Research by
Dr Jenny Hall
Dr Adele Doran

Photo: Louis Hume

Researching

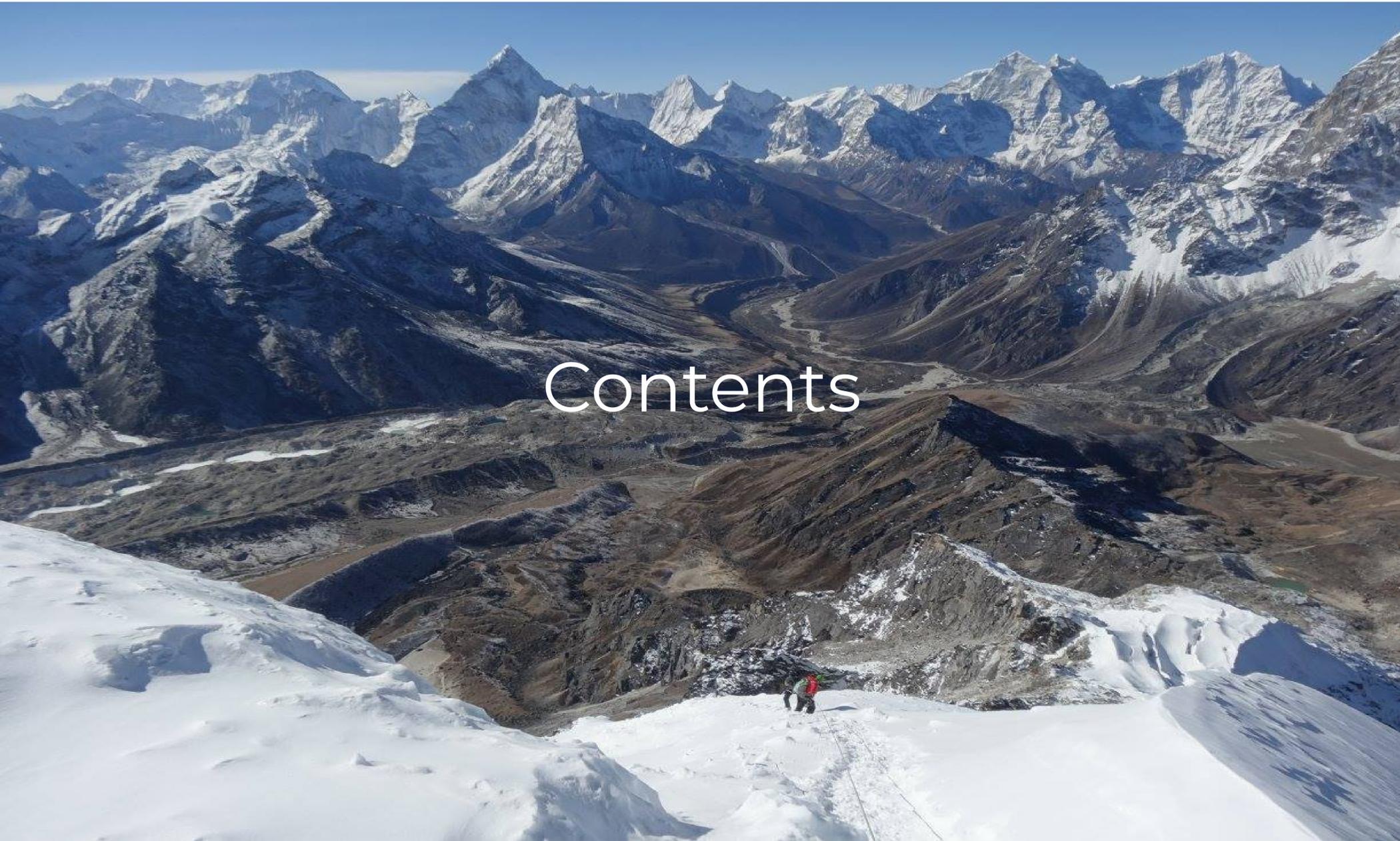# Women in Mountaineering, United Kingdom

CONTACT:

**Dr Jenny Hall & Dr Adele Doran**
j.hall@yorksj.ac.uk | a.doran@shu.ac.uk

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Contents

UK participation in recreational rock climbing and mountaineering (2.48 million participants) now rivals participation in mainstream sports such as football (2.43 million participants), demonstrating increasing popularity of the sport (Mintel, 2018). In parallel, in the UK there is a growing demand for climbing and mountaineering holidays, including skills-based courses (Mintel, 2015). Gender-specific data on participation is not available, although these studies suggest that women prefer walking over rock climbing and mountaineering activities. Furthermore, the British Mountaineering Council's (BMC, personal communication, November 4, 2019) membership also suggests that these activities are preferred more by men, as their female membership has largely remained static since 2006 (25%) at just 28% in 2019. What is unclear from these studies is why walking, a softer mountaineering activity, is more appealing to women than harder forms of mountaineering activities, such as rock climbing, ice climbing and mixed climbing.

Women are also underrepresented in the UK's national mountain leadership qualifications. In 2017, Mountain Training reported that only 19% of those completing national mountaineering qualifications were women (personal communication, March 23, 2017). The most senior qualification in the UK is the British Mountain Guide (BMG IFMGA), which enables qualified leaders to guide internationally. In 2017 there were only 7 (5.1%) registered women BMGs and this remained unchanged in 2019, further illustrating the gender imbalance in mountaineering.

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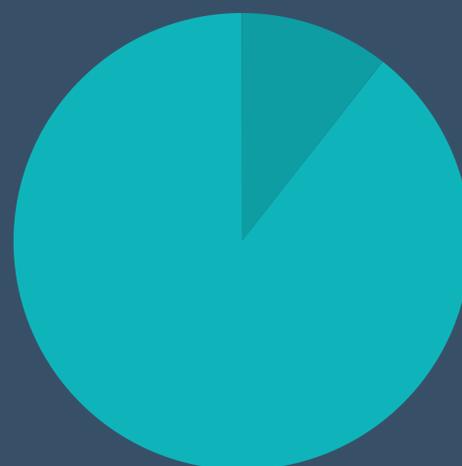
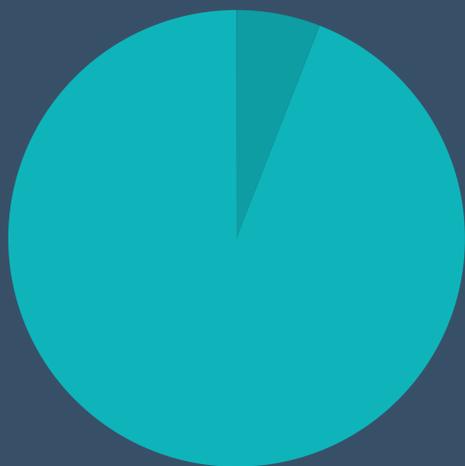## Winter ML 2017

■ Women (9%) ■ Men (91%)
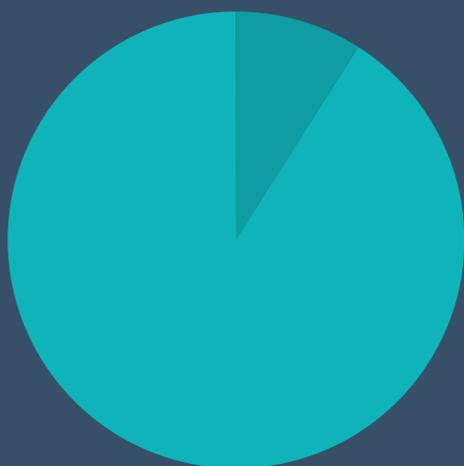
MCI 2017

■ Women (10.58%) ■ Men (89.42%)

Winter MCI 2017

■ Women (5.92%) ■ Men (94.08%)

BMG (IFMGA) 2017

■ Women (5.11%) ■ Men (94.89%)

ML = Mountain Leader; MCI = Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor; BMG (IFMGA) = British Mountain Guide (International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations)
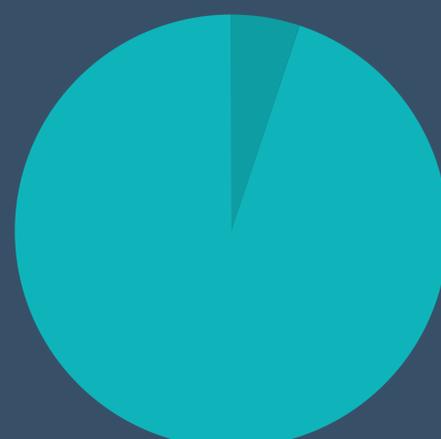
There is a significant dropout rate between training and assessment for female aspirant mountain leaders (MT, 2017).

