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(In) equality in the outdoors: gender perspective on recreation and tourism media in the Swedish mountains

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines gender differences in participation in various outdoor recreation and tourism activities in the Swedish mountain region, and how these activities are portrayed from a gender perspective on the websites of five major tourist destinations. Spending time in nature has been linked to better health and well-being, and this article contributes to research on the unequal opportunities women and men have in taking part of such advantages. Results show that there is a gender difference in both participation and in representation of outdoor recreation. The observed gender difference is not only in line with the traditional heteronormativity but also suggests that new trends in outdoor recreation are further favoring traditionally masculine modes of engagement with nature. This suggests the need for re-thinking not only gender norms but also human relationships with nature in general.

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Outdoor recreation participation; gender norms; tourism media; Sweden

Introduction
Participation and visibility of women in various spheres of society have been among the two main analytical foci of feminist studies, since these provide a clear insight in the levels of gender equality (Jónasdóttir & von der Fehr, 2005). Our paper investigates participation and visibility of women in outdoor recreation, by looking at the case of mountain areas in Sweden. The issue of individuals’ participation in outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism in general deserves attention for at least two major reasons. First, spending time in nature is linked to better health and well-being (Bedimo-Rung, Mowen, & Cohen, 2005; Doherty, Lemieux, & Canally, 2014). Second, in the context of Anthropocene, growing urbanization and disconnectedness from nature in the everyday life, outdoor recreation helps promoting environmental awareness and, consequently, environmentally-friendly behaviour and policies (Cocks & Simpson, 2015; Kil, Holland, & Stein, 2014). However, if men have better opportunities to participate in nature-based activities, it can be argued that women risk exclusion from important elements that connects to quality of life.

Outdoor recreation in backcountry areas is perhaps one of the few strongholds of gender-specified roles in Western societies. Mountains or remote national parks have been traditionally imagined and marketed as environments to be ‘conquered’ and ‘tamed’ by men (Cronon, 1996; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994). More concretely, Northern landscapes are particularly marketed as wild, rugged and untamed and, thus, oriented towards the male tourist gaze (Gunnarsdóttir, 2011; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b). Along with this, such tourist activities as shopping, spa, sunbathing, picnicking, spending time with family and friends, are most often marketed towards women, perpetuating © 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
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the normative discourses of beauty, motherhood and care in leisure (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Wearing, 1998). McNiel, Harris, and Fondren (2012, p. 41) state that ‘[g]ender socialization regarding wilderness recreation is shaped by structural constraints, such as cultural beliefs about women’s “places” that can lead to overt or subtle gender bias that constrains some women’s participation in these activities’.

One way to expose and better understand persistent gender norms in participation and representation of outdoor recreation is to look at commercial media. The attention towards representation of gender roles in marketing has been visible in academic research for a long time (e.g. Collins, 2011; Goffman, 1979; Klassen, Jasper, & Schwartz, 1993; Larsen, 1997; Rose, 2001). The centrality of the visual in Western cultures, and the importance of analysing visual representations, in order to get a unique insight into values, norms and practices, have been widely emphasized before, including the tourism context (e.g. Rakić & Chambers, 2011; Rose, 2001; Urry, 1990). It can be argued that examining media visualizations of women and men in the outdoors is crucial when attempting to understand and, possibly, counteract stereotyped perceptions of gender performances in outdoor recreation and tourism.

In our article we bring together a supply and demand side perspective in the domains of outdoor recreation and tourism (in its nature-based form) – heavily overlapping, but not synonymous concepts. Outdoor recreation can generally be understood as leisure recreational activities occurring outdoors in urban and rural environments (Jenkins & Pigram, 2004). Nature-based tourism, in its turn, has been defined as tourist activities in nature outside one’s ordinary neighbourhood (Fredman, Wall Reinius, & Lundberg, 2009). The factors of travel distance, place of origin, time frame, commercialization and local tradition are often pointed out to distinguish between the two (Fredman, Stenseke, & Sandell, 2014). From the supply perspective, however, this difference becomes irrelevant, since commercial tourist entities provide their services and market them indiscriminatorily to all visitors (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017). Furthermore, it has been noticed that outdoor recreation in Sweden is increasingly commercialized, further blurring the difference between outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism (Fredman, Wall-Reinius et al., 2014). In our paper, therefore, we emphasize the concept of outdoor recreation when talking about the demand side, i.e. data related to the behaviour of Swedish recreationists, since it includes both tourism activities and activities clearly outside of the tourism spectrum (e.g. walking with a dog or jogging in the neighbourhood). Discussions about the supply side, i.e. mountain destinations and their promotional media, however, are fully positioned within the tourism domain.

