months, she is expected to return the help. Twice a year, the women on the land and in the local community gather to complete projects on communal spaces. While I was there, I helped repaint the guest house and worked in the garden. The women on the lands may well believe that they are open to any woman who wants to come and visit, but they have organized into one- or two-person households, and have no infrastructure set up for long-term care of women who need it.

Discussion

As I began to analyze the interviews with women who lived as part of the women's land communities and compare those communities to what I found in fieldnotes taken during the music festivals I attended and helped to organize, I noticed a curious

divergence. Both types of communities had the same mission – to include *all* women – and yet the lands remained homogenous while the music festivals managed to diversify themselves at least somewhat. In the scholarly literature on women's organizations, I found a basis for a theory that formality of organization affects degree of diversity. Both music festivals and women's lands were founded on an ideal of cultural feminism and the universal sisterhood ideal that comes with it. As Echols (1989) notes, the more formal organizational structure of the music festivals allowed for discussion and a trend toward diversity that the informal organization of the women's lands did not achieve. Morris (1999) and Anderson (2019) noted that music festivals increased diversity with a push from both the top down, by increasing diversity in the leadership structure, and from the bottom up, by having processes in place to allow for festival attendees to suggest and organize around issues of diversity important to them. At the festivals I attended, some routes toward diversity had already been opened but continued to expand to allow even more inclusion. For example, a women of color tent is standard at the Ohio Lesbian Festival; but over time it has become the WOC/NIW space to include native and indigenous women. Like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Ohio also has a designated "patio" just outside the space to allow white women to converse about issues of racism.

Opposite these more formal structures is the informal organization of the women's lands. Cheney's (1985) memoir details early fractures along lines of race, class, and ability; and the women interviewed for this project confirm how those fractures have become entrenched over the years, despite the feminist intention to welcome all women. They have diverse ways of explaining these continued fractures. Eleanor, who lived at

Aspenland, was an example of the early trend toward accidental exclusion when she moved to the land in the 1970s. She noted her desire for a community made up of "free Amazons" who did not go out to work in "the system" everyday but instead put their energy toward women who were living on the land at the time. Donna, at Walnutland, exemplified the persistence of this trend today when she explained that, while "there's not a love fest going on here," the women on the land understand each other in ways that people from off the land, especially men, would not understand. While the lands may have initially discussed issues of diversity "to death," as Colleen noted, Joyce, at Hickoryland, told me that diversity conversations now come up "once in a while." Hickoryland's community monthly meetings now focus on "the ongoing needs of a collective to make decisions." Collective governance can make all women feel valued as part of the early stages of an organization but can also mask feelings of unequal participation (Staggenborg 1989; Riger 1994). Without any formal organizational leadership structure to ensure that women would be accountable for their work toward diversity (like the music festivals I attended had in place), these lands may have unintentionally created a space where only certain women felt welcomed, even if the original intention of these lands was for all women to feel welcomed and included.

Conclusion

As this study shows, women's lands are somewhat homogenous even as the women who created them claimed and believed that all women would be welcome. This homogeneity was not intentional, but instead stemmed from the ways the land communities initially organized around sex-as-assigned-at-birth as the only requirement for membership. By remaining loosely organized as they developed, save for that sex

requirement, the communities developed over time in an ad hoc manner, to which some of my interviewees attest, and in ways that prioritized the women who were most often present on the lands or the friends they could convince to come visit or stay – women who were typically white and able-bodied. Whereas funding organizations and festival attendees often pushed urban feminist groups and women's music festivals to become more diverse, the women I interviewed never mentioned any comparable push on land communities. Instead, the women gave various explanations as to why the lands began, and remained over time, small and homogenous.[7]

This study confirms prior research, showing that diversity within an organization must be cultivated, rather than assuming that it will flourish on its own (Anderson 2019:123; Morris 1999:147-176; Scott 2005:249). However, as I have shown, these women's lands also complicate this understanding. The lands were created as havens for women, understood at the time by leading feminist thinkers to be a distinct sex-class lacking basic rights, autonomy, and protections. The women could enjoy the freedom and

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[7] My study focused only on women who were living or had lived on the lands over a period of six months or more. A follow-up study should interview those women who feel excluded from the lands – those who either have tried to live on the lands and felt pushed off and those who have barriers that prevent them from coming in the first place. This second study would help explain what might need to be done to ensure these lands as women's-only communities survive into the future and explore if survival is even a needed or wanted possibility.

safety that was not always attainable in other settings at the time they were created and even in some ways still today, and the women, rightly or wrongly, assumed that if they built the land communities that diversity would follow, which never happened. Because of the land organization, they are less able than music festivals, where income comes from ticket costs and festival merchandise among other places, to raise money to make necessary changes to the physical landscapes and structures of the lands. This paper explains the lands' apparent lack of diversity not to excuse it, but to see the lands as more nuanced than simply homogenous communities uninterested in change. The women's lands discussed in this paper, like many – arguably most – feminist organizations, are not perfect, but they are attempting to hold true to a feminist social mission while simultaneously facing the dual challenges of survival and adaptation, all with limited resources.

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Chapter 3 "They Don't Want to Go Back into the Patriarchy [Just] because They're Old": Challenges to Aging in Place in Rural Feminist Communities

ABSTRACT

Women's lands initially designed in the 1970s and 80s as hotbeds of political community have slowly become naturally occurring retirement communities, as the women living on them age. Analysis of interviews with 39 women involved with nine rural, women's-only communities in the United States shows how these women support themselves without the help of any formal aging organization. It compares the care received in these intentional (feminist) communities that that offered in other naturally occurring retirement communities that were not founded on such moral foundations as feminism. Though the lands were meant to include any women and laud diversity, unaddressed relations of age inequality appear to limit the quality and consistency of the care that women receive on these lands, raising questions about their ability to sustain themselves without further engagement with the world they've left behind.

Keywords: Aging, Lesbian, Gender, Sexuality, Retirement Communities

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, as part of the women's liberation movement, women in their 20s and 30s bought land in the rural countryside. They set up what they meant to be self-sustaining, feminist communities. Often, the women would partner with friends to buy undeveloped land, build houses, learn to grow food and raise goats and cows for milk. Infused with a can-do attitude born of feminist rebellion, founders carved living spaces

from rocky hillsides, dense forest, and dry desert. They planned to make a world that better suited their needs than the patriarchal one they left behind. The women who currently live on the lands include founders alongside those who came later, and are now mostly 55 and older. The lands were created as hotbeds of political community, and have slowly become naturally occurring retirement communities, or NORCs. Relations of gender and age intersect to lower women's status as they age, rendering even the women's movement largely ignorant of the way needs shift with age and the importance of organizing communities with old women in mind. The founders of many of the lands were in their 20s and 30s, and perhaps did not consider the needs of older women when the lands were first established. I will show, through an examination of the language of self-sufficiency the women on the lands use, how the lands have become over time and currently remain less accessible to those whose mobility and other health needs differ from those of youth.

This paper offers an in-depth look at a community of lesbians seldom included in discussion of services for aging populations. I investigate how and why these women have aged in place with few services, what care they provide each other, how limited that care is, and how the families of choice that they have built on the lands support members up until death. The political commitment that founded these lands and the low status of old women in U.S. society, combined with the lack of young women moving to the lands, serves to isolate these NORCs from the services that can best sustain them into the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

NORCs

Wiles et al. (2011:357) define *aging in place* as a system that allows people to remain in their communities as they grow old. Staying in one place is as much about the community as it is about a specific dwelling; older folks might move from a larger house where they raised a family to a smaller dwelling with less space but nearby, to remain in the same community (Wiles et al. 2011:360). Aging in place allows old people to maintain their senses of independence, connections to social supports, and bonds with families and friends (Iecovitch 2014:23; Vanleerberghe et al. 2017:2900; Wiles et al. 2011:357). It is also generally cheaper for people to stay in their own homes than to move to care facilities (Vanleerberghe et al. 2017:2900).

Downsides to aging in place include the challenge of maintaining quality of life as the need for care mounts, the slower response time to any immediate need than they would have if they lived in care facilities, and the challenge to provide appropriate care to folks who might be dealing with multiple health challenges or taking multiple medications at different times of day (Morley 2012: 489; Vanleerberghe et al. 2017:2900). These are the challenges faced by naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs).

NORCs appear when people age where they have lived for years, or move to an area where they mean to spend the rest of their lives (Hunt and Ross 1990:1; Boggs et al. 2017:1542). They include communities that were not initially designed for older residents, as well as communities that are “age-integrated” but where older residents will ultimately outnumber the younger set. They tend to be small, often with less than 500

residents, and often not advertised as retirement communities (Hunt and Ross 1990:1). Because NORCs are typically made up of residents living in close proximity to one another, but not sharing any joint property, there is typically no buy-in fee required to join (Boggs et al. 2017:1542). The goal is to support independent living while providing formal and informal community support and fostering "community engagement, and empowerment" (Boggs et al. 2017:1542).