- **Winter ML** **66%**
- **MCI** **52%**
- **WMCI** **67%**
- **BMG** **No Figs.**

Photo: Louis Hume

Photo: Louis Hume

The dropout rate between training and assessment is significant for both men and women undertaking both the summer and winter Mountain Leader (ML) qualifications, and the Rock Climbing Instructor (RCI) qualifications, with over 50% failing to undertake their assessment (Hardy et al., 2019). For some candidates, this is because they are trained but they are not assessed, for others this is because they are assessed and do not pass. Although fewer women get to an assessment than men, there are no differences in pass rates between men and women for the period 2013-2019 (*ibid*). With the exception of Hardy et al's (2019) recent study on candidates of the ML qualification, little research has been done to understand the reasons why such dropout rates occur and why fewer women are being assessed than men. Hardy et al's (2019) study did identify some differences in the factors that influence the completion and non-completion of the ML qualification between genders. For example, the need to feel confident as a result of prior preparation and the more life change a woman experiences, the less likely they are to be assessed. In particular, it was noted that having children can lead to a perceived professional change that working hours are constrained (*ibid*). However, there were also similarities, for example, a strong coaching relationship with training providers that enhanced goal-setting led to higher pass rates for both genders. Although this study demonstrates some of the constraints candidates for both genders experience when undertaking the ML qualification, it does not address the issue of why fewer women candidates participate in the ML and other qualifications.

Mountain Training acknowledges that increasing the number of qualified women is an important part of raising the profile of women in the outdoor sector. Likewise, the BMC's Women Rock Tour, #WomenRockWednesdays and Women in Adventure Film competition suggests they are also advocating the visibility of women and encouraging their participation in the sport. In parallel with this, women-specific events, such as the Women's Trad Fest and the Women's Climbing Symposium, and the women's climbing community WomenClimb are strengthening this momentum. Increasing representation means more people seeing and interacting with women in leadership positions, normalising women as role models in mountaineering and climbing, and reducing the perception of barriers to recreational participation. Research has shown that in adventure sports contexts, including climbing and mountaineering, role modelling positively influences participation, particularly with young people (Rak, 2007; Vodden-McKay & Schell, 2010; Warren & Leoffler, 2006).

This report provides insight and offers recommendations for Mountain Training, the BMC, providers of mountaineering experiences and courses, and the wider climbing and mountaineering community to begin to address the gender imbalance in mountain leadership and wider participation. Specifically, this report presents the constraints on women's participation in climbing and mountaineering, the strategies women use to negotiate these constraints and the benefits they gain from participation. Each of these will be considered at both a recreational and a professional level.

This report draws upon research conducted in two separate studies.

1 An in-depth qualitative study conducted by Dr Jenny Hall that, in part, considered how professional, UK based, women mountaineers (n=7) experience mountaineering and what motivates them to take risks in extreme vertical worlds of rock, snow and ice in the twenty-first-century. The research paid particular attention to how their sensory and emotional lives were impacted upon by political, economic and social influences. Inequality emerged as a key theme and how this impacted on their professional and personal practices as mountaineers. The research findings are reflected through the voices of the research participants and provide a deep analysis of their experiences as mountaineers. The research identified the different ways in which women conduct their professional mountaineering lives through their approaches to overcoming discrimination, achieving goals, a sense of well-being and using softer-skills.

2 A mixed-methods study conducted by Dr Adele Doran that considered the constraints women experience when climbing and mountaineering (rock, snow and ice climbing, skills courses and high-altitude mountaineering), the strategies they employ to negotiate these constraints and the benefits they gain from participation. The study comprised of two elements: 1) a qualitative study that involved participating in a four-week expedition with mountaineers in the Nepal Himalayas (n=12) and 2) a quantitative survey (n = 321). 63% of the survey participants have considered becoming a qualified climbing instructor or mountain leader, therefore these findings will also provide insights on potential women candidates for Mountain Training's qualifications.

This report does not seek to make generalisations. By combing the results of these two doctoral studies, the aim of the report is to provide an insight into the current experiences of women who climb and mountaineer in the UK.

Whilst Doran's study includes female rock climbers (trad, sport and bouldering), space does not allow for an explanation of the experiences of each type of climber. Therefore, **for the purpose of this report, the broad term 'mountaineering' will be used to explain the experiences of all participants** in both studies.

The following report is divided into four sections.
- First, a summary of the constraints to women's mountaineering, both recreationally and professionally, is provided.
- Second, how women negotiate these constraints is considered.
- Third, the resultant benefits of mountaineering are presented.
- Finally, we offer recommendations.

Women's Constraints to Mountaineering

Photo: Louis Hume

Emotions

1 **Fear of Expressing Masculinity**

Women leaders felt that they needed to hide displays of competitiveness and are modest about their achievements, in fear that they would be perceived to be too masculine, unfeeling, hard-faced or not feminine enough (Frohlick 2005; Hall, 2018). Yet, conversely, mountaineering was an activity where they could express emotions and behaviours traditionally associated with masculinity, such as aggression, bravery, confidence, strength, privation, confidence and toughness.

2 **Shame & Crying**

The pressure felt leading up to and during mountaineering courses and qualification assessments were considered by half of the professional research participants to be a result of programmes being too heavily focused on technical skills and not differentiating between different learning needs. The qualification assessments were also felt to be determined by the subjective views of the assessor and not necessarily standardised. The stress produced by these factors intensified fears associated with involuntarily crying and the emotion of shame felt as a result. The research participants felt that expressing emotions such as crying, could curtail their professional career progression as mountain leaders, because it symbolised weakness, loss of personal control, lack of confidence and competence. This suggests that the stigma associated with crying, although purely a response to relieve stress, acts as a significant barrier to women's participation and progression through the national qualification system.
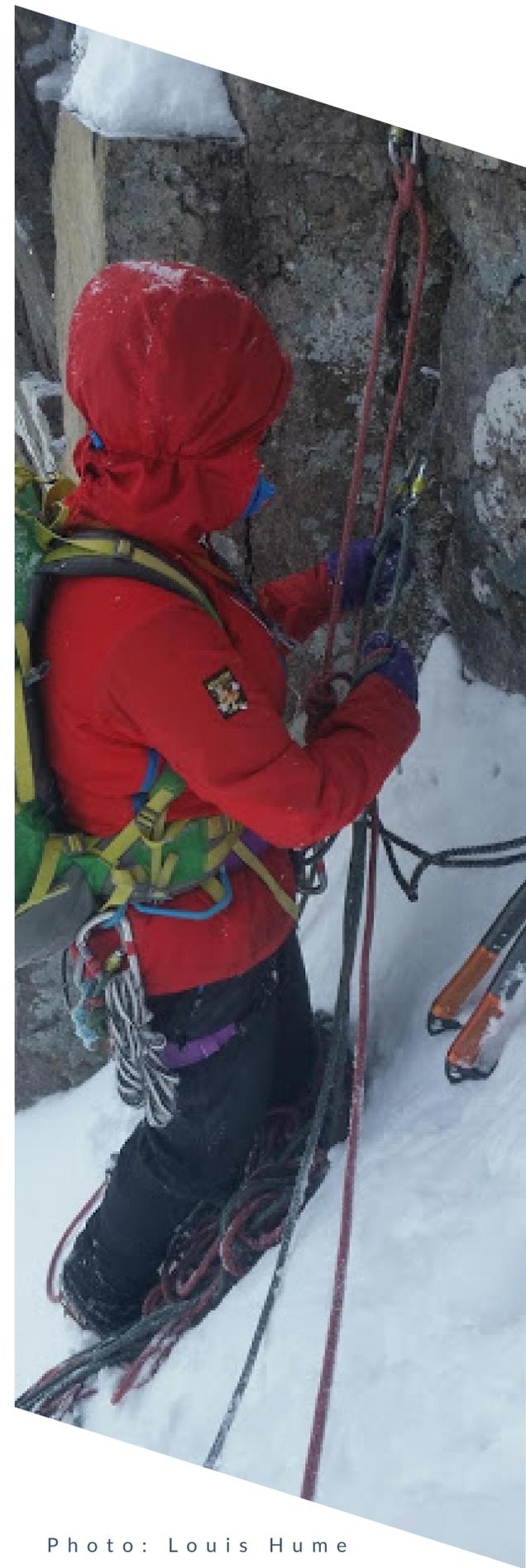
" When the pressure is on, how you stop yourself from crumbling... that was one of my biggest worries (Jo). "

Emotions

3   Anxiety & Competence

Women mountain leaders experienced high levels of anxiety as a result of feeling pressured to lead professionally at grade V in winter. Industry debate about raising the assessment level from grade III to grade V for MIC caused significant concern and was a barrier for women in their progression through leadership qualifications and, for some, rejecting lucrative work opportunities. This also revealed a culture where, for example, sharing knowledge concerning near misses with peers was silenced for fear of appearing to lack confidence, competence and strength, adding to a sense of isolation.

4   Physiological Needs & Embarrassment

The embarrassment associated with basic human needs, such as going to the toilet, was a perceived barrier to participation both for clients and aspirant leaders. Developing a 'camel bladder' (holding passing urine) was an uncomfortable strategy that women used to preserve modesty and to avoid the embarrassment of having to undress to relieve themselves, particularly during winter. Embarrassment and shame concerning topics such as menstruation, menopause and defecation remain taboo, forming a barrier to participation for aspirant mountaineers as well as leaders. Women-only groups provided the opportunity to more openly discuss strategies for dealing with these issues.

5   Menopause

One participant's experience of the menopause had effectively grounded her from conducting any major expeditions to the Greater Ranges. This was due to the physiological effects being potentially life-threatening through not being able to make rational decisions or the high possibility of developing hypothermia after a night sweat occurring within a sleeping bag. This caused anxiety and also fear of losing professional status. Menopause was a topic she felt needed to be shared more widely within the guiding community to develop a greater understanding of how this affected women.