In our paper, we aim to contribute to the existing research on gender representations in tourism media by focusing on promotional images of mountain destinations, grounded in statistical data on outdoor recreation participation in Sweden. We also position it into a larger discussion of people’s changing relationships with nature. The analysis combines descriptive and inferential statistical methods with visual research methods. The contribution of our paper, therefore, lies in bringing together the scholarship domains of gender and outdoor recreation with gender and media, empirically supported with the insights from the Nordic context. The central research questions are:

RQ1. Are there gender differences in outdoor recreation participation in the Swedish mountain region?

RQ2. Are there gender differences in the representations of outdoor recreation on the websites of Sweden’s five largest mountain destinations?

RQ3. Is there a connection between gender differences in outdoor recreation participation and the gender representations of outdoor recreation activities on destinations’ websites?

Sweden offers an interesting case for this type of enquiry. On the one hand, Sweden has long been known as a global leader in gender equality (always in the top five of Global Gender Gap Index ranking together with other Nordic countries (WEF, 2016). On the other hand, when it comes to specific sectors of the economy, gender equality is often taken for granted without strong empirical evidence, which could be the case with participation in outdoor recreation, and the reflection of gender equality in tourism marketing media. We focus on the case of the Swedish mountain region due to the traditional importance and a growing popularity of this destination type, both
domestically and internationally (Fredman et al., 2014; Sandell & Sörlin, 2008). Although this study is situated within a Swedish context, the findings hold relevance from an international perspective as it contributes to general knowledge on gender representation in tourism and outdoor recreation in Western societies.

**Literature review**

In our analysis we utilize the poststructuralist feminist approach to media and leisure, with a specific focus on outdoor recreation/nature-based tourism. More precisely, we look at the articulations of normativity within the tourist media regarding women’s places and roles in the outdoors. Norms and normalization processes have been central to feminist theory and activism, striving for inclusion and equality in various societal spheres. Works of Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler were particularly insightful in understanding and challenging dominant gender norms. According to Butler (1990, p. 20) one of the major tasks of feminist theory in general is to ‘… deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender’. Foucault’s (e.g. 1990) work helped shifting the perception of power as a top-down repressive dynamic to productive power, based on endless generation and circulation of knowledge about the world. Feminist theorists have extensively used these insights to analyse the disciplinary power, which establishes norms of ‘good’ and ‘appropriate’ behaviour and categories of subjects. They have looked, for example, at the role of institutions (families, schools), art and media in producing and reinforcing certain gender norms, which are internalized by members of given societies (Spade & Willse, 2016). Among these are the gender norms regarding leisure and recreation, which are the focus of our paper.

**Gender norms and outdoor recreation**

Access to recreation is not equally distributed across society, and socio-demographic characteristics play their role in the prevalence and extent of this access (Shores, Scott, & Floyd, 2007). Constraints to recreation are more pronounced for people who are in non-dominant groups, and gender has long been established as an important variable (Shores et al., 2007). Application of feminist perspectives to leisure has helped understanding barriers to leisure as experienced by women (e.g. Hargreaves, 1989; Henderson, 1991; Wearing, 1998). It has been argued, for example, that in patriarchal societies, women’s leisure is valued less than men’s and, consequently, women tend to prioritize others’ leisure over their own or believe that they are not entitled to it (Hargreaves, 1989). Due to their caretaking role within a family, involving a bulk of unpaid domestic labour, often in addition to formal employment, women tend to face stronger leisure constraints related to time, finances and social acceptance (Wearing, 1998).