For many LGBT folks born before the Stonewall gay rights revolution, NORCs that cater to LGBT residents represent the best-case scenario (Boggs et al. 2017:1542). These communities offer built-in support in the form of LGBT neighbours and understanding paid employees in the community, which make it more likely that an LGBT person will be open about their sexuality, thereby receiving the most comprehensive and appropriate healthcare and social support (pp. 1551-52).

As compared to older heterosexual people, LGBT elders are more likely to be single and live alone with higher incidences of disability, chronic health conditions, and mental stress, and more likely to be estranged from their family of origin (Knauer 2016). An elder LGBT person's friends or chosen family members may step in and provide health care emotional support, and other types of daily living help (Muraco and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2011).

Limits of Care from Families of Choice

Friendship serves as the main source of help with changing needs in a rural NORC. Friendship already plays a disproportionately large role in the lives of older gay and lesbian people in general. In one study, gay men and lesbians tended to value the length of a friendship and the frequency of contact between friends more highly than their

heterosexual counterparts do (de Vries and Megathlin 2009). In another study, Nardi (1999) found that, while heterosexual adults may find their friends important, they tend to have other choices for caregivers, arranged in a hierarchy of preference for informal caregiving: first, family stemming from marriage (spouse) and procreation; second, birth family; third, family related by marriage (in-laws); and finally, fictive kin (families of choice) (Baker, Herdt, and DeVries 2006).By contrast, gay men and lesbians often turn to their friends to help them navigate a heterosexual world. As they grow older, friendships remain more important than familial ties (Grossman, D'Augelli, and Hershberger 2000). Older gay men and lesbians are more likely to attend lesbian and gay social groups than activities offered through their local senior centers. These studies may explain the tendency of gay men and lesbians to think of their friends as their chosen family, over and above any blood relatives they may have. As they age, many gay men and lesbians come to rely on this chosen family for help with care and support first (Cohen and Murray 2006). Often, this care and support from friends rivals the amount of care they might receive from a heterosexual partner (Mullan 1998).

In one study, gay friends-turned-caregivers initially reported being happy to help, committed both to give and to receive care as part of a friendship; but most reported they eventually limited the care they provided as a way to prioritize the friendship over the caregiving (Muraco and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2011:1080). The caregivers also recognize that they may not always be able to sustain care, either because the care receivers need more than the givers can provide or because givers begin to need care themselves (Muraco and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2011:1086). Higher stress on the part of the caregivers, because of the lack of legal ties leading to a lack of available caregiver resources, may

also play a role in the reduction of care provided (Croghan, Moone, and Olsen 2014:81). Because caregivers and receivers have tended not to be legally related to each other, sometimes healthcare laws can also complicate the giver/receiver dynamic (Knauer 2016:159). People within chosen family are often from the same generation, which can present problems as the people age together; and, while the women living on the lands may want younger adults to move in and help with their care, this does not tend to be the norm in NORCs (Knauer 2016:159).

This lack of support for old people is understandable from an age relations perspective. Adults become devalued as they age, especially as they enter the retirement phase of life and grow old (Calasanti and Slevin 2006). Doctors begin to impute symptoms to "old age" rather than to injuries and diseases; and they begin to withhold treatment as well (Calasanti and Slevin 2006). Old people internalize fears of growing old by avoiding other old people or by voting against their own age-based rights in efforts to be seen as not yet old. Such ageism affects feminism as well; within the movement, younger feminists have often rejected association with the second wave of the movement, feeling as if older women stood in their way (Henry 2004; Reger 2014). On these bases, we might expect women on the lands to have trouble finding the care that many of them increasingly need in old age.

Women's Intentional Communities

Unlike many NORCs, women's lands are *intentional* communities, founded on moral bases though not with aging in mind. Intentional communities allow groups to live close enough to one another to shared lifestyles, with shared cultures and common purposes (Christian, 2007:xviii). Often, intentional communities will share housing or

land and govern themselves without any outside help (Christian, 2007:xviii). Intentional communities can vary in their goals, from conservation to offering a back-to-the-land rurality, to maintaining a spiritual or religious focus.

During the 1970s and 80s, some feminists tired of trying to change the broken system of patriarchy. They bought cheap, rural land and founded separatist communities on them (Hoagland and Penelope 1988:5). Espousing a utopian vision of sisterhood predicated on women's oppression based only on dimorphic sex, these lands were an outgrowth of radical feminism in the early 1970s. Radical feminism in turn became cultural feminism in the mid-1970s and thereafter (Echols 1989:3-5). Many of the women who went to these lands initially were mid-20s through mid-40s years old, with some into their 50s (Cheney 1985:11). Women have moved onto and off the lands, but in general the age of the women has continued trending upwards throughout the years of these lands' existence.

The women who founded the lands meant to find a self-sufficiency difficult to attain in the mainstream world (see previous chapter) and never meant for them to provide for assisted living or skilled nursing. Cheney (1985:11), in her early study of women's lands in the United States, found that most women who started the lands were in their mid-20s to mid-40s and set up the lands as an outgrowth of the second wave feminist movement. The women were trying to create more perfect communities than any mixed- or single-sex community available in the United States, with an emphasis on a shared political and emotional sisterhood among women.

From both my own observations and other recent studies of these lands, we know that today the population on these lands is older than it used to be. Norman, Mushroom,

and Ellison's (2015) anthology of land women reads like an updated version of Cheney's 1985 study, complementing Burmeister's (2013) thesis interviews with women on the Oregon lands. The women studied over the last decade range in age from 61 to 85 years. Likewise, both Kershaw's (2009) and Raphael (2019) *New York Times* articles explore Alapine, 300 acres of women's land in northeast Alabama bought in 1997; and HOWL, a 50-acre plot of land in Vermont. They find that the women on these lands are mostly in their mid-50s and older.

The communities under study are located in rural parts of the United States, often removed 15 minutes from the closest town and 30 minutes or more from any mid-size city. Given the secluded nature of these communities, the women have come to rely on each other to provide support as their needs change. The women's lands represent the aging-in-place model of a NORC, where residents live near each other and support each other as comrades and friends without outside support. They sit at the under-researched intersection of both intentional communities and NORCs. While designed as communal spaces where younger women could live outside the patriarchy, these lands have now unintentionally become "aging-in-place" retirement communities. The rest of this paper explores the challenges that the women in these unique communities face. It asks how the care given to the old residents compares to that provided in non-intentional NORCs.

1. How do aging women on the lands manage to receive care; and
2. What are the limits of care the women (acting as part of a friendship community of care) provide for each other on the lands.; and

3. How does the quality and consistency of that care compare to that shown in previous research to be available in **non-intentional** communities that become NORCS?

METHODS

This study draws on 39 semi-structured interviews I conducted with women who are or have been involved with women's lands in the United States. I defined involvement as having resided on women's land for at least six months, even if they no longer do, or served on the decision-making board for one while living off the land they managed. Women who do not live on the lands give various reasons including employment, need for community services like health care services and public transportation, or unavailability of space on the land. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. All but two face-to-face interviews were recorded with a hand-held recorder, the other two via handwritten notes. One interview was conducted at a national women's music festival. Three interviews were conducted over email: I sent a list of questions; and the women sent in their responses. I followed up as necessary for clarification. All names provided here are pseudonyms to protect the women's anonymity.

I had visited women's lands prior to beginning my research and used those connections to sample lands in three states as well in the now-defunct Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. From there, I recruited a snowball sample of friends of the initial women interviewed. I also sent email to the 23 lands listed with contact information in the 6th edition of Shewolf's Guide to Womyn's Lands and Lesbian Spaces with whom I did not yet have any connection.

Interviews were conducted from May through November 2018, on nine lands in eight states in all geographic sections of the contiguous U.S. (I am aware of no women's lands in Hawaii or Alaska). The smallest land community I visited had two permanent residents, one of whom agreed to participate in my study. The largest land community I visited had 21 permanent residents, eight of whom agreed to participate.

Land geography varied, but all of the lands were rural, with the closest small town some five miles away and the closest large city 45 minutes or more away. None of the lands were accessible by public transportation. Most of the lands' geography reflected the surrounding landscapes – Red Cedarland[8] in the northwest was full of overgrown evergreen trees and featured a grass and natural mulch forest floor on the path through the woods leading to a creek. Aspenland in the southwest was dry, rocky, and hilly with no potable water. Each of the lands, regardless of size, had one space designated as a central community gathering space. The walks to each communal space differed. At five of the lands, the central house was a five to 10-minute walk from each woman's own home; at three lands a woman's home doubled as the community house, the trade-off for residing in the largest (or in one case the only) house on the property was that the house could be used for gatherings and sometimes overnight guests; and at one land, set up more like a large gated neighbourhood with individual lots with gravel roads throughout, the community house was at least a 10-minute walk for most women, so often they drove their vehicles to access the space.

[8] All of the names of lands mentioned in the article are pseudonyms.