" Many of the women profiled here would never begin to tell the world about their achievements – because that's just not what British women do (Schirrmacher, 2008, p.22). "

Women-Only and Women-Specific

Photo: Louis Hume

> Women-only programmes have had successes since the turn of the century by creating an atmosphere of care, cooperation, collaboration and informed choice that 'resists the subtle influences to conform to facilitator or programme values', or masculine norms (Warren, 2016, p. 362). However, Warren (2016) points out that women-only spaces do not necessarily challenge the dominant masculine discourse that can lead to social change, and, as such, this political task needs to be taken seriously and escalated within governing institutions.

6   Defining Women-Specific

At the Women in Adventure Sports Conference at Glenmore Lodge in 2016, leading mountaineers, of both genders, debated women's poor levels of engagement in mountaineering. They recommended a move towards 'women-specific' rather than 'women-only' coaching and training programmes because they believed a women-only approach was divisive. The conference did not define what 'women-specific' meant or how to deliver this. However, the belief was that a women-specific approach would create a more inclusive environment that supports women's development. One research participant found that this caused her male colleagues to feel *'worried about saying inappropriate things'* and that they did not feel they could usefully join the 'women's' debate. She wondered if this was a smokescreen, stating that there are still *'a lot of guys out there who generally think there is not a problem'* concerning women's participation and engagement. This identifies the need to define women-specific constraints in order to develop gender-sensitive approaches to training, coaching and leading that could benefit both women and men.

7   National Engagement Programmes

Since 2015, in an attempt to increase women's participation, the national mountaineering centres have implemented a programme of women-only courses. However, one research participant had experienced difficulty in recruiting women to attend women-only courses because *'they think that it is about extreme feminism'*. Some of the professional mountaineers and their male colleagues held the negative perceptions that women-only courses were for women who lacked confidence and competency. Furthermore, the atmosphere of conforming to the dominant masculine norm in professional mountaineering prevented one research participant from pursuing a business opportunity to deliver women-only courses because she felt it could be detrimental to her career as a leader.

Self-Doubts

Photo: Louis Hume

8   Competency, Fitness, Skill & Speed

Despite the recreational mountaineers regularly participating and having the skills to climb independently, they still doubted their abilities. Indicating that past experience, even if successful, does not reduce concerns regarding women's mountaineering abilities. Similarly, concerns regarding their fitness is also a key constraint. This is of note as it contradicts self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) which suggests that positive experiences would increase confidence and reduce self-doubts. However, it is possible that some women have not had enough positive experiences to reduce their concerns and this warrants further investigation.

Furthermore, a fear of being perceived as 'too slow' or not 'fast enough' was experienced by women from novice to seasoned mountaineering professionals and it inhibited progression through their mountain qualifications. Culturally in mountaineering, speed is perceived as a measure of strength, competence and fitness, and moving quickly over hazardous terrain is understood to be a measure of good practice. This encourages a competitive atmosphere. However, demonstrations of speed can become counter-productive, exclusive and marginalising by making some women doubt their abilities.

9   Taking the Lead

One of the leaders described how in training, coaching or guiding contexts, some women show reticence in taking a lead, particularly in group situations. Women *'hang back a little if somebody else is taking charge …. Often it takes somebody to step down from that role for us to step up and go, all right, I had better start. Once you are given that position it is amazing how you … just take to it' (Lorrie).* Suggesting that women need different mechanisms of facilitation to encourage them to take ownership of leadership tasks, actions and roles (Ives, 2016; Wittmer, 2001).

> " *Yeah, failing and how I was perceived in front of peers, all that stuff is exhausting. [It is] why am I so tired [and] not really doing very much … it would be good to get that back [to climbing at my best] (Lorrie).* "

10   Family & Social Constraints

> "
> *If I did go and have babies now my outdoor career would be, not over, but I would find it very hard to step back into the position I am in now... Getting work at the national centre and having a name is actually quite a thing in the outdoor industry and if my name is then Jo with a baby, then it is quite difficult to come back. [Largely] because someone will have taken that place ... and I would have to start again... building up my reputation... That is a choice I am going to have to make or I get my head down and rattle off my MIC ..., which is still going to be two years minimum and that [means I would be] 33 [years old]. It is a sacrifice. In the freelance industry, it is going to be very difficult to get back into [a similar position]... It is built on reputation and then you leave and go and have babies ... you would have to work back up to being an instructor and then get that reputation back again (Jo).*
> "

Social expectations define a woman's role and can be significant barriers to participation. The findings of this study support previous research (e.g. Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Wilson & Little, 2005) which found that women, compared to men, are expected to place household duties and family commitments before personal mountaineering desires. Consequently, this reduces the available time and energy women have to pursue mountaineering and these interruptions in women's mountaineering can result in a loss of skill, fitness and confidence, which heightens their existing self-doubts.

For example, some of the recreational mountaineers agreed to be constrained by their household duties/family commitments, particularly those women who participate in women-only groups. This indicates that either the participants' sense of family commitment is heightened in women-only groups or that women with strong family connections prefer to climb in women-only groups as women can be more understanding of their family commitments and more flexible climbing partners. This possibly also relates to the socially ingrained perceptions that women-only groups are in some way inferior to mixed or men-only groups and this inferiority complex strengthens the obligation to home and family. This constraint becomes less pertinent as women climb more frequently and take climbing trips, presumably because once they have overcome this constraint it is perceived to be less restrictive with increasing participation.

For others, their family and/or friends not understanding their participation was a constraint, particularly those new to climbing. Having just begun to climb, their family may still perceive the activity to be dangerous and may not yet fully understand their reasons for participating and/or beginners may feel that, given their lack of expertise, they cannot justify time away from home.

Connected to these is the feeling of guilt for leaving family and/or household duties, which can prevent women from mountaineering. It is worth noting that women are not innately more caring than men, but women are more likely than men to be socialised in, participate in, and to value caregiving (Day, 2000; Gilligan, 1982).

For the professional mountaineers, constraints relating to their family were keenly felt as this impacted not only on their recreational mountaineering but also on their careers. These women felt that they either had to forego having a family or grapple with how a family might fit into their mountaineering lives. Those that chose not to have a family felt that they were perceived as being hard-hearted. By comparison, those that have a family felt that they were unable to escape their identity as mothers, unlike their male peers, and that they were perceived as being selfish for wanting both a professional mountaineering career and a family.

Competition

'Having a name is actually quite a thing in the outdoor industry'(Jo).

> *It is not unusual, on a big gnarly winter's day when you are feeling under pressure to go out and deliver, that you feel physically sick in a morning … that low-level anxiety is there all the time; you never get rid of it, even on your days off (Selkie).*

11 ## Female-Specific Mentoring

Mountain Training introduced a highly successful women-only leadership mentoring programme in 2016 for the Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor scheme. However, following a backlash from a few aspiring and qualified mountain instructors, Mountain Training initiated a new mentoring scheme which covers the majority of their qualifications and extended to incorporate all aspirant leaders (MT, personal communication, March 23, 2017). Such a move is in danger of diluting the issue of female representation through claims for equity from male peers. This is a clear example of how the masculine culture in mountaineering inhibits progress towards addressing gender imbalance. Furthermore, Hall's (2018) research shows such reactions compound the reluctance of some professional women mountain leaders to acknowledge or engage in women-only or women-specific initiatives because it is associated with a negative perception of 'feminism'.

12 ## Exclusion from Knowledge Networks

Issues concerning access to 'knowledge networks' was a specific problem where mountain leaders had reported how they had been rejected from informal peer networks because they were considered not to climb 'hard enough' and so were excluded based on perceptions of strength, speed and competence. This occurred at Mountain and Climbing Instructor (MCI) level.