In addition to the general issues of access to recreation, women face a plethora of other barriers when it comes to types of ‘approved’ leisure, and specifically outdoor recreation. Here, the positioning of women in relation to nature/outdoors has been particularly problematic and paradoxical, not only with patriarchal, but also feminist ontologies. Within the standard (and in itself problematic) nature/culture ontological divide, women have been associated with the natural (i.e. primitive, uncontrolled, undisciplined), as opposed to cultural/male realm (Moore, 2011; Ortner, 1972). Within this logic, however, women are to be confined to the indoor domain, while men perform the role of ‘tamers’ of nature, both indoors and outdoors. This has resulted in a reactionary feminist trajectory of distancing women from this narrative, known as ‘the feminist flight from nature’ (Alaimo, 2016). Thus, the ecofeminism approach, on the other hand, aimed to capitalize on aligning women and nature, pointing out at the linkage between women’s oppression and environmental problems, and looking for new ways to re-inhabit natural spaces (Alaimo, 2016). Overall, up until the last few decades, women’s involvement with the outdoors remained complex in theory and largely invisible in practice (Henderson, 1996).
Studies on women’s participation in the outdoors, for example in the American context, show that women express higher concern about their skill levels, body image, fear of harassment, fear of embarrassment and not fitting in (Henderson, 1996; Henderson & King, 1998; Shores et al., 2007). The latter is particularly important when the social context deems certain activities as more appropriate for men than for women (Warren & Loeffler, 2006). Those women who do succeed as outdoor professionals are often perceived as ‘superwomen’, thus, suggesting that being a woman in the outdoors, especially in a leadership position, is something outside the norm (Haluza-DeLay & Dyment, 2003; Henderson, 1996). Despite women’s participation in the outdoor leisure and adventure environment is increasing in the Western societies, they are still a minority in what is seen as a male domain (Boniface, 2006; McNiel et al., 2012).

Gender norms and tourism media

Tourism marketing media has had a long-standing reputation of lagging behind when it comes to visualizing gender equality (Alessio & Johannsdóttir, 2011; Gunnarsdóttir, 2011; Jenkins, 2003; Khan, 2009; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a; Rakić & Chambers, 2011; Sirakaya & Sonmez, 2000). Although substantial progress has been made in the Western tourism media domain, there are indications that certain gender stereotypes still persist and, thus, need further exposure (McNiel et al., 2012; Zink & Kane, 2015). Contributions from tourism scholarship exposed gendered representations in various recreational settings (e.g. Jenkins, 2003; Khan, 2009; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a; Rakić & Chambers, 2011; Sirakaya & Sonmez, 2000). According to Khan (2009), tourist destinations have typically been marketed as appealing to either females or males, and tourism advertisements often reinforce heteronormative patriarchal discourses, where ‘men act and women appear’ (Berger, 1972, p. 47). In this regard, various aspects of recreation become masculinized or feminized due to the ways in which tourism is marketed.

Many factors can contribute to gender socialization, but different types of media are ever so influential due to their power to generate and solidify gender role norms (Larsen, 1997). In today’s image-conscious world, images are of great importance when it comes to the way reality is perceived and understood (Zink & Kane, 2015). Despite a significant progress, there is evidence that in advertising media, women are still underrepresented and/or tend to be portrayed in conventional roles (Collins, 2011).

Images have always been a highly important part of tourism, be those brochures, postcards or photographs shared through social media (Gunnarsdóttir, 2011). The way in which gender is articulated as a part of the social ‘reality’ has significant implications for the general development, staging and marketing of tourism. Therefore, tourism processes are gendered in their construction, presentation and consumption (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996). More concretely, tourism processes are constructed out of a gendered society, and, consequently, major aspects of tourism-related development and activities embody gender relations.

According to Khan (2009), tourism marketing in the Western world has traditionally been male-oriented and, indeed, the dominance of masculine ethics is still visible. For example, women are typically shown not as travellers, but rather as attractive and welcoming hostesses (Khan, 2009). Moreover, research on gender depiction in tourism emphasizes that women tend to be portrayed in decorative roles (Jenkins, 2003; Khan, 2009; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994). Pictures of attractive women are especially vivid in promotional media of exotic destinations, where sexualized bodies are routinely used to illustrate the desirability of a place (Jenkins, 2003; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994).