Sample

All of the women in my sample were white; three of them gave descriptors of "WASP" (white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant); two disclosed that they were Jewish; and one, refused to answer my question about race and ethnicity, but still looked white.

Most of my sample was between the ages of 45 and 85, although I tried to include a variety of ages within that range.[9] Interviewing only one woman under 45 was unintentional because I tried to find multiple women in each decade from 18 on up. My failure suggests the changing age demographics on the land. The women who first created the lands may have wanted a continual influx of new, young, members; but this has not occurred. All of my interviewees were cisgender women; a trans woman from a land in the northeast agreed to be interviewed through email but then never returned my questionnaire.

No participants at the time of the interviews had any obvious difficulty walking, though some commented that their age slowed them down and that they preferred to drive rather than walk to distant buildings on their lands.

Thirty-one of the women identified themselves as lesbians, with one woman qualifying herself as a "butch lesbian," and one as a "femme lesbian." Two of the women identified themselves as bi-sexual; one of those women noted she kept that identity quiet because the land she lived on was designated specifically as "lesbian land."

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[9] The ages of the women who gave their ages were as follows: 30-34 (1); 46-50 (2); 55-60 (5); 61-65 (3); 66-70 (6); 71- 75 (5); 76 (3); 75-80 (5); 81-85 (1).

The economic situation of the women varied, and often the women who first started the lands were in a more precarious position than the women who came later to live. When first starting out in the 1970s and 80s, the women in my study told me they had to pool their money with friends or negotiate with private landowners to buy inexpensive land, which was often rural and sometimes unimproved, later waves of women could often move onto an already-established land. Most of the women I met were retired and living on some type of Social Security. The jobs the women held throughout their lives were various and included an OBGYN, community college professor, photojournalist, national park worker, a few masseuses and reiki instructors, and some artists, and one Wiccan priestess, among others. Only one indicated she had worked mostly under the table and therefore did not qualify for Social Security. Some of the women had held jobs (both paid and unpaid) that allowed them to acquire the skills necessary for survival on the lands, including carpentry and home maintenance, but often women came to the lands, either as young women who founded the lands or upon retirement specifically to age in place with their friends on the lands, and learned the skills through trial and error.

RESULTS

Aging in Place

Without infrastructure to assist with health-related challenges or the entrance of an organization dedicated to supporting the women as they age, most of the women acknowledge that remaining in their rural communities can be challenging at times. Similar to people who remain in their communities once they become NORCs, the women living on the lands stay because they have lived on them for years and are

comfortable in their homes, even as the difficulty of doing so grows and they might have otherwise sought more care with kin or retirement institutions. Faye, a retired community college professor living at Hickoryland, explains that:

> I love this space. But, pragmatically speaking, I have lost a certain kind of energy that's required for taking care of it. This big log house, I've been [here] 13 years and it is frustrating in some ways. It requires a kind of dedication that is…I'm 76 and I'm still reasonably healthy – do I want to spend the next five to 10 years of my life expending the energy into this log house which when I first got here [was] I fell in love with the land?

Faye acknowledged that it is becoming less appealing to live at Hickoryland because of the climate and the upkeep required, but at present she and another land mate currently spend each winter at a mobile home community in Arizona, coming back to Hickoryland and their permanent homes during the more temperate times of the year. This, at least for now, is a signal that she still has no desire to give up her home on the land, but rather find ways to make staying at Hickoryland doable.

However, for many women, the reasons for staying are more than simply not wanting to move. The lands were founded as political spaces where women could create communities that did not involve men; and the women would like to keep it that way. Bonnie, at Walnutland, explains:

> The idea up here is that women want to age in place, meaning literally. They want to be in their homes when they pass. They don't want to

> leave nature; they don't want to leave that. They don't want to go back into the patriarchy because they're old. Everybody says, that lives in Walnutland, "Once you pass that gate, you're going out into the quote unquote world, and when you come back in, you're coming home."

At the same time, Bonnie acknowledged that the women living on the lands faced many of the same fears about growing older as women "living in patriarchy." Bound to the land by what remains of their politics, these women consider leaving only when they feel their health and mobility at risk. I will examine the various pressures that do, or will eventually, lead many of the women to move off of the lands that they love in the next sections.

Health

When asked about living out their lives on the lands, each woman voiced desire to do so, but many feared that loss of their health may prevent it. Anne, who had lived on several lands in the northwest, shared that, as women's health declines, they need more assistance.

> The lands are not as accessible. They're not accessible. They're really not accessible. A few of them are. A few of them have ramps or things. But, even so, you have to drive up this long driveway to get to it and then, getting to the shitter [outhouse] is a whole other matter. So, in that way, and I used to squat all the time to pee, that's getting a little more difficult. So, accessibility is the issue for me about the lands.

One of the practical challenges of many of the lands is the geography and its development by the communities. Walnutland looks and functions like a gated HOA

community with gravel roads and single-home lots. There, Donna worried about what might happen if disaster struck on her own land, where she lacked landline telephone and cellular service.

> …We are two acre lots that are so far separated from each other that, if I fell and I was screaming, nobody would hear me. At one time we had a policy of carrying an air horn with us so that we could let people know [something was wrong], but that kind of went by the wayside.

Even when women see doctors for care, the doctors do not always understand how the organizations of the lands might leave residents requiring more care than doctors assume they would. Wendy, living at Walnutland, spoke of advocating for a friend who was recovering from replacement of her knee:

> I'm trying to explain to the doctor that she needs to go to rehab and he said, "No, we're going to send her home." I said, "You don't understand, there's no level spot out on the land, none. She heats with wood that she has to carry the wood in the house. We live in the mountains." He goes, "Oh," because, they all have this image of what [the land] means. People down on the bottom [of the mountain] don't even come up here [to the top, where Walnutland is located].

Doris fell in her house on Hickoryland, and suffered a stroke while at the hospital which resulted in challenges to her organizational abilities; and she said she has not quite recovered. She worried about her "ability to do things."

> I can't keep everything together, I lose stuff. It's like somebody just walks through the house just dropping things on the floor. Right now, I might look like I'm doing fine; but, on an emotional level, I feel like I'm falling apart. Doctors did not expect me to live [after my stroke]; and if I did, they very clearly told my children I would have brain damage. And that I would not be able to take care of myself.

To make the lands more accessible, both for themselves and for friends who might visit and give support, women have improved their houses, adding grab bars and exterior ramps. On two of the lands, women envisioned elder care facilities, for those who could no longer live in their own houses.

Donna lives at Walnutland, purchased by women who had initially lived at Magnolialand in the South. Magnolialand was a collection of homes in close proximity to one another in a residential area, rather than homes built on a single parcel of land. They sold Magnolialand to purchase what seems like a never-quite-finished community of two-acre lots, on which women can build homes governed by a neighbourhood homeowners association. They hoped that these would better accommodate their health needs as they aged. The property has a community house currently used for visitors, which the women hope one day to turn into an assisted-living facility for lesbians. The dream, according to conversations I had with the women on the property, would be that younger women already working in healthcare fields would come work on the land and provide care in exchange for food and housing.

Margaret likewise spoke of retrofitting the main two-story house at Red Cedarland to ensure that women living on the land could remain there. The main house

has electricity and running water, mostly used for guests and as the communal kitchen space. Permanent residents live in cottages, none of which have indoor plumbing or electricity; and most women heat their homes with gas or propane stoves. Margaret envisioned a time when women could move into the main house as they age.

Margaret was challenged by the geography and architecture of the lands, but she, like other women, remained committed to avoidance of the mainstream. To her, straight life off the lands

> just has ghettos for old people or something. You just [get] deposited in these spots until you die. We need to have viable community for when we get older and less abled. But the old people need to create that for ourselves; the young people aren't all that particularly interested in that.

Several women in this study believed the way Margaret did. The women did not shun doctors outright, and many of them reported visiting doctors for treatment of ailments. But they avoid any permanent move back into straight society. Hoping to stay far from the mainstream when they first moved to the lands, and having lived outside of it for years, they are leery of moving permanently into retirement homes or accepting help from strangers, even if the strangers are healthcare workers. Now, the lack a formal mechanism for altering the lands combines with the political resistance to leaving them. Together, these limit the caregiving that their families of choice on the lands can and are willing to provide.

Caretaking for Each Other

As the women on the lands grow older and begin to need more daily assistance, they rely on each other for help. Smokey, who is 70 years old and lives at Walnutland, noted that she moved there specifically for that collective caregiving:

> When there's a need, little subgroups really do rally around, so ... And actually, it's functional. It works. When [a woman living on the land] had a problem with her knee before I got here, she had a big problem, and other women stepped in. And so, three or four women stepped in…and just made it work.

Harpo, in her mid-50s and living at Aspenland, noted that women routinely helped with daily tasks.

> Eleanor and Anna, They're very well respected. And valued. And helped if they need help. Like with your firewood, or your water, you know, carrying heavy stuff down to whatever ... Rachael and I will jump in, when we see Eleanor's car loaded up that she's taking down [to her house].