13 ## Gradism

Mountaineering is a competitive culture of grades and grading, and conversations are dominated by what you have climbed, where you have climbed and how you climbed it. Thus, having a name is founded on a form of social status that is masculinised and which marginalises women and femininity. To measure up in the competitive stakes and build social capital, the professional mountaineers had to negotiate 'grade-ism' or how hard a 'grade' they were climbing (Ryan, 2005). Grade-ism is a classification system built on male bodies and male ideals and is the mark of being tough and as such, can be exclusionary through denying women access to social resources, such as knowledge networks and climbing partners, to prove their climbing ability. It also pushed women to feel they had to climb grades and in conditions that were riskier than they would have liked, producing significant anxiety. The national qualification programme is founded on this grading system, which can be a barrier to participation.
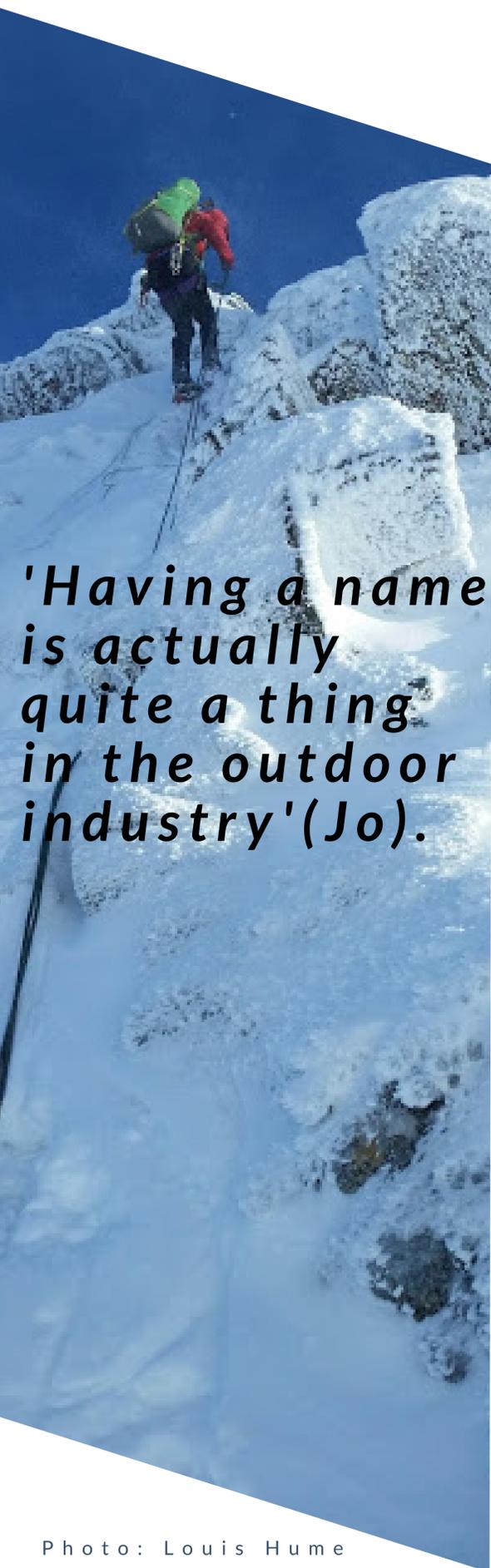
Competition

14 ### Leader/Client Power Dynamics

Women leaders still experience *'that dip in the shoulders when assigned a female leader'* and they felt subjected to an exhausting daily process of managing client-based power dynamics (this occurred when guiding independently and also for national centres and providers). The research revealed that women switch between contrasting leadership styles from highly collaborative (integrative, empathetic, consensus decision-making) (feminine) through to autocratic (masculine) behaviours that required the demonstration of masculine emotions and behaviours such as competence, speed and toughness to counter client based sexism. Women felt they had to continually reaffirm their status and the impact of this led to feelings of inadequacy and stress for both leaders and clients.

15 ### Climbing Partners

Not having a climbing partner was a key constraint for 40% of the surveyed recreational climbers. This constraint can be negotiated by joining an organised course or holiday, and women-only experiences have been found to be appealing to some women as they are considered to be more supportive and less judgemental space for women, as well as less competitive and less intimidating compared to mixed-gender groups (Kiewa, 2001a; McDermott, 2004; Mitten, 1992; Whittington et al., 2011).

16 ### On-sighting & Burnout

Over half of the leaders felt pressure to demonstrate competence and one way to do this was through on-sighting* a route with a client. As a result, some leaders felt that if they asked for knowledge about a climbing or mountaineering route they planned to lead a client on, they would be perceived as lacking in knowledge, confidence and competence. This meant the daily lives of leaders involved high levels of anxiety and stress because they were taking clients on routes they had not climbed before. The impact of adhering to this gradist cultural norm increased the risks within their daily working lives. The link between risk-taking and competence led to exhaustion and 'burn out'. Furthermore, it led six of the seven leaders to turn down lucrative contracts within their careers.

*To 'on-sight' is to climb a route without any prior knowledge other than a guide book

> " In the summer I worked in North Wales for a bit and was [also] around local people who were climbing really hard and know the area really well. I [was] trying to on-sight work to make sure I was doing a good job for the Brenin. [As well as] climb in my spare time for myself. I was not really appreciating that this was putting me under [a lot] more pressure than I thought (Lorrie). "

Competition

"

So, you are saying the pressure to climb a certain grade [whilst leading clients for companies that hired you as a leader] must have been detrimental to all of your climbing? (Jenny)

It stopped me enjoying going climbing that winter. I enjoyed it once at work. It was alright once I got to work because I just had to get on with it, but personal time [climbing] I just did not really want to be there, it was just too pressured (Lorrie).

"

"

So, I will have a serious conversation with [redacted] where I am down to lead on the [winter climbing] programme this year…I do not think I am good enough, in as far as, I make a very active choice that I am not going to climb grade V with clients in winter, it is just too dangerous (Selkie).

Is that really the mark? (Jenny)

It is certainly perceived to be. It was a big point and topic of discussion this week about pushing up the grade for the MIC qualification (Selkie).

Most people do not climb that grade (Jenny).

No, well, they do not see that; they absolutely do not see that (Selkie).

Most people who hire climbing guides do not climb that grade and they are the people with the money (Jenny).

They do not see that either. There were three of us who were trying to get that across, but they did not see that because they are so far removed from that grade, [for example] you have an international guide saying grade III is really easy, it is like walking, it is not a climbing grade and I was just sitting there thinking, OMG you really have no idea. [When teaching] I fully appreciate people getting gripped on a VDiff slab and people getting the heebee jeebees when they are on snow and they have not got any runners on a grade I gully. But these guys just don't see it. So, if that is the expectation for training and assessment at MIC [to increase the grade], that is where you need to be at [for leading professionally] (Selkie).

"

Other Constraints

> " I felt pressure not to appear weak … by confessing my fears of making that crux move…. Unconsciously, I acted totally differently … I told myself I needed to 'man up'. There's a constant pressure to prove ourselves as strong and capable climbers (Jun, 2016). "

17 ### High Cost of Mountaineering

For the majority of the recreational mountaineers, the cost associated with mountaineering (equipment, skills courses, travelling and accommodation) was prohibitive. Although those women earning a higher income felt this was less of a constraint on their participation.

18 ### Lack of Knowledge of the Climbing Routes

Being unfamiliar with the climbing routes was the second most important constraint for the surveyed recreational mountaineers and it was heightened by the women's existing self-doubts in their climbing capabilities and fitness. Consequently, some women feared for their safety and chose not to climb in unfamiliar places.

Summary

The combined findings from our research illustrate a range of constraints that women face when mountaineering. It is unsurprising that the majority of the constraints cited by the women are intra-personal constraints (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991), which are constraints that reflect one's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, as this supports the underpinning theory that intra-personal constraints must be overcome to form leisure preferences, motivation and commitment to participation. Consequently, overcoming these during mountaineering is critical to success (Doran & Pomfret, 2019). In this context, intra-personal constraints include the women's concerns regarding their climbing capabilities, speed, fitness, fatigue and confidence in taking the lead. It is of note that 30% of the surveyed recreational mountaineers did not answer the questions relating to negotiating the constraints and the benefits of participation. Therefore, it can be assumed that the constraints do act as a barrier and have prevented them from participating (Doran, Schofield & Low, 2018). Furthermore, many of the surveyed recreational participants have been climbing for some time (47% 1-5 years and 28% 6-10 years) and we believe that, over the years, they have overcome constraints on their participation and they now perceive fewer constraints. Therefore, women who are new to mountaineering may face alternative constraints which have not been identified in this report. Similarly, non-participants, who were not captured in this study, may also face a different set of constraints.

However, despite these challenges, women are using mountaineering to resist, rather than submit, to constraints. To negotiate these constraints women are employing a range of strategies that will enable their participation and, in doing so, challenging traditional gendered discourse in mountaineering. These will now be discussed.

Negotiating Constraints in Mountaineering

Women use a broad range of **strategies to overcome the constraints** on their mountaineering participation. These strategies could be **specific actions, behaviour or mind-sets** (Fendt & Wilson, 2012).

1 Their passion for mountaineering makes them determined to overcome any barriers

Through pure determination and by simply focusing on the positive benefits of participation the recreational mountaineers are able to overcome constraints.

2 The recreational mountaineers strongly agreed that being a woman does not deter them from participating

Reasons for this are unclear. Research suggests that women recognise that they are marginalised in mountaineering, but choose to ignore this, seeing themselves first as mountaineers with abilities equal to men. However, in doing so, this suggests that women are simply finding ways to accommodate gender inequity at an individual level, without challenging the system that perpetuates that inequity (Evans & Anderson, 2018; Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008). In opposition to this, some women might feel that gender is no longer an issue in the contemporary mountaineering community.

3 Training to develop skills and awareness of their climbing capabilities and boundaries

This enabled many of the women to reduce self-doubts in their physical capability and climbing skills, to cope with the physical demands of mountaineering and to fight fatigue.

4 Using positive self-talk, stopping negative thoughts and focusing on the moment

A strategy which involves convincing oneself of the ability to succeed (Feltz, Short & Sullivan, 2008) is used by both the recreational and professional mountaineers to overcome fear, fatigue and self-doubts in their climbing ability and physical fitness. Through successful performance, a sense of competence can arise, which leads to feelings of self-sufficiency, exhilaration, control (of the activity and of oneself) and, ultimately, a sense of well-being.

Negotiating Constraints in Mountaineering

Photo: Louis Hume

5 **Researching the climbing location to reduce its unfamiliarity and concerns about the routes**

Many of the recreational participants climb independently and not as part of an organised course, event or holiday, therefore, this strategy is used to negotiate concerns over safety.