As women’s role and status in both family and society have evolved dramatically in the Western countries in the last century, women have become a substantial part of the labour force and, consequently, leisure consumption as well. Although it could be expected that tourism advertisements, targeting a generation of well-educated and independent working women, would actively depart from old gender tropes, this has hardly been the case (Jenkins, 2003; Margaryan & Zherdev, 2011; Sirakaya & Sonmez, 2000).
Media research on nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation advertising has found that these often focus on individualism and are primarily grounded in the ideology of white male dominance (Cronon, 1996; Hirschman, 2003; Kinnaird & Hall, 1996; McNiel et al., 2012). Being out in the 'wild' still means overcoming challenges, such as fear, exposure and pain, becoming self-sufficient, testing oneself against nature’s elements, and the solo performance is seen as an ideal (Cronon, 1996; Hirschman, 2003; Saayman & Viljoen, 2016). Advertisements of women’s place in the outdoors, on the other hand, are less straightforward and more complex. For instance, in a visual analysis of outdoor recreation magazines in New Zealand, Zink and Kane (2015) found that women are significantly underrepresented in these images. Similarly, McNiel et al. (2012) found that women’s participation in outdoor activities is shown as short in duration and lacking physical performance, whereas men’s participation is portrayed as a source of challenge, demanding strength and endurance. Women in the outdoors tend to be visualized in limited roles, often together with men, who are represented as necessary companions to help, educate, or protect women (McNiel et al., 2012). This is arguably somewhat of a paradox, given that women throughout history have been associated with the natural. Nevertheless, the representation of women as in need of assistance in the outdoors corresponds to ideas of women being distanced from nature by the restriction of their roles to domestic domains, as argued by Alaimo (2016). It can be assumed that in this type of recreation and adventure environment, the overall theme in outdoor media representations is that women are outsiders, whereas men are in their rightful element.

Study area

Sweden and other Nordic countries are known for high levels of gender equality, expressed, primarily, in unusually large number of women in all levels of electoral politics, employment, and education (Jónasdóttir & von der Fehr, 2005). Regularly topping the world Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2016), however, does not mean that gender equality is uniformly and proportionally distributed among all sectors and hierarchical levels. For example, as in the rest of the world, the economic, bureaucratic and scientific-technological power elites remain dominated by men (Jónasdóttir & von der Fehr, 2005). Thrane (2000) found that women in Sweden, Norway and Denmark also have less leisure time than men, which is especially exacerbated by marriage and the presence of small children, in line with the women’s ‘double burden’ theory (Väänänen et al., 2005). This makes the Swedish case study unique but also typical enough to provide useful insights for other contexts.

Sweden has a long tradition of outdoor recreation (locally known as friluftsliv or ‘open-air life’), which prioritizes simple, healthy and sustainable activities in nature, accessible to everyone (Sandell & Sörlin, 2008). Activities, such as hiking, Nordic walking, fishing, mushroom and berry-picking in the forest, and cross-country skiing, remain highly popular among the general population (Emmelin, Fredman, Sandell, & Lisberg Jensen, 2010; Fredman, Stenseke, et al., 2014). About half of the Swedish population has visited the mountain region at least once in a five-year period (Fredman et al., 2014), and 85% of these visits are related to leisure and recreation (Heberlein, Fredman, & Vuorio, 2002).

The Swedish mountain region, stretching for over one thousand kilometres along the Norwegian border, constitutes one third of the country, but accommodates only two percent of the total population. The mountain region also shows the highest proportion of specially protected nature areas in the country (SCB, 2017). Locally known as fjällen (fells), this area, with a rather flat topography above the line of the tree growth, is especially suitable for hiking and skiing. At least half of those who plan a visit to the Swedish mountain region seek information on websites (Fredman et al., 2014). Websites and electronic portals, therefore, provide an important gateway to the region and introduce potential tourists to the outdoor recreation activities available in the mountains. The images displayed on websites are, therefore, both an important indicator of and a contributor to how different outdoor activities are perceived.

The Nordic outdoors has historically been positioned in the tourism media as a masculine space, inviting exploration, independence, physical challenge and adventure (Gunnarsdóttir, 2011; Heldt
Cassel & Pashkevich, 2018). Celebration of Nordic landscapes and the themes of masculine achievement are deeply rooted in the Romantic ideals and the glory of Arctic explorations of the nineteenth century, where female narratives were invisible (Ísleifsson, 2011; Wall-Reinius, 2009). Nordic landscapes have been imagined and represented as places to test one’s limits, to be confronted with nature’s forces. In her detailed analysis of the earliest forms of tourism in the Scandinavian wilderness, known as Scandinavian Sporting Tour, Sillanpää (2002) demonstrates how the local tourist place-myths and images were created in response to the desires of male tourists. Previous research on tourist images in the Nordic countries allows suggesting that gender equality is not necessarily evident in the tourism marketing even in the Nordic context (Alessio & Johannsdóttir, 2011; Chekalin, Fuchs, & Lexhagen, 2018; Gunnarsdóttir, 2011; Margaryan & Zherdev, 2011).