Satisfaction with the caregiving varies by age. Older women who moved to the land well before retirement age sometimes do not feel the care that Smokey and Harpo, who moved to the lands once they were older, describe. Margaret, living at Aspenland, noted that women on the lands are assumed by others to be self-sufficient and able to manage daily tasks on their own.

> When we live on the land we just live on the land as equals. So there's not such a thing, "oh so you're older," [and] there isn't that thing where you just don't pay attention to what someone who's older says. But [at the same time] I don't think there's a recognition of the different challenges that are there. And people who have been to different [women's lands] have felt that, too, on the land that they have. People haven't really honoured what [older women's physical] needs are.

Margaret's comments speak to what is missing from the lands in terms of caregiving. Members of the land community, as part of a person's chosen family, are willing to step in and help do basic tasks, but none of the women I interviewed mentioned being willing to provide long-term care. Women on the lands might carry groceries for one another, as Harpo mentioned above, but only one woman I met (Nora, detailed in the next section) mentioned moving in with someone or allowing someone to move in with them to provide constant care either as health declines or as part of a rehabilitation program. Eleanor, living at Aspenland, notes that

> [Long-term care is] something we're not terrifically good at. But we've never been good at dealing with people who are ill or injured, disabled. When you get old, you just become disabled even if you've been able-bodied all your life. You're suddenly in that class and in that state, where you're disabled. We could ignore when we were younger, and some of our sisters were suffering with, now we get to have it. It's always been hard. People who were chronically ill have always had a

> harder time. It's easier for us to do hospice, because it's temporary, than to deal with somebody who's sick for 10 years.

These tensions around care tend to decrease as the nature of the care shifts from long-term maintenance to end of life care.

End-of-Life Care

I observed an example of that end-of-life care first-hand while visiting Hickoryland. During the visit, I learned that Isabella, a woman in her 70s, had been in hospice care at Nora's house for about two months before I arrived. She died during the weekend I was there. Nora explained that she and Isabella were friends and Isabella had helped Nora care for a rattlesnake bite Nora got when she was younger, so Nora felt it was her duty as friend to care for Isabella now as she died. Nora also opened her home to the out-of-state medicine women whom Isabella requested be brought in to help keep her comfortable. Isabella wanted a "green burial," which meant she would not be embalmed but would be wrapped in a simple shroud and buried without a coffin. Under state law, Isabella's body had to be buried within 24 hours of death; so, when she died early on a Saturday morning, many of the women of the community worked together to schedule the funeral for Sunday afternoon, notifying family and friends and asking a local man with a backhoe to dig the grave. The funeral service included community members from the land and surrounding area, as well as Isabella's family members. Isabella was buried in the community's green cemetery alongside another land woman. Instead of a headstone at her grave, women installed a plaque with the GPS coordinates of it on the rock wall that borders the cemetery.

DISCUSSION

Some of what I observed in the field and these respondents reported in interviews match findings in the literature on aging in place, caretaking of older LGBTQ people, and the limits of care from people picked as families of choice for these older women. The lands had some of the hallmarks of naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) that Hunt and Ross (1990) and Boggs et al. (2017) describe, in that they were not initially created as retirement communities but become so as the residents age. As Margaret from Red Cedarland notes, the community members work together to retrofit their own houses with such built-in assistance as grab bars and ramps, in an effort to make it more likely that women can live on the lands longer than they otherwise might.

By living in these communities, the women have come to rely on the other members as a type of "family of choice," as Weston (1991) uses the term. Smokey, at Walnutland, and Harpo, at Aspenland, both describe the ways women will support each other – younger women carrying groceries for older women who need extra help and providing support for a woman who had just had knee surgery. At the same time, there is a limit to the care provided in these family-of-choice relationships (Muraco and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2011). Margaret, at Red Cedarland, noted that although the feminist ethos on the lands allows for old women to be seen as equals, that sometimes means that the older women do not enjoy the extra support they need to live comfortably on the lands. Eleanor, at Aspenland, noted that the women on the lands are better equipped and willing to step in for short bursts when needed rather than set up to do long-term caregiving, although there are clear exceptions to this as evinced by the two-month-long hospice care Nora offered Isabella at Hickoryland.

A NORC that evolves from an intentional community complicates both the understanding of women's land communities as traditional NORCs, in part because the intentional nature of the women's lands mediates the effect of relying on families of choice. On one hand, sharing similar feminist values as a requirement to join the communities when the women were younger and supporting each other in maintaining those values for decades may mean that the bonds the women have with each other may be closer than old people living in traditional NORCs tend to have. Those feminist values include treating each other as equals and as self-sufficient, which mediates the effect of the family-of-choice model of relying on each other for support as women grow to need more care. Both Margaret and Eleanor mention this misalignment between the women's daily needs and the willingness to provide daily care.

Knauer (2016) notes that members of a chosen family are often in the same generation, which is the case in these women's communities. While people in the NORCs would like younger people to move in and assist those who increasingly need it, as evidenced by the hope at Walnutland that the guest house could be turned into an assisted living facility, Knauer (2016) notes such influx of younger people does not seem to be the norm. This trend was true of the women's communities as well.

From an age relations standpoint, a lack of support from younger women is understandable (Calasanti and Slevin 2006). During my visits to the land, ageism came up as a reason that young women might not be visiting or moving onto the lands, though not in the formal interviews. Conversations with young women while visiting various lands and women's music gatherings suggest an uptick in interest in these spaces from women in their 20s, although so far visiting has been limited to daily or weekend visits.

Several land women I interviewed worry about isolation as they age and the ability to give and obtain care on the lands, especially with the lack of younger women moving to the lands long term. The intentional nature of the lands, the move to rural places that finances dictated, and the ethic of self-sufficiency that their feminism has fostered, appear to have isolated them from sources of daily care. The women have chosen their neighbors, but do not treat each other as family in the sense of owing each other intensive care.

CONCLUSION

Women's-only communities have slowly shifted from political activism to NORCs. This study finds echoes in these unique communities of many of the concerns addressed in the literature on NORCs and LGBTQ aging . Respondents note that they moved to the lands, and now stay, for the community they find with like-minded women. At the same time, they voice concerns about growing old in such rural spaces. Health topped the list of concerns because they do nearly all of the caregiving for each other, and because both those receiving care and those giving it are of comparable age. Many voice fears that one day leave the lands, as their chosen families might no longer be able to support them. While some of the lands can support a woman's short-term health needs, long term care remains harder to find.

Long term care might become more reliable if the women allowed a non-profit management organization to take some control of any of these communities or the

women governed themselves independently through a cohousing model.[10] Absent a restructuring, the feminist havens that founders envisioned may close. No young women, much less those with specialized healthcare skills, have accepted offers of work exchange for any length of time. Some of this reluctance might owe to ageism, but much of it is probably more pragmatic – few young women can afford to drop out of the formal economy or give up a living wage. They depend instead on proximity to jobs and reliable transportation; they may not want to leave their own communities; and they may not have the practical skills to survive in places that require gardening, carpentry, excavation, plumbing, and electrical work.

Still, respondents voiced hope. Lands founded by likeminded feminists, tamed over decades as women found money to address their needs, may still be reorganized enough to serve aging women. Having made havens from a world that abuses all women, they find themselves mired in one that neglects them for growing old.

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[10] Cohousing communities are organized in a way that each person or family lives in a private dwelling but shares common spaces like a kitchen, meeting space, and laundry room with other residents (Christian, 2007:xix; Cohousing Association).

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CHAPTER 4 Challenges and Success While Working in the Research Field – AKA Avoiding 20,000 Years of Bad Lesbian Karma

ABSTRACT

During my time in the field, I faced competing pressures to maintain good relations with the women's communities I studied and the academic community that employed me. Neither community fully trusted me as I engaged in this research, each believing that I possibly identified too much with the other to do this project well. Using an outsider-within framework, this paper explores the tensions I felt from each group, their demands (or suspected demands) of me, and the shortcomings of the organizations of each community. I conclude by suggesting that each group to reflect on its own biases and allow that all feminisms accommodate themselves to their circumstance and sustain exclusions by doing so. By taking the critique of each group seriously, I become a more responsive researcher to both.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores tensions created by a researcher's dual status as both outsider within the academy and insider without while out doing feminist research projects. I argue that those competing ties can enhance rather than diminish research on feminist exclusions. The competing claims made by these groups about each other and their exclusions lead to recognition that all feminist groups must make concessions to their contexts which lead to exclusions. Feminists can focus on our common goals while recognizing our common roots in constitutive exclusions and reliance for our livings on

systems that oppress others. The research wound up shining a mutually revealing light on both residency on women's land and the profession of women's and gender studies in state (land-grant) universities, revealing not only the bases of their suspicions about each other, but also the limitations of the organization of each.