6 **Making time and prioritising mountaineering**

Mountaineering is an integral part of the recreational mountaineers' lives, it is prioritised over any other recreational activity and it is their main activity whilst on holiday. However, despite their determination to participate, the majority of the women find it difficult to make time for mountaineering due to other responsibilities and commitments. Rather than not participate, many compromise on the amount of time they spend mountaineering, particularly those women with families. For example, it has been found that climbing mothers have to either suspend their climbing and return later when their children are older (although their husbands returned to climbing before them), they stopped climbing completely or they changed their activity (e.g. to running) during this period in their lives when their time was more limited (Dilley & Scraton, 2010). Thus highlighting the gendered nature of responsibility. By comparison, others reduce their responsibilities at home or reduce/be flexible with their work hours to enable their participation.

7 **Planning and preparing to anticipate future mountaineering**

This was an important strategy for over three-quarters of the surveyed recreational mountaineers as it helped them to maintain their connection with mountaineering and to anticipate future mountaineering trips when they have not participated for a while.

8 **Developing friendships/connections with likeminded people**

To provide company and safety when climbing and to overcome constraints regarding loneliness. For some this is achieved by joining an organised mountaineering course, holiday or event.

9   Tokenism & Marginalisation

> "
>
> *You're an outlier, and outliers are interesting, so you get opportunities that maybe your equally skilled male counterparts wouldn't. I've been the beneficiary of that. The other side of it is this knowledge that perhaps you've been given an opportunity because you're the diversity quota, the lone woman, and you have to work twice as hard to establish that you deserve the spot (Arnot Reid, 2017).*
>
> "

Although the professional mountaineers recognise that being in a minority as a woman can constrain them, rather than succumb to this, they use their marginalisation to their advantage. For example, the women noted how they are routinely subject to tokenistic gender-based recruitment practices (Sandberg, 2013) when employers require a woman to provide balance when running mixed-gender group activities. Gender-biased recruitment practices led to feelings of exclusivity and they were accepted by the research participants because they produced social and economic benefits. It was, however, a no-win situation because by not accepting such offers led the women to fear that they would be marked as a troublemaker and lose lucrative opportunities in the future. Jo's quote below illustrates how tokenism is prevalent in mountaineering. The conflictual nature of the quote demonstrates that although employers recognise women mountaineers have the required skills, it is not the primary reason for hiring that individual. Thus, tokenism is prevalent in professional mountain leading and continues to marginalise and undermine women mountain leaders' achievements, status and legitimacy.

By comparison, the recreational participants did not capitalise on being a 'token' woman and when asked if they used their femininity to take advantage of the attention they get from men to further their experience and skills, they strongly disagreed. However, using their gender and their femininity to capitalise on being treated differently has been noted by women in other adventure sports (Kiewa, 2001a; Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008).

> "
>
> *It has definitely helped me in the outdoors. I have got work because I am a woman (Jo).*
>
> *The women I have spoken to [also] enjoy that (Jenny).*
>
> *[Y]ou would expect people to be a bit more feminist and equal rights and all that, but actually I enjoy it as well. I am quite smug about the fact that I get work in Greenland because I am the token girl ... you get work because you are female and yeah I quite like it (Jo).*
>
> *But equally, that comes with its own baggage as well? (Jenny)*
>
> *I want to be hired for the skills that I have, not because of my gender .... But I think the people that have hired me because I am female accept I have those skills as well. I can be the token female going on an expedition, but it is because I have got those skills, they accept that and it is not just because you are female. I think that is why you can be a bit smug about it and a bit relaxed, it gives you a step up in the competition ladder (Jo).*
>
> "

10 Women-Only Climbing Teams

Research has shown that men treat women differently to how they behave with their male peers when climbing. Even if overt sexism is not present, women often feel undermined by being subjected to unwanted chivalry, being used as confidantes, not being listened to and being teamed-up with male companions who are dismissive of giving feedback (Barrett & Martin, 2016). Other women have reported men being patronising, domineering, condescending, impatient and competitive and that their male climbing partners actively impede their climbing by supporting stereotypes of masculinity and femininity by expecting them to make the travel arrangements and climb after men (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Kiewa, 2001a; 2001b; Moscoso-Sanchez, 2008; Plate, 2007). Consequently, this can reduce women's opportunities to develop their mountaineering skills and constantly places them in a secondary position. Conversely, this behaviour can also foster gradism where women feel a competitive pressure to climb the hardest, fastest and/or remotest grades on new unclimbed routes. Although some women enjoy these challenges, they also find the pressure to be continually proving themselves counter-productive. Traditionally women negotiate this by forging women-only climbing teams and expeditions. Lorrie (see below), one of the mountain leaders, was planning one such mountaineering trip with two other women climbers, where they had agreed on a rule to just climb whatever felt good.

Scholars have shown how all-women climbing teams found climbing with other women to be more fulfilling, collaborative and supportive, creating the space needed to feel the freedom to be the climber they wanted to be (Barrett & Martin, 2016; Kiewa, 2001b). Furthermore, women have also reported that they climb harder with other women, they are more confident in leading a climbing route, they are inspired more, and they can be more themselves (Plate, 2007). Not exclusively so, but all-women climbing groups tend to be more social in nature and concerned with the well-being of others working hard to maintain positive relationships.

Whilst these all-women groups provide women with an opportunity to collectively resist dominant gender constructions and gain empowerment, this study found that the recreational mountaineers also experience empowering benefits through mixed-gender groups and, in fact, indicating a preference of climbing in these groups in order to challenge dominant notions of masculinity in mountaineering. Despite the preference for mixed-gender groups, constraints were more prominent for those who climb in these groups, particularly in regard to the negative effect the masculinity of mountaineering has on their participation (masculine portrayal of mountaineering, lack of women guides/role models, feeling unwelcome, etc.). This was especially the case for those who participate in ice and mixed climbing over the other mountaineering activities.

> *I would like to go to Alaska and do some big stuff. I would quite like to go anywhere like that but without such a high objective, to go and climb some cool things. To see what it is like and to just get a feel for a totally different mountain range without it being too high pressure. So there has been talk of a trip with a couple of other girls, maybe this spring. We want to go and experience it and climb whatever we want to climb, rather than having a really determined objective (Lorrie).*

11 Softer-Skills & Emotions

Competence in mountaineering is deeply rooted in the technical knowledge and skills a mountaineer demonstrates physically and verbally, and these 'harder' skills still dominate leading and coaching, as well as training and assessment of the mountaineering national qualifications. Research has shown that women require different environments, including women-only environments, to acquire and build confidence in developing and demonstrating technical abilities. For example, some need training, coaching and leading spaces that are free of negative egoist competition combined with regular opportunities for feedback and discussion (Dingle & Kiewa, 2006; Sharp, 2001; Warren, 2016; Warren & Loeffler, 2006). Professional mountain leaders created (informally) such environments through developing and using softer-skills, which places greater emphasis on competencies like consensus decision-making, cooperation, emotional empathy and are relationship-focused; in contrast to being competitive, demonstrating strength, toughness, being technically focused and proving oneself (Barrett & Martin, 2016; Sharp, 2001). Most of the mountain leaders felt softer skills were more important than technical skills and central to staying alive in extreme environments. Yet women-only training and leading opportunities are relatively infrequent and perceived to be for women of lower-ability that lack skills and confidence. This perception was off-putting for those women who were competent and confident in their own abilities.

Summary

These findings show women as proactive and creative participants who, driven by a desire and commitment to mountaineering and their profession, seek to overcome constraints by utilising a range of negotiation strategies to ensure satisfying mountaineering experiences and working environments. Furthermore, the process of negotiating constraints adds value to the experience, it helps the women develop resiliency skills, such as self-confidence and self-awareness, strategies for dealing with high-risk situations and their associated fears, and techniques for handling issues related to gender role beliefs in mountaineering (Doran & Pomfret, 2019; Evans & Anderson, 2018). In turn, this challenges hegemonic ideas about gender in mountaineering and empowers women. For the surveyed recreational participants, without these challenges, their mountaineering experience was of less value.

However, the findings also suggest that women negotiate ways to accommodate gender inequity at an individual level, without challenging the system that perpetuates that inequity and marginalises and trivialises them. Moreover, this system may well continue to do so for future generations of women in mountaineering (Evans & Anderson, 2018; Hall, 2018; Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008). Nonetheless, change might be occurring incrementally and further examination of the longer-term impacts of the negotiation strategies highlighted in this report may reveal this. Furthermore, this proposed research could also explore if the level of resistance and negotiation changes as life situations change through a woman's life course.

The benefits of mountaineering for women participating at both a recreational and professional level will now be discussed.

> *There should be different approaches to the way we are assessed, trained and coached …. We need more feedback and talk around the issue. [I also] think there are probably quite a lot of blokes that would want that too. There is a generalised sweeping statement that more females want a softly softly … feedback kind of approach and why not have that? (Jo)*

Benefits of Mountaineering

The women in both studies experience a broad range of benefits from their mountaineering participation.