Methods

We adopt a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative (descriptive and inferential statistics) and qualitative (visual data analysis) methods. The aim of the quantitative data analysis is to find out if there are gender differences in the modes of participation in outdoor recreation among the Swedish population. The qualitative analysis of images in tourism websites aims at understanding how outdoor recreation is represented in major promotional media from a gender perspective. Finally, results of both data sources are brought together and discussed in a wider theoretical context.

Data collection

The quantitative data stem from a comprehensive national web-based survey conducted in 2013 among the Swedish population between 15–70 years of age. The study includes questions about visits to the mountain region, and different types of recreation activity participation in the region. The survey was conducted during the months of January, May and September. At every occasion, 1,000 randomly selected individuals participated in the surveys, i.e. a total of 3,000 survey participants. Of those 3,000 participants, a total of 305 respondents had visited the mountains and participated in various outdoor recreation activities during the previous year. General results of this survey (without the focus of gender stereotypes) have been published in Fredman et al. (2014).

For the collection of qualitative data, the websites of five large mountain destinations in Sweden were analysed: Funäsfjällen, Idre Fjäll, Sälen, Vemdalen and Åre. These destinations were selected because they are the most popular mountain destinations in Sweden showing a high number of visitors in both the summer and winter season (Visit Fjällen, 2016). The websites were searched for images of the marketed outdoor recreation activities, which resulted in a sample of 316 pictures. The search was conducted from March to April 2015. From this sample, the following images were excluded: images with no people in sight, images of children and images where it was difficult to judge whether a person is female or male (e.g. when a helmet covered the faces or when the picture was taken from great distance). Similarly, images of very large groups were eliminated from the analysis. Although images portraying outdoor activities included in the quantitative survey data were the primary focus, a few pictures portraying other activities were sampled as well in order to further explore special topics of stereotyped gender depiction. The final distribution of the image sample from the selected Swedish mountain destinations is shown in Table 1.

Data analysis

The question from the national survey chosen for the explorative analysis was: ‘How many days have you participated in the following outdoor recreation activities in the Swedish mountain region?’ The respondents in the survey were given a list of 40 common outdoor activities in Sweden and were asked if they had participated in these activities with the following frequencies: not at all; up to 1 day; 1–2 days; 3–7 days; more than 7 days. As the survey also included activities that are not very
common, such as *geocaching*, *caving* or *snow kiting*, the sub-samples of some categories were very small. Due to the violation of the assumptions of minimum expected frequencies they had to be dichotomized into ‘yes/no’ variables. A Pearson’s chi-square test was conducted on 40 variables in order to detect the relationship between activity participation duration and the participants’ gender.

The website photographs were analysed based on the principles of content analysis (Rakić & Chambers, 2011; Rose, 2001), inspired by Goffman’s (1979) classic study of gender role portrayals in advertisements. Based on Goffman’s approach, each picture was coded accordingly as: (1) the activity being engaged in, and the gender of the person engaging in it; (2) if a woman was present in the picture, her relative size and placement; (3) the setting of the picture; (4) if a woman was present in the picture, whether her portrayal is active or passive; and (5) gender depiction in the family context. These five categories were used as a starting point to identify themes and recurrent patterns on tourism websites.

**Results**

The quantitative analysis clearly shows that there are significant gender differences in certain outdoor recreation activities in the Swedish mountain region. More precisely, a statistically significant association between gender and type of outdoor activity were found in 12 out of the 40 activities (Table 2). In all but one (picnic/barbecuing), more men participated in the respective activity than women. Interestingly enough, almost all of the outdoor activities found to have significant gender differences can be considered as traditionally male, i.e. fishing, hunting, rock climbing or mountain biking.