I begin by drawing on concepts made famous by Patricia Hill Collins (1986), who described the critical insights that black women bring to the academy long dominated by professional class, heterosexual whites and men. I am **outsider within** the feminist discipline women's and gender studies (WGS). I attained this status by moving, from long-time participation in rural, separatist and mostly lesbian women's lands, into doctoral study in a department of sociology. My current activity on those lands includes familiarity and long-term friendship alongside the more strictly professional relation of researcher to respondents. I am also **insider without**, while I am on those lands, because while out there I pursue academic work sponsored by and accountable to a state university. As I move between these roles, I juggle loyalties, to the male-dominated state, and to women who have largely rebelled against it.

Shuttling between these sites and competing memberships, I find myself subject to contrasting mistrusts. Because of my employment by a state-sponsored university, I stand accused by some of the women I sought to interview of working for "the man" and undermining both the validity and the security of women's-only spaces. Some fear the potential state intrusion onto their lands that the publication of my research could inspire and enable, and some argue that I compensate respondents for their time – beyond some $10 token of appreciation. On the other side, because of my ties to the culture of women's lands, some of which include only cisgender women, I find myself wary of

appearing transphobic to peers in women's and gender studies, insensitive to the exclusions practiced on these lands.

The power dynamics and value for research of outsider-within status is well known, due in large part to the influence of Collins (1986). Working at underpaid and insecure margins, many groups find that their labor and perspectives have long gone ignored, even as their work maintains the very institutions that resist their advancement. Such groups can use those standpoints as bases of important critiques of scholarship produced mainly by white men employed by a settler colonialist state. They can spur substantial revision of theory rooted in patriarchal, racist, and capitalist relations of domination. Likewise, an expansive literature on fieldwork sponsored by the global North has shown that insiders without can pose threats to those whose communities they study. As insiders to the academy of the global North, fieldworkers go out and gather data, reporting to institutions can later use that information to inform the extraction land, labor, and other resources (Connell 2017).

Neither of these power dynamics in the academy are new; but I was struck by the effect of the collision of mutual mistrusts on this field research. Called to account by competing groups of feminists, I found myself rewriting questions and redirecting attention with each mistrust in mind. The result was an approach to feminism that I had not anticipated, one that focused me on the constitutive exclusions that shape all feminism, and which sometimes divide feminists from each other.

I begin by establishing the ways members of these communities have viewed me with suspicion, then explore how I navigated between both communities as I completed my research. I explain how I have crafted my research report to avoid selling women of

the lands out to the academy and the state that sponsors much of it. I then show how I use my academic knowledge to explore limitations on inclusion built into the organization of the women's lands, and then use the lessons of the women's lands to reflect in turn on the exclusions built into state universities. I point out the ways the WGS community sometimes misses opportunities to think critically about its own organization, especially the kinds of exclusions that both enable feminism and divide feminists from each other. I found that responding to mutual distrusts inspired me to consider the bases of feminism in accommodations to oppressive circumstances. What first appeared as a bug now looks like a feature. I conclude by reflecting on what each group of feminists, the insider and the outsiders, can learn from the other.

Problems in the Field

When I entered the field to begin research on the organization of women's lands, I found myself eyed with suspicion. I had been a part of the women's music festival scene for 12 years and had stayed on several of the women's lands; and so I was welcomed as a member of the community personally before I returned to the field as a professional. Still, I faced distrust the minute I put on my researcher hat. To help balance my researcher and community-participant identities, I chose semi-structured interviews, which often turned into facilitated conversations, as my main method of data collection. Like Brayboy and Deyhle (2000:165), who studied Native American communities as insiders, I found that entering the land and beginning to take notes immediately, playing the role of researcher from the outset of my visit, was off-putting to both my participants and me. I revised my approach by first entering a land (whether I had had a previous connection to it or not) as

a friend. I spent at least a few hours at each making introductions and just "hanging out" with women, without my research notebook or interview questions.

I needed to gain trust before obviously resuming the research because state-sponsored study was itself a problem for many residents of the lands. Most of the women I asked were willing to be interviewed, but the five who declined told me that it was my work for a public university that they distrusted. Their suspicion fell into three categories, all related to my work as a state agent:

1. fear that my project would expose the location of the lands, leaving the lands and the women on them open to boycotts, harm to the women, and land destruction from both men and anti-woman activists;
2. the expectation that I (and through me the state) should pay for women's time rather than merely sap their energy; and
3. fear that I might paint them all as a homogenous group of trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs in the current activist parlance); and thus alienate potential recruits among young feminists who might ultimately otherwise move to the lands and carry on their legacy.

Below, I will discuss and offer examples of the three types of suspicion.

Fear that I Might Expose the Lands to Harm

My first confrontation occurred in June 2018, at a music festival. I had been in email contact with Paula, who worked as vendor at the festival, and agreed to speak with me then. I found her at the booth where she sold pieces of meteorites from outside her home in the southwest United States. I explained who I was, and reminded her that I was collecting interviews for a dissertation and possible publication. She decided not to

participate and then talked *at* me for ten minutes. Her biggest fear was that any writing I did while I was employed by the state could be used in ways I had not intended and without my knowledge or acquiescence. She figured that the patriarchal state sought to harm these lands, and she was afraid that any reports I made would leave them vulnerable to attack. She was certain that I would publish a directory of the lands with addresses, and that men, trans women, and their allies would then come and "burn the lands down." Before I left the one-sided conversation, she cursed me with "20,000 years of bad lesbian karma," and threatened that I would be singly responsible for the destruction of all the lands and the lesbian community if I continued with my project in any way.

Though other women were less emphatic, and though no one else directly denounced me or my work, many of the women who granted me interviews also voiced fears of exposure. Often, the land women emailed me directions to their communities just two to three days before I visited. Until then, I often only knew the name of the city or airport closest to the land.

This fear, the women claim, results from hard experience. In one interview, Frankie recalls her first time at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, which in its 40-year history never provided a street address to attendees, only travels directions mailed out with the tickets. She and other women had to stand across the road to form a barrier between the festival and the men who would drive by the site at night to gawk and/or harass the attendees, waving shotguns and revving engines. The festival itself paid for off-duty officers from Oceana County, MI, (all affectionately named "Road Bob" by the security crew, after the very first patrol officer) to watch the road outside the main gate for 39 of its 40 years. This need arose after an editorial in a local newspaper in 1977

brought the festival to the attention of the Hell's Angels motorcycle group, which threatened harassment. Some hold up Bonnie Morris' (2016) book *The Disappearing L* as evidence that "biological" women's and lesbian's rights are being erased from colleges and universities and largely even society in general. They distrust men; and some of them distrust feminists who work for such male-dominated institutions as state universities.

Resistance to the state using me to exploit the lands with no compensation

Some women did not understand why I did not offer to pay them for their time; they assumed that the state had money that someone had decided not to offer them. In my research design, I could have included a modest $10 gift card as a thank you. I lacked funding for the project that would have allowed me to offer more. Given my relationship with some of the women in the women's community, I believed the $10 would have been seen at best unneeded and at worst patronizing and off-putting. However, there were women who refused my request for an interview altogether or later pulled out when they learned there was no payment. Just as I had approached Paula, I met Bridget first online and then in-person at a music festival. Bridget was a former college professor and felt strongly that my large state institution had money to pay for interviews but had refused to allow me to use it. She suggested I should ask them for that support, and that it was not fair to ask her to give me "my feminist education for free." She then later mentioned that she would work as an instructor during the following school year in a university local to me and suggested that I could interview her during one of her class periods, so that she could be paid for the time.

Kristin provides another example of the second group of women. When we first exchanged emails in spring 2018, I offered to meet her during her feminist weekend later

that year, and to help around the land before or after that. I had provided such labor before, during visits to other lands on workday weekends. All the women who lived on her land, and those from the surrounding community, came together to knock out small projects: repainting house sidings, working in gardens, splitting wood for use in winter. I was meaning to be helpful, not viewing the work I did as any type of payment in lieu of money. Kristin contacted me by email a few weeks before her fall feminist gathering, to see if I still planned to attend. At that point, I admitted that I had run out of time and travel money (since my dissertation project was unfunded); so, although I did not reveal this her, in the fall I was prioritizing lands where I might do more than one interview. In the same reply, I said that I would still love for her to be included in my project if she was willing via email or phone for an interview. She said she felt "disrespected" that I was no longer coming to visit and that she "no longer [does] interviews with grad students for free." She explained that she had had a number of students ask for her help with projects and most of them had "bagged" on her. While the other students' projects were not my responsibility, it helped me understand her motivation for refusing the interview. Although I was not viewing my helping with land work as payment, she viewed it as such and as a result decided against participation.