> " *I am hoping to increase my mountaineering confidence, I am hoping to really challenge myself and succeed. And I do think it is going to be a challenge, a real challenge, but I hope that I am going to come back down and look back on it and think it was a real achievement* (Katherine). "

1   A sense of achievement & well-being

Both the professional and recreational mountaineers cited a sense of achievement as one of their primary benefits of participation. This is unsurprising, as a number of other benefits contribute to the sense of achievement women gain from mountaineering. For example, benefits relating to risk-taking and personal challenges (both physically and mentally), practising and developing skills, increased confidence, taking responsibility for decision making and learning about oneself through participation can all lead to feelings of achievement. In turn, this enhanced women's sense of well-being and self-motivation, thus supporting self-determination theory, a popular theory on human motivation and personality which assumes that people are determined and self-motivated to develop and change once psychological needs, such as the ones listed above, are met (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

> " *I just know that my mental and physical wellbeing are much improved after I have had a really good day mountaineering* (Annie). "

2   Feeling stronger, fitter and physically active

This was the second most important benefit of participation for the recreational mountaineers. Previous research on female rock climbers found that women placed emphasis on what their body could do, rather than how it looked, and, consequently, they felt empowered by their alternative physique to other (non-climbing) women (Dilley & Scraton, 2011; McDermott, 2004). To test if their fitness or skills were decreasing and to reaffirm their capabilities, many of the professional mountaineers set themselves challenges, which was crucial to their confidence, believing that *'if I shy away from those challenges, I am going to get weaker and I don't want to get weaker' (Jo).*

Benefits of Mountaineering

3   Feeling connected with the natural environment

Not only through what they were seeing, but also through the physical activity of mountaineering. Remote settings, in particular, have been found to induce self-reflection and provoke women to re-evaluate their priorities and critique materialism and body image (Pohl, Borrie & Patterson, 2000). Therefore, mountaineering is seen as valuable in terms of its benefits to women's mental health.

4   Being able to pursue their own interests and develop a mountaineering identity

Although developing a mountaineering identity through their participation was the least important benefit for the recreational survey participants, nevertheless, 61% said that this was important to them. This identity unites mountaineers by a common lifestyle based on values which reflect contact with nature, personal development, challenging experiences and excursions to specific climbing locations (Moscoso-Sanchez, 2008). For example, climbing in Nepal and other 'must-see' destinations enables mountaineers to gain adventure capital (Myers, 2010; Obenour, 2005), reaffirm their mountaineering identity and provide them with an opportunity to pursue their mountaineering interests. Developing a climbing identity has been noted previously as enabling women to resist the traditional social norms of femininity, which is constructed in relation to their position as wives and mothers (Dilley & Scraton, 2010). Thus, developing a mountaineering identity is a benefit as well as a negotiation strategy for women.

5   Being able to escape from everyday life and to feel relaxed

Mountaineering helped recreational and professional mountaineers to escape the responsibilities and pressures of everyday life, to feel relaxed and to gather strength before returning to their responsibilities. Previous research has described these benefits as being heightened by the natural environment they are participating in, particularly if participating in remote settings (Carr, 1997; Pohl et al., 2000).

> " *I like the fact that it (mountaineering) clears my mind. I have a reasonably stressful job, but when you are halfway up a mountain or cliff you are not thinking about work, it clears your mind. I also like the fact that it is physical and it keeps me fit and healthy (Liz).* "

" *This expedition is an adventure for me because it is a bit of the unknown. It is pushing me outside of my comfort zone and doing something that I wouldn't normally get to do in my normal life. It is not just about this trip, you learn about yourself. It is about finding out about what kind of person you are and what hardships you can tolerate (Nicky).* "

" *I suppose because it is rich, you can go out for a solo day out in the hills and it is that sense of self-sufficiency and full belief in yourself. There is no ego involved because it involves no one else and you are not doing it for any other reason than for yourself (Lorrie).* "

6 Being able to take risks and challenge themselves, which increases their confidence and self-reliance

Findings from both studies indicate that this increased the women's understanding of themselves, in particular, their physical capabilities and their climbing skills, which led to feelings of achievement and satisfaction and it reduced their perceptions of constraints. In these situations, the women enjoyed being able to take responsibility for their own decisions, which enabled them to gain a sense of independence. Self-reliance, or the feeling of being self-sufficient and independent, was also important to the professional mountaineers and was signified by their ability to draw on their skills and experience, to control their emotions in difficult situations, and to manage life or death decision-making (Kiewa, 2001b). As illustrated by one participant: *'mountains are about freedom and feeling like I can go anywhere, and I can do anything, and it is partly why I have all the skills and qualifications...[I enjoy being]...self-sufficient and being able to go anywhere and not be reliant on other people to look after me' (Caitlin).*

7 A sense of satisfaction with their mountaineering skills and capabilities

This was notable amongst the recreational mountaineers who were physically, technically and mentally challenged when climbing, particularly when participating in remote areas.
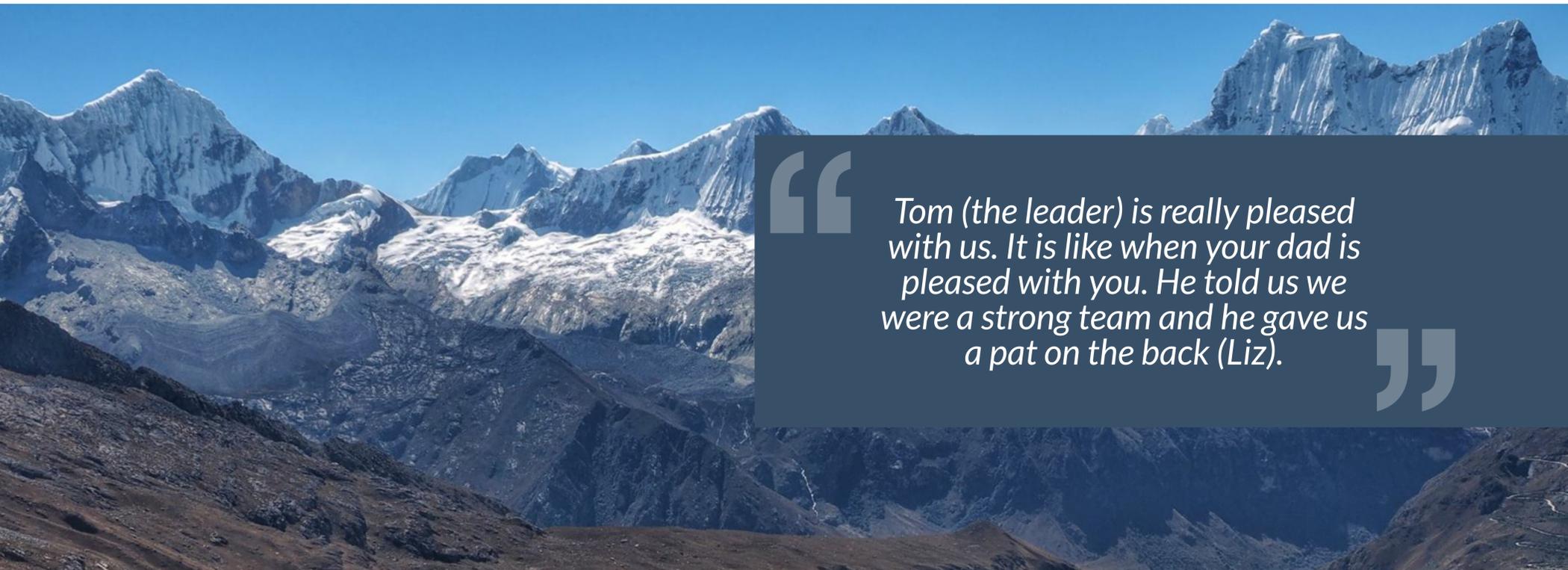
> " *Tom (the leader) is really pleased with us. It is like when your dad is pleased with you. He told us we were a strong team and he gave us a pat on the back (Liz).* "

8 The relationship with the leader/guide is considered important to the success of the course/trip

The expedition group members attributed the success of the trip to the leader's ability to nurture, foster a team mentality and ensure the group were cohesive and supportive of one another. For example, the leader insisted we walked together, he encouraged the group to observe one another and look for signs of fatigue and altitude sickness, and he consistently asked group members to share their experiences and feelings, which encouraged the group to bond, provided a supportive learning environment and created a positive rapport. The group respected the leader and looked to him as a father figure during the expedition, as illustrated in the quote above.

9 Exclusivity & Tokenism

Women mountaineers are in a minority. One research participant in her early professional mountaineering career described how she enjoyed a sense of being *'exotic and different'*. This gave her a *'sense of achievement when she could do what the men could do' (Annie).* Moreover, it gave her a sense of exclusivity and the feeling of being different from others in everyday life, which produced a sense of identity and generated a feeling of well-being. Being exotic or an outlier produced economic and social benefits for all of the professional research participants, including being hired as the 'token' women. Although, participating in tokenism did produce feelings that were conflicted, as described earlier in the report.

10 To develop friendships with like-minded people

Which provide companionship and role models. Furthermore, close bonds and meaningful long-lasting friendships are often formed during participation due to the intensity of mountaineering. This contributes to a sense of belonging to a climbing community.