It is important to note that in the majority of the outdoor activities (i.e. 28 of 40) no significant difference in participants’ gender was found. For some classical Swedish outdoor recreation activities, such as downhill skiing, hiking or camping, this result was somewhat expected. However, a surprising finding was that the activities that are described in the literature as typically masculine or feminine, such as skateboarding, horseback riding or meditating/yoga (Bäckström, 2013; Birdee et al., 2008), gender differences were not found. The reason why the majority of the analysed outdoor activities do not show gender differences could also be determined by the fact that these activities are often

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diving/Snorkelling</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain bike</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orienteering</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paintball/live</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic/barbeque</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock climbing</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailing, wind/wave surfing</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowboarding</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowshoeing</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail running</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>.410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
engaged by all family members together. Similarly, a rather unexpected finding is that motor sports activities did not show significant gender differences. For example, snowmobiling, motor boating, flying motor- or sailplane, are often perceived as a typical masculine activity (Mehus, Germeten, & Henriksen, 2011). Interestingly, no gender differences were found for this activity in the context of Swedish mountain tourism participation. However, this might be partially explained by the way the question was formulated, not allowing to differentiate between drivers and passengers (see Henderson, 1996).

**Gender and outdoor recreation activities**

Moving on to the content analysis, it suggests the following findings. The 128 selected pictures contained representations of 108 women (45%) and 136 (56%) men. Hence, more men than women were shown participating in outdoor recreation activities. Moreover, in many of the activities portrayed, gender differences in terms of frequency could be noticed. For instance, within the activity of mountain biking/cycling, more than twice as many men as women were pictured. In contrast, men were not present at all engaging in spa and shopping. Interestingly enough, cross-country skiing was portrayed as a typical female activity, showing seven women and only one man. In the more action-filled and adventurous outdoor activity of rafting, there were almost twice as many male participants as there were females. Similarly, fishing was shown as an activity dominated by men; only four women were pictured when engaging in this activity compared to eleven men. A similar finding was obtained for trail running: eight individuals were displayed trail running, of which six were men an only two were women. The activities with rather equal gender distribution are the classic mountain activities: hiking and downhill skiing (Table 3).

**Women’s relative size and placement**

In general, there were not that many pictures portraying a woman as smaller than a man, or placed behind him, as found in previous studies (Chhabra, Andereck, Yamanoi, & Plunkett, 2011; Lindner, 2004). However, it was immediately clear that more images pictured women as smaller and placed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canoeing/kayaking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-country skiing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog sledging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downhill skiing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golfing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horseback riding</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice-skating</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montain biking/cycling</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafting</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock-climbing/ice-climbing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roller skiing</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sledding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowmobiling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowshoeing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spa/shopping</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming outside</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trail running</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterpark entertainment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga/fitness classes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziplining</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
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</table>
behind a man than the opposite (15 pictures displayed women as smaller and more often placed behind a man, and five pictures displayed men as smaller and placed behind a woman). Figure 1 shows a group of women rafting, but it appears to be the male guide who does all the work in steering the boat.

The setting of the picture

It was more common for women to be shown in calm environments than it was for men. More precisely, 61% of the women in the pictures were shown in calm environments, comparing to men. Out of the pictures presenting men in a calm environment, 45% of the portrayed men were engaging in fishing, or spending time with the family. The calm environments with women were presenting such common activities as hiking with a male partner or a family, spa or shopping, cross-country skiing, canoeing, and horseback riding.

In pictures portraying people in action-filled or challenging environments, men (65%) were again more frequently present. Most action-related pictures portrayed men while mountain biking or rafting. The case of mountain biking is an interesting example, clearly showing a gender-bias: out of 17 photos of people engaging in mountain biking, only three depicted women without a male partner. Out of the pictures taken in an action/challenging outdoor environment, women were most commonly pictured downhill skiing. Out of 19 pictures portraying downhill skiing, eight of those pictured a woman skiing (on her own or in a group). The rest pictured women and men skiing together, or men alone. Out of five pictures portraying canoeing/kayaking, women were only depicted canoeing, comparing to the more action-filled kayaking. Figure 2 displays two women and a child calmly paddling along the quiet river.

Are women portrayed as active or passive?

Altogether, people shown in website images were clearly more often portrayed as active participants than as passive enjoyers. However, there was a distinct difference between how women and men

Figure 1. Rafting in Idre Fjäll (Source: www.idrefjall.se).

Figure 2. Canoeing in Funäsfjällen (Source: www.funasfjallen.se).
were portrayed. Of the women portrayed by website images, 20% were depicted as passive, whereas only 4% of the men were portrayed as passive. More concretely, women were more often pictured when receiving a spa treatment or admiring the scenic view, as shown, for instance, in Figure 3. In the few pictures where a man was portrayed as passive, he was typically pictured together with a woman.