Fear of State-Sponsored Negative Publicity and Misunderstanding by the State

Women's lands were founded in part to provide space separate from state-sponsored patriarchy, which many feminists saw embodied in men, and to a lesser extent, by straight women. Many of the women's landers were eager to talk to me about that history and their current lives there, but were unsure why or where I planned to publish the information they gave. Some were concerned that my agenda included critique of the

lands for their exclusions of transwomen. Most remain open to cisgender "womyn-born-womyn" only; and they suspect that I was taught in college, through the "gender" part of coursework toward the women's and gender studies master's degree I had earned, to reject and critique that worldview. By living on women's land, they had separated themselves from the state as much as possible; they had no interest in being dragged back into its orbit to be derided as homogenous TERFs and used as examples of how not to do feminism. Rickie is an example of this. In her email to me, she agreed to the interview under certain conditions:

> You do not have a male with you. (Most of the time interview projects end up being projects led by males who have female co-workers who introduce themselves and show up with the males when they get here) [and]
>
> You are not associated with transgender activists, and will not be writing about transgender issues.

After I explained that I would be coming alone, but that it would not be possible to ignore a discussion of transgender "issues" and the ways they inform these women's spaces, Rickie never responded again.

In another example of this suspicion, Jean agreed in May 2018 to have me visit. I would fly to the southwest United States and interview her in late June. I was upfront about my project being a large part of my PhD work, although I was not explicit that the interview would be used for publication in academic journals as well. This was apparently an oversight on my part because, just six days before I was to visit, Jean sent

me a single sentence email explaining that she would speak to me but would not agree to be recorded because I could not assure her that her words would not be read by men or non-lesbians.

I followed up with another email to explain that, although I did have a male advisor, he would not see any raw interview data. I also offered not to use her direct quotes and explained that I was trying to get an overall picture of the women on the lands, rather than focusing on a specific woman. Her response was again a single sentence - she simply reminded me to bring a sleeping bag, pillows, and towels. She completely ignored the explanation I had sent.

I still flew to see Jean because I was also visiting another land in the area; and we had a wonderful visit. True to her word, she answered all questions and allowed me to take handwritten notes, but then ignored me anytime I mentioned using her comments in my dissertation. She helped me understand many nuances of women's lands; and her insights inform my analyses; but I cannot publish any of her words.

Women's Land Community Members are Right to be Suspicious

Rickie and Jean join many others in their suspicions of state-sponsored fieldwork. I understand them as responding both to their immediate situation and to the history of colonialism embedded in ethnographic research and are wary of the ways that scholars represent those whom they study as "other." I could very well treat their responses as an authentic but devalued knowledge, and the knowledge of myself and fellow researchers in the academy as "the gold standard" (Connell 2017:26). Feminist research methodology has addressed this problem, but I must still research with an eye toward graduation and publication, which might then lead to a teaching post, perhaps one within another state

university (Wolfe 1996:3). Although feminist researchers focus on cultivating ties to their participants, doing research 'with' rather than 'on' them, ultimately all data, including interviews and fieldnotes, becomes fuel for the "ethnographic mill." The words shared by those whom we study become data for analysis and remain under our control once we leave the field and return to the ivory tower, process our fieldnotes, conduct our analyses, address our findings to fellow scholars, and produce publications that feed careers and increase paychecks in a conventional labor market (Stacey 1988:22). In Connell's terms, we take raw knowledge exhumed from the periphery back to the core, to be analyzed, processed, and theorized before being published in journals using citations from other scholars in the global North. Those in the periphery have historically had little to say about how we represent them (Connell 2017:26).

The land women's fear that I would misunderstand or revile them, and/or expose their lands to state harm, is an instance of the core/periphery conundrum in my own research. The women intentionally left the core, what they saw as a world represented by men and the patriarchy, for the periphery of unmarked rural women's lands, to create a new type of community. They were not so eager to engage with a researcher who depends upon the core for her salary and career aspirations, who might trade their secrets for her advancement.

The land women are right to be suspicious of me. Working for the state and academia, the women view me as not fully trustworthy and throughout my visits to their lands for this project, I felt a distance in my interactions with them that I had not experienced on previous visits; I felt myself becoming an insider without. In the next section I turn my attention to my academic community, the ways I feel like an outsider

within while doing my research, and how the community often perpetuates the very same exclusionary boundary work that it calls the women's community to account for doing.

Problems on the Job

When I began my scholarly engagement with the women's and gender studies literature in a master's program in fall 2009, I entered the academy as an outsider, tied to women's-only communities and music festivals for 15 years, with little connection to any profession or state institution; I became an outsider within (Collins 1986: S14). I had been a part of women's-only spaces for close to 15 years. I have spent time at women's-only music festivals in different U.S. states. For instance, I spent a month volunteering as part of the carpentry crew building the infrastructure at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 2014. I have camped on several permanent women's lands as I travel across the country. Through these experiences, and the use of social media and private listservs, I was able to develop my relationships with the women I met in these spaces and have visited with them through the years. These relationships eventually formed my initial pool of interviews.

My participation in the women's community forms the basis of my status as outsider within the academy. Collins (1986:S14) writes of the black woman outsider within sociology, a discipline that was formed largely by and about straight, professional class, white men. Though more easily integrated into the academy than many black women have found themselves to be, I still find myself an outsider because of my ties to these rural, nonprofessional, women's-only, lesbian-dominated communities known for an essentialist view of sexual dichotomy. In academic circles, I often find my community to be object of condescension or derision, at best assumed to be a misguided relic of

another era and at worst painted as inherently transphobic. In her article on feminist exclusionary spaces, Browne (2009:542) notes that queer and trans scholarship on the topic of separatist spaces often cites the now-ended Michigan Womyn's Music Festival as an (and often the only) example of "essentialist thinking (in contrast to gender fluidity where male/female boundaries are questioned) and trans oppression because it does not recognize trans women as womyn" because of its "womyn-born-womyn" ethos.[11] Sex-segregated spaces like Michfest were where I first encountered a large proportion of women of actively resisting and living outside of gender norms typically assigned to women: women with beards, fat women, those who could pass as (and were in some instances trans) men both on-and-off the land, and women in stereotypically female dress and mannerisms engaging in traditionally "male" trades like construction, electric, and land maintenance. This gender smashing on the lands is in contrast to the academic community, which is currently interested in smashing the notion of dimorphic sex. The lands are interested in undoing gender stereotypes while not questioning the idea of dimorphic sex, and the exclusion of men from the land based on their biological sex is

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[11] In 2014, after a call for a boycott of Michfest 2014, festival founder Lisa Vogel wrote a public statement on Facebook about the intention of the festival, speaking specifically to the festival experience for women and girls and the festival's thoughts on transgender inclusion. For the full statement, see "Statement from Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," http://www.facebook.com/lisa.vogel.587/posts/10152163431086330:0.

institutionalized on most of them. Conversations with me about transgender inclusion or exclusion, like conversations about men, on the lands was rare.

I did not include a question in my interviews with the women about transgender inclusion because, except for one land, I knew that their definition of woman did not include transgender women and I did not want to risk losing any rapport I had built with them. Several events seemed to confirm my suspicion that I risked losing rapports on the lands. During non-interview conversations, a few women asked me, almost as if I could bring "news from the outside world," about transgender politics happening elsewhere. They asked what my thoughts were or what the climate of the world outside of their community was toward trans and gender politics. As if on cue, when those conversations would come up, usually one or more women sitting within earshot would drift away or outright say they were leaving because they didn't wish to be involved in contentious topics, that the topic "didn't interest them," or that they lived on the land to get away from conversations like these. In at least one instance, a woman denied my interview request because of an unwillingness to talk about transgender women's inclusion on the lands. As noted above, Rickie never responded to my request to set up an interview after I refused to honor her request that I not write about transgender issues even though I assured I was not associated with any sort of activist group.

Even so, the trans-exclusivity of the land women is often the first interest of scholars when I talk about this project. Like Luis (2018:188), who wrote a book based on research at four women's lands, I observed overt transphobia only minimally while in the field. Unlike Luis, I do not disavow or socially distance myself from the lands or accuse

them of "scapegoating trans bodies," and because of that I often feel like I am eyed with suspicion.

The rise of scholarly interest in the subversion of naturalized, dichotomous sex has empowered not only trans scholars but also many feminists who support them and hope to end dismissals of and attacks on transgender existence. In this scholar-activist context, academics whose research seems dismissive, derogatory, or otherwise harmful toward the transgender community have been met with swift pushback both within and outside the university setting.

As one example of this boundary policing, which forms the context of my own work, Rachel Tuvel faced swift and very personal backlash upon the publication in 2017 of her philosophy article in *Hypatia* about the relationship between transgender and trans-racial identities. Examples of censure of her included: 800 academics signed a petition demanding her article's retraction; the entire editorial board of *Hypatia* apologized for the article's acceptance; and Tuvel was called various names online like "racist," transphobic," a "TERF", a "disgusting person," "Becky," and "Rebecky Tuvel" (Tuvel 2017:274).