> " *I am delighted, meeting other mountaineering women has been fantastic because we are all of the same mindset (Nicky).* "
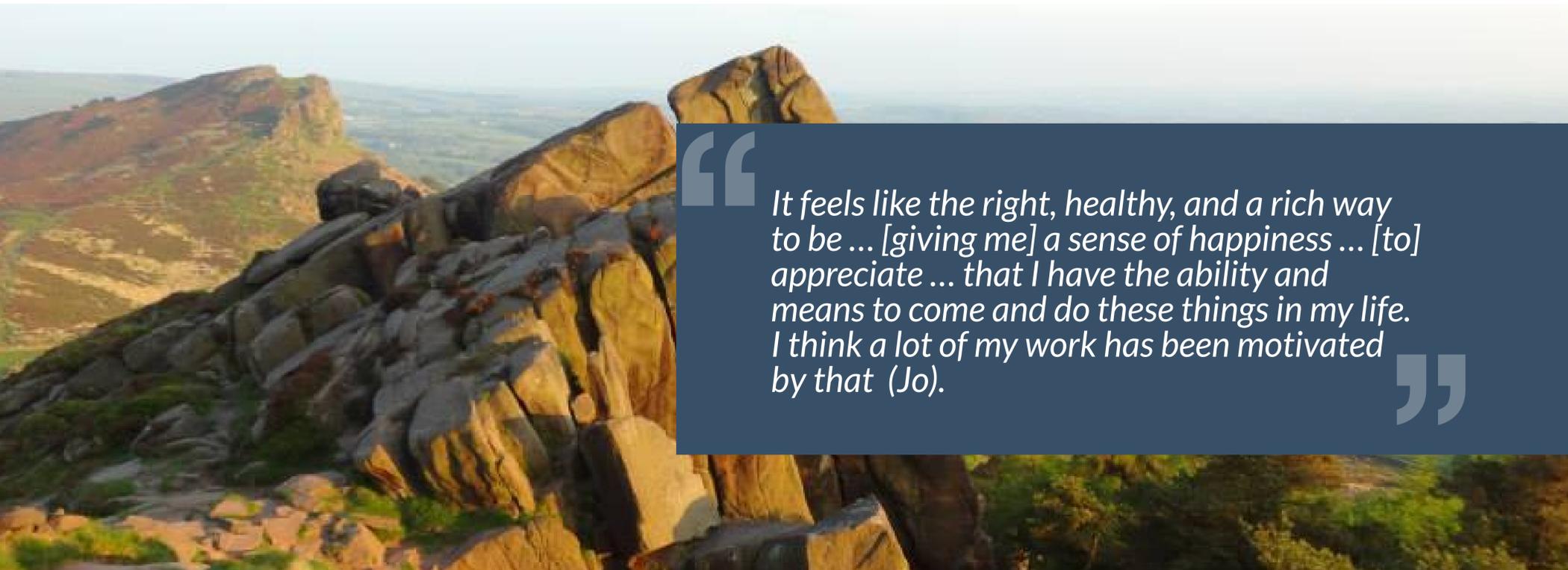
> " It feels like the right, healthy, and a rich way to be … [giving me] a sense of happiness … [to] appreciate … that I have the ability and means to come and do these things in my life. I think a lot of my work has been motivated by that (Jo). "

Summary

These findings indicate that mountaineering is a space where women can gain empowerment, exemplified by feeling more physically capable, a sense of achievement, taking responsibility for one's decisions and gaining independence. The women's resistance to gendered expectations and norms and their resilience also support this assertion. Accordingly, women can begin to experience the benefit of empowerment during the constraint negotiation process. For example, being undeterred by their gender and by developing their mountaineering skills through training the women can experience confidence, a sense of achievement and greater awareness of, and satisfaction with, their mountaineering capabilities.

The research has also shown how women mountaineers may not find happiness in the same things that normative society applies to notions of femininity. Mountaineering for women can mark them as wilful, setting them apart from and being perceived as uncommon in normative society, as well as in the masculine environment of mountaineering. In contrast, the research identified that the research participants achieve a sense of fulfilment and well-being through mountaineering and was, in fact, vital for securing their psychological and physical health. To achieve this the research participants required a complex mix of conditions including the right level of exposure to risk, a sense of self-sufficiency and sensations of mastery and control.

> " I have had some incredible experiences where it is just you and the activity and I feel a sense of flow, a sense of being at one, you do not worry... fear does not come into it, as long as I am in the mood the movement just flows... it is that thing of being totally in the now... it feels like the right thing, where your mind and body are all in the same place wanting the same thing for you (Lorrie). "

Recommendations

Whilst the findings presented in this report come from two separate studies, the results validate one another and highlight that women are encountering constraints relating to self-doubts, negative forms of competition, familial commitments and lack of access to knowledge networks at both a recreational and a professional level. Gender is less of a constraint for the recreational mountaineers in this study, however, it is prevalent for the professional mountaineers, highlighting that characteristics associated with masculinity become more acute as women progress through their mountaineering career from an amateur to professional and they significantly impact on the quality of their working environments. Further research that explores how best women should be supported to make the transition from an amateur to a professional mountaineer and how this is sustained over a life-course is needed. Although the recreational mountaineers generally disagreed rather than agreed to the survey questions relating to gender constraining their participation, for example, the under-representation of women in adventure media, the lack of women guides/leaders and being unwelcome/a minority as a woman, these have been identified as key barriers to women's participation in other studies on rock climbing, mountaineering and other adventure sports. Therefore, further research is needed to explore this and ascertain if gender, or indeed any other constraint that was not listed in the survey, is prevalent for women who mountaineer recreationally. To enable a more comprehensive conceptualisation of women's barriers to mountaineering, this research should look at women's experiences across a range of activities, e.g. rock climbing, ice climbing, mixed-climbing etc., as each may present women with a different set of constraints, especially as some (rock climbing) see more female participants than others. An in-depth qualitative approach is recommended to garner rich and detailed accounts.

The findings also point to a number of constraints that could be reduced through a more supportive and inclusive mountaineering environment. Some of these constraints are socially constructed and therefore difficult for Mountain Training, the BMC or providers delivering mountaineering courses and experiences to influence. Such as the social expectation of women placing family needs before their personal mountaineering desires and women's tendency to have more self-doubt and less confidence than their male counterparts. However, other constraints can be alleviated by these organisations. These include the negative forms of competition and gradism, how feminine emotions can be understood and supported, the masculine perception and the media's portrayal of mountaineering, and helping women to recognise their climbing capabilities. Therefore, further research that explores and defines what women-only and women-specific coaching, training and leading should be and how this is best disseminated amongst the providers of mountaineering experiences and the trainers of mountaineering professionals, as well as how it should be delivered in practice is needed. This could also benefit the women's recreational mountaineering community as many will be taught, guided or led by a professional mountaineer at some point.

In view of the existence of multiple masculinities (Wheaton, 2004) and the marginalisation of men who resist dominant stereotypes in the outdoors (Warren, 2016), future research could also examine the participation of men. Moreover, research that examines the participation constraints of male mountaineers may also help to reconstruct the dominant male stereotypes which are strongly associated with mountaineering, benefiting both male and female mountaineers alike (Doran et al., 2018). This would provide further insight into the role of gender in mountaineering.

The following recommendations both unpack and offer ways to move forward on this subject.

Photo: Louis Hume

" *Being guided or taught by a man does not apply as directly as being guided or taught by a woman. Watching a man do something bears no significance to a woman – it simply does not apply to her... it is more tangible, easily transferable, to watch a woman climb: I am in essence watching my own form – the form I most naturally, inherently relate to and identify with – and it doesn't stop at movement, but encompasses attitude and composure as well (Loomis, 2005).* "
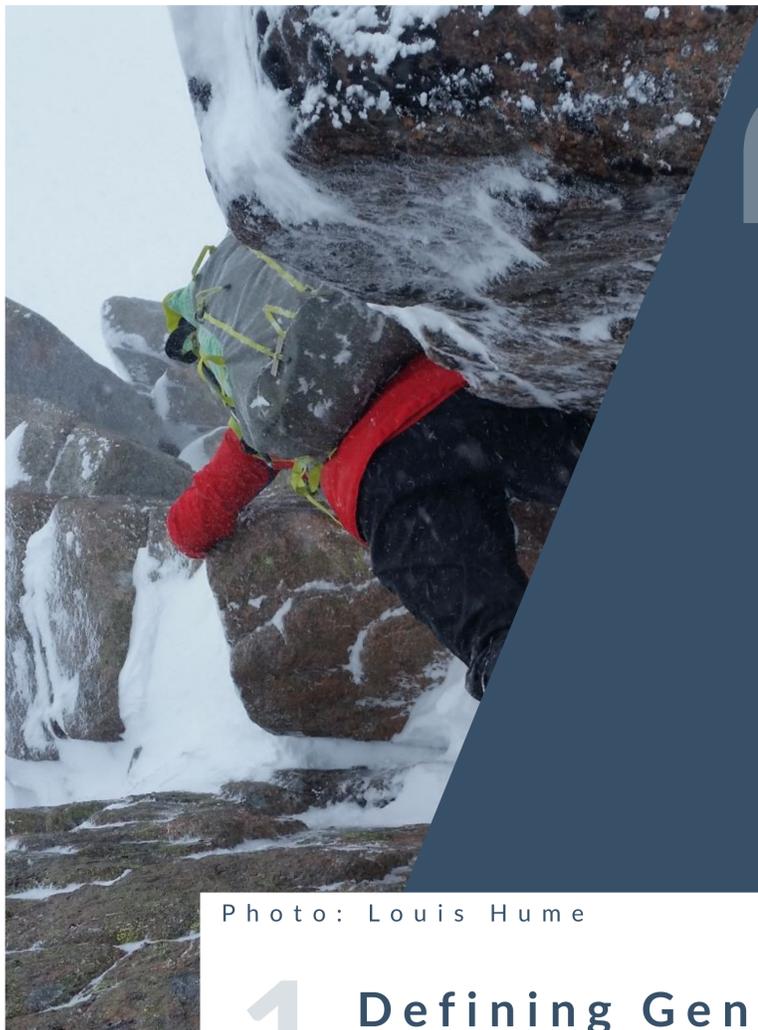
> **On-the-ground women still experience from male clients 'that dip in the shoulders when assigned a female leader'. This kind of behaviour should be robustly challenged through awareness building delivered in a positive campaign that addresses the impact that negative behaviours can have (Selkie).**

