



Claiming Space for Womxn and Other Non-Dominant Identities in Conservation Science NACCB 2020 Interactive Session Report

In recent years, NACCB's scope, activities, and policies have responded to and reflected the impacts of the 2007 and 2016 #MeToo movements as well as broader efforts toward greater inclusivity, equity, diversity, and justice (IEDJ) in science. We designed this interactive session to hold space for deep, open conversations about the barriers, risks, benefits, and fundamental need for these efforts, so that womxn and people with other non-dominant identities may be heard, find belonging, and thrive. We drew from our own multi-year organic process of sharing our gender-based experiences as one axis of diversity, and through this, exploring how we might better support a sense of belonging of non-dominant perspectives and equity toward marginalized identities in conservation. The session was designed to be non-prescriptive, deeply experiential, and to offer learning opportunities for facilitators and participants alike. All were welcome to attend, but the session was explicitly meant to hold space for womxn to speak and connect through their experiences, strengths, fears, and creativity. While there was space for men to engage, we asked men (and in some conversations, women who hold more privilege than others) to largely practice a listening and learning role. We also asked participants to step outside the bounds of their rational intellect, bringing their creativity and emotional intelligence to the conversation and opening themselves to a more deeply personal experience of the focal issues. Our decision to offer this session stemmed from our belief that celebration, welcoming of, and learning from the full range of voices in conservation is necessary to produce better, more relevant and socially just science. Our goal was for participants to leave session with new curiosity and movement toward action - whether connecting with affinity groups, seeking allyship, or offering allyship - as well as a greater sense of connection within their conservation community.

NACCB 2020 shifted to a virtual platform due to COVID-19, so the session was adapted to be held via Zoom, using break-out rooms for small-group discussions as well as an external polling tool (Mentimeter) to enable anonymous polling and free-form responses. Attendance fluctuated over the course of the 2.5-hour session (2 scheduled hours, with an extension to accommodate ongoing discussion), with some participants joining late and others needing to drop off early. However, we recorded at least 40 total participants joining all or part of the session. We collected voluntary information about participants' identities using Mentimeter questions and polls. Participants ranged from undergraduate students to those in late career stages, and worked in academic, government, nonprofit, independent, and other settings. Queer, disabled, Black, Latina, Asian American, and many other self-described identities and backgrounds were present. Our impressions as facilitators were that although it took a bit of time for participants to warm up to conversation in a Zoom setting, by the end of the session, many opened up about their personal experiences, issues within their universities or organizations, and what they were inspired to work towards. Our sense was that many womxn and other non-dominant identities were inspired to reimagine how their workplace can be, to seek out more connection, and to give themselves permission to expect to be able to bring more of themselves to

work.

We received 10 responses to our formal post-session evaluation. Eight rated their overall experience as a 5 (mean rating=4.8, with 1=poor, 5=excellent), and all scored their sense of being welcomed and included as a 5. Evaluation questions on design, facilitation, and content received similarly high values. Specific comments received included:

- *So genuine and honest. It's very rare that our field truly recognizes and creates spaces for people in their complex entirety.*
- *I felt inspired to speak out for myself as a hispanic woman and not reserve all my thoughts to myself.*
- *I liked, and am thankful for, how many different experiences were shared! Which speaks to the supportive atmosphere created.*
- *Listening to the other people in my group talk, I realized how much privilege I had that I had no idea about. It was extremely eye-opening and I will now take the next few days to reflect on it, and understand it better.*
- *I have left thinking about the importance of not only being an ally, but being vocal about that, to create safe spaces w[h]ere people feel comfortable to share their full selves.*
- *I loved how safe and welcome I felt. I was overcome with emotion many times during this session.*
- *I will remember this session for the rest of my life.*