**Gender depiction in the family**

Of the 128 pictures, only 16 images portrayed families or adults with children. Therefore, it is difficult to reliably draw conclusions regarding representation of gender roles within a family. Parents and children in all images were actively engaged in an activity, so women and men were equally participating. Also, the types of activities engaged in were fairly equally distributed between women and men. For example, Figure 4 shows a mother mountain biking with her son. However, fathers were not pictured engaging in typical masculine activities with their sons, and mothers were not portrayed participating in typical feminine activities with their daughters. About half of the pictures portrayed a nuclear family, whereas the other half of the pictures portrayed a single parent (which could be explained by comparatively high divorce rates in the country).

**Figure 3.** Admiring the view in Funäsfjällen (Source: www.funasfjallen.se).

**Figure 4.** Mountain biking in Idre Fjäll (Source: www.idrefjall.se).
Discussion

Our findings put forward that despite overall high levels of gender equality in Sweden, there is a certain difference in the modes of participation and visualization of outdoor recreation. Thus, based on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data we suggest the following discussion points.

Persistence of gender norms in outdoor recreation participation and visualization

According to the quantitative analysis, there are significant gender differences in outdoor recreation when it comes to specific activities. Men either equally participate in all activities women do, or dominate the rest, while the same could not be said about women. This indicates that women engage in a narrower range of outdoor activities. In turn, findings of the subsequent qualitative analysis of website pictures from the five largest Swedish mountain tourism destinations show that traditional gender norms were also present in website images.

What is interesting is that new trends in outdoor recreation do not seem to be going in the direction of higher equality, but rather the opposite. Already a few years ago, it was noticed that there is an evident shift in outdoor recreation trends, characterized by increasing commercialization, importance of experiences, achievement, equipment and skills, adventure rather than social interaction, and overall more male-orientatedness (e.g. Fredman & Heberlein, 2003; Fredman, Gössling, & Hultman, 2006; Odden, 2008; van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). This, we observe on the example of mountain biking, one of the ‘hottest’ new activities in the off-season ski resorts, attracting significant investment and being actively marketed (Hagen & Boyes, 2016; Pickering & Leung, 2016). This activity was featured on all websites as challenging and action-filled. The fact that the majority of mountain bikers are men, both in terms of participation rates and visibility, point to that it is normalized as a male activity (Huybers-Withers & Livingston, 2010; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b; Wagner, 2008). On the other hand, in line with the increasing commercialization trends, ski resorts aim to position themselves not only as places of physical activity, but also as places of comfort, relaxation and hedonic consumption. Spa and shopping were presented extensively on the websites, featuring exclusively women, and, thus, normalizing these activities as female-oriented (see Khan, 2009; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Wearing, 1998). In other words, we have not observed any new trends in the visual representation that would explicitly challenge the traditional heteronormativity.

Another interesting finding was that some popular outdoor activities were presented as most suitable for a specific gender, whereas no statistically significant differences were found in participation rates (e.g. cross-country skiing). In addition, many of the popular activities in the survey were not pictured at all in the websites (e.g. snowboarding). The discrepancy between the images and the ‘real life’ has been noticed by tourism researchers before, who argued that tourism media tends to be more lagging behind the actual societal trends (Alessio & Johannsdóttir, 2011; Gunnarsdóttir, 2011; Jenkins, 2003; Khan, 2009; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a; Rakić & Chambers, 2011; Sirakaya & Sonmez, 2000).

To sum up, the findings gained in this study clearly support the idea that tourism marketing media tends to reinforce gender expectations in the context of outdoor recreation (Collins, 2011; Johansson, Röjlar, Eriksson, & Frisk, 2008; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a). Gender role socialization gives men better tools to participate and feel more comfortable in outdoor recreation. In contrast, women fit into fewer role models in outdoor recreation, and, therefore, are more likely to feel limited and avoid participation.