In a second example, Lisa Littman published an article in *PLoS ONE,* a multi-disciplinary open access, peer reviewed journal, investigating what she called "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" in teenagers, surveying parents of teens who have reported experience of this phenomenon. The article suggested that social media may play a part in ROGD (Littman 2018). Again, reaction from scholars and others on social media were immediate. People questioned her descriptive study methodology and accused her of "using 'transphobic dog whistles' and engaging in hate speech" (Bartlett 2019). *PLoS*

ONE decided to do a "post-publication re-review" of the article based largely on anonymous comments to the journal, which were then picked up on social media, in response to "the threat—whether stated or unstated—that more social-media backlash would rain down upon *PLOS One* if action were not taken" (Flier 2019). Ultimately, Littman's article was republished in March 2019, with an added apology to the "trans and gender variant community" for not fully taking their interests into account when deciding to publish the research (Heber 2019).

Both attempts at policing other academics failed to have the intended effect of pulling either article from publication. The conflict however, was a reminder of just how narrow is the range of scholarly inquiry into gender transition that can appear in print without drawing rebuke or at least suspicion. It certainly left me conscious of impressions that my own scholarship can make on my peers.

As both an insider without as I study the women's communities and an outsider within the academy, I walk a tightrope, seeking to honor two groups of feminists who do not always respect each other. These communities differ in their expectations of me, and each distrusts the other. In what follows, I examine each in turn with an eye toward the compromises that feminists make in their unequal social contexts. Can feminism do without exclusions?

Compromises within Feminist Communities

I have laid out the suspicions that members of each community expressed about my work. Land women voiced fear that academics could do their communities harm. Some said that, because I am tied to the state and its patriarchal culture that hurts women, there is no way I can do research, even if I try to do it *with* them rather than on them, that

would not result in exposure and misunderstanding of them. And they are not wrong. Scholars of women and gender do well to bear in mind the consequence of our work within and for the patriarchal, colonialist, and capitalist state, which can range, from exposure to criticism, all the way to physical harm to both the participants and their lands.

We scholars run the rat race of competition for jobs, publications, and career advancement, all of which women's-landers left behind. To earn my doctorate, I attend to questions of inclusion that interest fellow scholars, which leads me to offer critiques of these lands for failing to measure up to the inclusiveness of academic feminism.

The same pressure limits my ability to reverse the critical gaze. As a graduate student and adjunct instructor working for a state institution, my position is precarious. In my current situation, I am reluctant to cause a stir on behalf of the feminism lived on those lands, for fear that I might alienate colleagues, and risk my employment and source of income. If I take an academic job on a tenure track, I will end up offering up the knowledge these women give me in exchange for publications within the "publish-or-perish" model of academia. As noted in the examples above, there are consequences for stepping outside the bounds of theories of sex and gender, and ethics of fieldwork on marginal communities, and on the politics of working for the state, that seem current to colleagues at the moment.

I feel suspicion from the women's and gender studies academic community because I not only research but also participate in these women's land communities, most of which do not include transwomen on their lands, and which remain unintentionally homogenous while WGS strains for greater diversity. And the WGS community is also

not wrong. My academic training has focused my research the ways these land communities could work to become more intentionally inclusive without compromising their values, which would help them sustain themselves into the future.

Having a foot in both communities allows me to be responsive to each. By attending to the criticism of exclusivity the academics make of these communities, I can offer strategies to them on how to become more intentionally inclusive so they can continue to be sustained long term. By taking the critiques and fears of the women's lands seriously, I become a more empathetic researcher and more critical of the political and professional bases of academic feminism. While it is true that I must meet certain requirements if I want to secure a job and work toward tenure in academia, keeping in mind the critiques from the women's lands helps me remain critical of the system that employs me. They remind me to continue to work to make it better. Their critiques also help me become a better instructor. They remind me that feminism is not only an intellectual exercise, but instead something to practice every day, which daily practice requires compromises that professional scholars may not understand.

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CONCLUSION

This dissertation has forced me to take a more nuanced look at the women's lands that I love, and for that I am grateful. I am able to see them more clearly in all their complexities, compromises, and unintentional exclusions. Certainly, the lands have more growth to do around issues of inclusivity, if they want to survive, because the new generation of young feminists expect that inclusivity. However, academic feminists could also give the lands, and other communities they feel are not doing feminism right, a bit of a break. All feminist groups wind up compromising with oppressive contexts that sustain them, whether those be rural outposts or state institutions. They all exclude some people, deliberately or not, because all feminist groups must make compromises within the communities to which they answer, and the exclusions made by the women's and gender studies academic community are not inherently less damaging than the exclusions made by these lands. That said, these lands were and still are important to me, and I feel are very much still relevant as spaces that help girls and women celebrate their identities as women and grow more fully into that identity – which is what they set out to do initially.

As explored in Chapter Two, the women on the lands I visited tended to be homogenous – all the women I interviewed were white; most had no obvious physical limitations; all who disclosed their sexuality identified as lesbian or bisexual; and all the women who agreed to an interview were cisgender. One transgender woman agreed to an interview by email but then never returned my survey. Little of this homogeneity was by design. Rather, due to the singular focus on gender, the original founders of the lands missed the way race, class, and ability might keep women of color, those with disabilities, and old women from visiting or living permanently on the lands. Also, as

women came to the lands, they brought their friends and by doing so reproduced the lack of diversity within their friendship networks. Relative to the more formally organized, widely advertised, and popular women's music festivals, the lands came under little pressure to diversify.

That the lands are not as inclusive as they could be would not be news to many of the women I interviewed. It is now becoming a problem because, as noted in Chapter Three, most of the women on the lands are older; some have left; and some have died. Unless they draw a younger crowd, both to provide assistance and to maintain the population, the lands are in danger of closing. The question from the women is how to bring in a more diverse group without giving up their founding vision. To that, I reply with the suggestion to take a cue from Black feminist writings on need for intersectionality, and from the music festivals that continue to work toward diversity and ask young feminists off the lands what would make them want to come. From there, the women on the lands can make intentional changes to draw a more diverse crowd – even if the change starts with the day or weekend events the lands might offer – while still honoring the original purpose of the lands which was to celebrate, uplift, and provide a safe space for women. Making the changes might mean partnering with outside non-profit organizations that pay to upgrade infrastructure, which might also be a first step toward opening up these lands to a wider community.

Women founded the first of these lands amidst a thriving women's community, a radical and then cultural feminism. Bookstores, both an underground and public network of newspapers and magazines, coffee houses, medical centers, and music and political events run by and for women exploded in numbers. These spaces offered ways for the

lands to advertise by word of mouth, through notes tacked to bulletin boards, and in feminist newspapers. If the journals kept at some of the lands are accurate, then we know that women travelled to these lands to find community and rest, but also to use them as safe havens, as they travelled across country. As cultural feminism faded, so too did chances to advertise the lands. I found Shewolf's guidebook online by pure chance. Had I not stumbled across it, then I might never have learned that these lands still existed. To be sure, some women on these lands connect to and stay in touch with each other through online message boards and other social media; and some even have websites. Still, many of the new, younger women who join the boards learn of them through word of mouth at feminist gatherings first. Using pipelines so narrow limits the reach of the lands to a new generation. As noted in Chapter Three, it is becoming hard for some women to maintain their lands as they age absent any formal aging organizations to help with maintenance, transportation, and daily living activities. Many of the lands were initially created by women in their 20s and 30s and not designed to support aging in place. The women on these lands would like to increase their outreach and membership to a younger group of women so the lands can sustain themselves into the future but so far, younger women have been slow in responding to any outreach for permanent living.

Part of the hesitation to advertise in magazines such as *Lesbian Connection* or more mainstream LGBT publications, redesign themselves into a cohousing community model, or to participate in academic research, results from the fear that they will be harmed, that their lands may be burned down, for not sharing the most current beliefs at any given moment. Many of the women on the lands believe, and many lands were built on the belief, that womanhood is determined strictly through sex as assigned at birth, and

that gender but not sex is an illusion built on stereotypes designed to keep women in second place to men. They focus on abolishing sex stereotypes (what academics and the mainstream public calls gender) without compromising on the idea that biological sex is real and essential. On this matter, they are out of step with the current understandings of feminists in WGS. As noted in Chapter 4 of this project, there have been real consequences for academics who publish articles questioning the currently accepted beliefs about sex and gender; outside of academia, the public has tried to censure celebrities who also hold the wrong beliefs – popular novelist J.K. Rowling serves as a current example – and these celebrities find themselves labeled as trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFS) in an attempt to silence them in the current #CancelCulture moment. The women on the lands are right to be worried.

This is where I turn my critique to the women's and gender studies academic feminists, and ask them to turn their ideological purity requirement down a notch or seven. While academic feminists point fingers at other feminist groups not getting the movement right, they miss the ways they participate in the very systems that the women on the lands call us to dismantle. While academic feminists point fingers, they also survive by accepting money from the state in return for doing its bidding. Many academic institutions were built on land stolen from indigenous people; and academic feminists earn degrees, take jobs, and work toward tenure by exploiting marginalized communities (like the land women I interviewed). They do that by accepting profits from use of lands stolen from First Nations; and by using people as objects of research, as grist for the academic publishing mill. They also pass on ideological purity tests to the students they teach, which assessment becomes part of the class-sorting mechanisms of higher

education. I am also complicit in this system, and I aim to reduce that complicity no less than I do to challenge essentialism and the inadvertent exclusions that follow from it on the women's lands.