Problematicization of gender norms in the outdoors

We problematize persistence of gender norms in the outdoors on the following levels. First, the observed tropes that perpetuate women’s role as passive participants, undermining women’s
aspirations for leadership positions in the outdoor context and beyond. Placement of women behind men in the photographic composition, observed in our sample, has been described as one of the most frequent categorization of gender display (Goffman, 1979). Although the majority of individuals displayed in the websites are portrayed as actively engaging in an outdoor activity, more women than men were depicted as passive. Men, on the other hand, were in almost all pictures actively committed to an outdoor activity. Displaying the need for women to be protected by men in the outdoors, as found in the analysed website pictures, can, thus, be interpreted as a stereotypical demonstration of men’s superiority over women (Goffman, 1979; Haluza-DeLay & Dyment, 2003; McNiel et al., 2012; Sirakaya & Sonmez, 2000; Warren & Loeffler, 2006). In the context of Sweden, it can be argued that the outdoors remains one of the few spaces where this norm is still visible rather explicitly.

Furthermore, the depicted heteronormative gender roles place exaggerated expectations on men as adrenaline-seeking adventurers and conquerors of the outdoors. The spirit of rugged individualism can be found in all pictures of male visitors taken in challenging environments. This, again, is in line with the ideal of acting ‘out in the backcountry’, where individualism and tackling nature’s challenges is the main goal for men, but not for women (Cronon, 1996; Hirschman, 2003; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a). As could be expected, the analysis of website pictures revealed a majority of female visitors enjoying the calm and still environment. This suggests that women are supposed to prefer a relaxed, calm atmosphere, and if engaging in a challenging activity, they tend to be with a male partner. This implies that if women themselves are allowed to choose outdoor activities to participate in, they would choose calmer activities. However, when together with a man, they might choose more challenging activities, as they would feel more safe and would also have a chance to assert themselves in order to be perceived as equally competent as men (Henderson, 2000).

Perpetuation of traditional gender norms of behaviour in the outdoors has far reaching consequences not only in the context of gender socialization but also people’s relationships with nature. On the one hand, limiting women’s participation outdoors or positioning it as something ‘not for women’ might have its effects on the involvement of women in natural sciences, environmental policies and nature-related decision making. On the other hand, proliferation of adrenaline-, skills- and adventure-rich male-oriented activities not only de-normalizes other ways of engagement with nature for men, but also reduces nature to a background setting, thus, discouraging deeper, more mindful and meditative human-nature relationships.

**Conclusion**

Our study put forward that traditional heteronormative stereotypes pertaining to the images of masculinity and femininity can be found in the context of participation and visualization of outdoor recreation in Sweden. This suggests that even if Sweden is one of the most gender-equal societies, it is not exempt from traditional gender norms of behaviour and representation, albeit to a lesser extent than in more patriarchal societies. In fact, we claim that the context of Nordic backcountry context makes these norms more pronounced, appealing to the male-dominated Romantic ideals of nature conquest and adventure (Alessio & Johannsdóttir, 2011; Gunnarsdóttir, 2011; Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2018; Ísleifsson, 2011; Sillanpää, 2002). We also argue that the new trends in outdoor recreation may, in fact, further perpetuate this vision, due to growing popularity of outdoor activities, stressing physical challenge, adventure, skill and achievement, oriented primarily towards male recreationists, observed in our data and previous literature (Fredman & Heberlein, 2003; Fredman et al., 2006; Odden, 2008; van Bottenburg & Salome, 2010). Female-oriented activities, in turn, predominantly either represent traditional gender roles or encourage new forms of hedonistic consumption in controlled, quasi-outdoor settings.

A highly promising area for future research is to focus on the demand side, thereby exploring user-generated images on photo-sharing and social media platforms, such as Flickr or Instagram (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Munar & Steen Jacobsen, 2014). Also, in the context of Anthropocene and uncurbed
negative impacts of humans on the ecological environment, it is necessary to critically re-think the role of tourism and recreation in the natural context. Participation in outdoor- and nature-based activities can contribute to a higher degree of environmental awareness and increased connectedness with nature among practitioners. Thus, (re)discovering new and old modes of meaningful engagement with nature, expanding the range of gender-conscious outdoor activities, moving in directions other than challenge- and action-seeking, is suggested as a fruitful further research trajectory.

Note

1. Other activities tested, which did not have any significant association with gender, included various forms of skiing and other winter activities (e.g. dog sledding, snowmobiling), water sports (e.g. canoeing, kayaking, boating, swimming), typical summer activities (e.g. picking berries or mushrooms, hiking, Nordic walking, camping), meditating/yoga, horseback riding, and a few niche activities.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