No one group of feminists ever gets it all right. All groups must respond to the pressures of the communities where they operate. I have learned much from both of these kinds of feminism. I love the land communities and land women because they helped me find my confidence and watched me grow up through my 20s and into my 30s. Some of my most important relationships have started and are sustained on women's land and through women's community events. At the same time, I also crave a diversity that is missing from these lands and value the scholarship that addresses that. That recognition is due in large part to the ways I was trained to think critically about my world, during my time in academia. That critical thinking makes me want to encourage these lands to be more inclusive. I needed these lands at 20, and I know there are new 20-year-old baby dykes who need them now. By pushing for more inclusivity and helping the lands find safe ways to increase their membership, but also calling out the academic feminists who would demonize the land women for not compromising on their main ideology and therefore discouraging young women to visit the lands, I hope I can partner with both groups to help sustain these lands into the future.

TABLES

Table 1. Descriptions of the Lands Mentioned in the Article.

Name	Location	# of Women	Size	Description	Amenities
Aspenland	Southwest	6-10		Very steep, dry, and rocky; unpaved, dirt requiring a 4-wheel drive vehicle but no drivable roads through the community; adobe-style houses; no clear-cut paths through the land; 30 minutes from a large town	None; spotty cell phone service; propane stoves; solar lights; collected rainwater for showering and filtered drinking; composting toilets
Balsamland	Midwest	1-5	80 acres	Single-story farmhouse surrounded by forest designated for rustic camping; gravel driveway to the house; fields left for hay to generate income; former wooden outbuildings include a sauna	Running water and electricity; internet in the farmhouse; no cell phone service; composting toilets outside for visitor use, flush

				with wood-heated stove and stone barn; 15 minutes from a small town	toilets inside used in the winter
Birchland	Northeast	6-10		Two-story farmhouse surrounded by fields designated for rustic camping; one large barn (formerly) with rooms to live in; gravel county road that ends at Birchland; 30 minutes from large city	Running water, electricity, and internet in the house; no cell phone service; composting toilets outside for visitor use
Elmland	Midwest	1-5	151 acres	Two-story farmhouse surrounded by fields designated for rustic camping; small lake for swimming, boating, and fishing; one large wooden barn; 2 cabins available for rent; paved county road to entrance of parking lot, no roads on the land 15 minutes from a small town	Running water, electricity, and internet in the house; spotty cell phone service; collected rainwater shower and composting toilets outside for visitor use; propane stove and refrigerator, and kitchen

					supplies in the wooden barn for visitor use
Hickoryland	South	16-20	240 acres	Single-story farmhouse used as community space with hot tub out back; one metal, one wooden barn for storage; various types of residents' houses connected by gravel roads, set back into the surrounding forest; cemetery for former land residents; pond; 45 minutes to a large town	Running water and electricity and full kitchen and bathroom in the community house; spotty cell phone service; internet available for private homes
Magnolialand	South	11-15	N/A	Former resort community by the ocean; beach-front cottages in a small town	Magnolialand was mentioned by an interviewee; it closed in the 1980s

Red Cedarland	Northwest	6-10		Two-story roundhouse used as a community house surrounded by a pine forest; gravel driveway ends at the roundhouse; various residents' cabins built in the forest with natural trails connecting them; communal fire pit; stream flowing through the land; 45 minutes from a large city	Running water and electricity, internet, and full kitchen and bathroom in the community house; no cell phone service
Walnutland	South	26-30	108 acres	Neighborhood of privately-owned homes on 2-acre lots, connected by gravel roads; one home is designated as the community meeting house and visitor quarters; all homes are surrounded by forest; 60 minutes from a large city	Running water and electricity, and full kitchen and bathroom in the community house; no cell phone service; internet available for private homes

Table 2. Participant Demographics.

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Relationship Status
Aspenland N=5			
Eleanor	75	White	Single
Harpo	58	White	Partnered with Judy
Judy	58	White	Partnered with Harpo
Margaret	74	White	Partnered
Patricia	Undiscolsed	White	Single
Balsamland N=1			
Jackie	Undisclosed	White	Unknown
Birchland N=4			
Amy	47	White	Single
Lori	61	White	Single
Raven	63	White	Single
Sparrow	50	White	Single
Elmland N=2			
JoAnn	Undisclosed	White	Widow
Sheryl	61	White	Single
Email N=2			
Colleen	66	White	Single
Nancy	69	White	Unknown
Hickoryland N=8			

Doris	80	White	Single
Faye	76	White	Single
Joyce	71	White	Single
Paula	Undisclosed	White	Partnered with Sherry
Sherry	79	White	Partnered with Paula
Tammy	59	White	Single
Teresa	82	White	Single
Thia	60	White	Single
National Women's Music Fest N=1			
Frankie	65	White	Partnered
Red Cedarland N=5			
Anne	75	White	Single
Jem	76	White	Single
Mary	34	White	Single
Maude	Undisclosed	White	Single
Saja	57	White	Single
Walnutland N=8			
Bonnie	Undisclosed	White	Unknown
Donna	70	White	Single
Johanna	67	White	Single
Lisa	70	White	Single
Louise	Undisclosed	White	Single

Marion	71	White	Partnered
Millie	70	White	Single
Wendy	76	White	Single

APPENDICES

Appendix A. List of Interview Questions.

1. Tell me about yourself:

1a. Where did you grow up?

1b. What was your home life like?

1c. What types of school(s) did you attend?

2. Tell me about your main caretakers:

2a. Who were your main guardian(s) growing up?

2b. Were you raised in a religious household?

2c. What economic class would you say your family was?

3. Describe your first experience with feminism:

3a. Where did you first encounter feminism?

3b. Did you have a "type" of feminism that most resonated with you?

3c. Why did feminism resonate with you?

3d. With whom did you find to talk about feminist issues?

4. Let's talk about women's separatist spaces:

4a. Where do you first learn about these spaces?

4b. Which spaces have you lived in?

4c. Tell me about your current community.

4ca. What is daily life here like?

4cb. How often does your entire community meet?

4cc. For what purposes?

4cd. Who decides the “rules” of your community?

4ce. Are there any specific holidays or rituals the community shares?

4cf. How often are Feminist and/or separatist politics discussed?

4cg. How many women lived in your community in the beginning?

4ch. How many live here now?

4ci. What made you want to live here?

4cj. What makes you stay?

4ck. What does you see as the value of women’s separatist spaces?

4cl. What is it like getting old in this community?

(If the participant currently lives in a separatist community, skip to Q5)

4d. Tell me about your former community.

4da. Why did you choose to live there?

4db. How many women lived in your community in the beginning?

4dc. How many live there now?

4dd. What made you leave?

5. How much of a responsibility do the women who live in women’s separatist spaces have to pass on their feminist knowledge to younger feminists?

5a. What types of knowledge(s) do you want to pass on?

5b. How do the women in the women’s separatist space in which you are involved currently interact with a younger generation of feminists?

5c. What do you hope the younger generation of feminists learn from you?

5d. What do you think is the future of separatist spaces?

Appendix B. Codebook.

Descriptive Statistics

n=39

- Age
  - 30-40: 1
  - 41-50: 2
  - 51-60: 5
  - 61-70: 10
  - 71-80: 10
  - 81-85: 2
  - No Answer: 9
- Race:
  - White/Caucasian: 39
- Gender:
  - Cisgender: 39
  - Transgender: 0; 1 woman initially agreed, then never returned my survey
- Sex:
  - Female: 39
- Sexuality (open ended question):
  - Lesbian: 28
  - Butch Lesbian: 1
  - Femme Lesbian: 2
  - Bisexual: 2

- No Answer: 6

- Chosen Sexuality Label Important?
  - Yes: 21
  - No: 3
  - No Answer: 15

Codes

Diversity

Mental Health

Not being a Topic of Conversation

Physical Health

Race

Recognition of Privilege

Self-Sufficiency

- Aging
  - Accessibility of the Lands
  - Aging in Place
  - Caretaking of Each Other
  - Emergency Procedures/Preparedness on the Land
- End of Life Care
  - Healthcare
  - Limits to Caretaking of Residents by Other Residents
  - Physical Limitations
  - Thoughts/Beliefs About the Value of Old Women

    - Treatment of old women by younger land members

- Why Women Come to the Lands to Live/Visit
    - Energy
    - Feel Empowered
        - Find a Community of Like-Minded Women
    - Freedom
        - Gain a Fuller Sense of Self-Knowledge
        - Lands as Places of Safety/Refuge
    - Leave a Male-Dominated Society
    - Refuge
        - Respite from the World
    - To be in Nature
        - To be Surrounded by Female Energy
        - To be who you are
        - To Escape Male Energy
        - To escape patriarchy
    - To Experience “Women’s Culture”