1 Defining Gender Inclusive Training

The use of softer-skills was prevalent amongst the female mountain leaders and these 'informal' coaching skills, acquired through experience rather than through training, had enabled them to develop strategies for managing client expectations. For example, the women placed greater emphasis on communication, rather than hard technical skills, when leading clients and they noted how their female clients needed far more feedback than male clients. This suggests a need for a 'gender-sensitive pedagogy' (Warren 2016, p. 361). Warren (2016) argues women learn technical skills differently than men, requiring a non-competitive space for the repetitive practise of skills to counter a lack of skills developed in childhood as a result of social conditioning. However, our research also suggests that this could be beneficial for men. For example, one leader commented on how some male students prefer a non-competitive environment when learning new skills and demonstrating techniques, as illustrated in this quote: *'it has been really good going out with a female instructor because [they]… do not feel like [they] … have … to compete with [my]… ego all day' (Selkie).* As such, terms such as 'female-specific' and 'gender-specific' need to be researched and defined to understand what both men and women need and how this is best delivered before effective training and coaching programmes that incorporate this can be implemented and embedded within the sector. This may also help to understand how social and professional relationships between men and women can enhance rather than impair their mountaineering experiences (Hall, 2018; Pomfret & Doran, 2015).

> "There should be different approaches to the way we are assessed, trained and coached …. We need more feedback and talk around the issue, [I also] think there are probably quite a lot of blokes that would want that too. There is a generalised sweeping statement that more females want a softly softly … feedback kind of approach and why not have that? (Jo)

Photo: Louis Hume

2 Clarifying Assessment Criteria

There is a perception by the professional research participants that Mountain Training's qualification assessment criteria lack consistency and clarity between providers. Therefore, these findings support Mountain Training's ambition to review the structure and delivery of courses to achieve greater access and representation. For example, split training and assessment weekends were indicated by participants as a simple way to accommodate women's familial constraints and also a means of handling the emotional impact produced by the assessment process. How the assessment is conducted is also a major point of concern and should be analysed in terms of the length, duration and content. Research is required to understand which pedagogical tools are most effective during coaching, training and assessing candidates to understand which criteria are essential for producing twenty-first-century mountaineers. In doing so, this could alleviate barriers associated with perceptions of speed, autocratic leadership, negative forms of power-play and competition, and develop strategies for dealing with taboo subjects and gender differences in general.

3 Defining, Formalising & Renaming 'Softer Skills'

The research suggests that women require more feedback than their male counterparts throughout their mountaineering training, their skills development and when being guided. While it is acknowledged that 'softer skills', such as giving feedback, are trained and assessed through the Mountain Training programmes, the majority of the professional research participants felt these were not adequately defined or consistently delivered in training, assessment or when guiding clients. However, they did recognise that pockets of good practice exist. This suggests that research and work are needed to define 'soft skills', to identify which 'soft skills' are important in Mountain Training programmes and in guiding contexts, and to improve the consistency of the delivery of these skills, including providing effective feedback. Furthermore, research should aid with de-gendering the term 'softer skills' to help with the development and mainstreaming of effective gender-sensitive learning and teaching strategies to the benefit of all leaders, trainees and clients (Hall, 2018; Warren, 2016).

I want to be hired for the skills that I have not because of my gender (Jo).

Photo: Louis Hume

4 Campaign that Supports Knowledge Networks

Clear pathways for accessing 'knowledge networks' need to be identified and formalised from recreational participation through to finding professional mentoring training partners. The Women in Mountain Training Facebook group and Womenclimb are proven as successful fora and should be considered for further development as well as other mechanisms. Such networks could open pathways, for example, to knowledge about locations, routes, alleviate anxiety associated with on-sighting and provide support regarding childcare and pressure concerning family commitments. This could go some way to assisting with the negative impacts of gradism and instead provide a space where women can share their experiences and celebrate their achievements.

5 Transparent Recruitment for Freelancers

Research participants perceived there to be a lack of transparency when hiring freelance mountain leaders. This leads to anxiety over retaining a 'name' and a jostling for position economically that can lead to feelings of isolation and pressure to choose between starting a family or pursuing a career. Developing greater transparency concerning recruitment processes could alleviate the anxiety concerning meeting familial commitments. There should also be work undertaken to address tokenistic recruitment practices regarding the requirement for a 'woman' leader. This should be challenged through policy and setting of industry standards. Research that explores if recruitment practices are gendered could be conducted through analysing current person specifications, job descriptions and interview techniques.

6 Mentoring and Women-Only

It is acknowledged that some women want women-only experiences and the benefits of this should be promoted by providers of mountaineering courses and experiences to challenge perceptions that women-only means that it is for less-skilled women. In a professional context, the successful women-only mentoring programme delivered by Mountain Training in 2016 proved that with focused attention significant gains can be made. However, this women-only mentoring programme received negative backlash from both men and women in the professional mountaineering community. Consequently, some of the professional research participants expressed a reluctance to acknowledge or engage in initiatives that aim to encourage women's participation and increase their representation. Greater education, publicity and awareness-raising concerning the impact gender imbalances have, could alleviate future negative backlash.

> *I find that a lot of it is confidence related, so if I can have conversations with women [I try to] instil confidence into them and let them know they are doing really well and doing the right things, you get much more from them [that way]. Men kind of want to be challenged and just get on with it, [whereas] women need a lot more feedback [and] generally a bit more input (Jo).*

Photo: Louis Hume

7 The Representation of Women

The imbalance that exists within mountaineering, from national governing organisations right through to clubs and recreational participation, requires a more proactive approach to increase women's representation. Recruiting women into senior positions and increasing women's representation in the media could contribute to this. For example, women should play a greater role in the governance, management and operations of mountaineering organisations, in producing and being the lead subject in films and in the writing of guidebooks and biographies. Combined with an increase in female mountain leaders, particularly at ML (winter), MCI, WMCI and BMG level, will normalise women in mountaineering, it will provide aspirant mountaineers with role models and it will debunk the myth of 'superwoman' (Warren, 2016, p.361) and show that superhuman powers are not essential criteria to be a female mountaineer or leader.

Similarly, the misrepresentation of women in the mountaineering media plays an important part in increasing women's participation. Efforts should be made to feature real adventurous women of all shapes and sizes in their communication, with and without children (ATTA, 2017). Research has found that the outdoor recreation media, including mountaineering, reinforces traditional gender roles of women being passive participants or consumers of soft adventure and it dissuades women from participating (Kling, Margaryan & Fuchs, 2018; McNeil, Harris & Fondren, 2012; Rak, 2007; Vodden-McKay & Schell, 2010; Zink & Kane, 2015). For example, women are rarely depicted as being alone in the wilderness, actively participating, dirty or unkempt. Instead, they are either shown with their family or placed behind the man, given the role of novice and requiring assistance from a man. When women are shown as active participants, they are generally professionals and their physical accomplishments are often either downplayed or depicted as the endeavours of unique women who require feminisation. Media images do not just reflect reality, they actively shape the way reality is perceived and understood as they provide important points of reference regarding 'appropriate' behaviour, particularly for those new to mountaineering (Zink & Zane, 2015). This is why it is important to examine the relationship between media and mountaineering as, to date, adventure media, in general, has escaped the level of scrutiny that sports media has received.

> *It highlights for me, those few statements you get back from men, … [that] they really like having a female instructor and that I can provide something that the male instructors cannot (Selkie).*

Photo: Louis Hume

8 Women's Health & Hormones

There is a clear need to provide strategies to deal with normal physiological functions experienced by women that could and are commonly overlooked in mixed group settings. In recognition of the need to be more open about such issues, the Women's Adventure Expo (2017) have launched their Managing Menstruation in Extreme Environments Project (MMiEEP) to identify issues and to find practical solutions that promote women's health and well-being. Until the launch of projects like MMiEEP, taboo topics like these have remained hidden issues and certainly have not been the subject of research in mountaineering. It is clear further research is required in this area.

9 Maternity/Paternity/Child Care Support for Professional Mountaineers

Specific support for women or partners who need to take maternity/paternity leave or take time out to care for a relative could be facilitated through the introduction of 'Keeping in Touch Days' (KIT) days. In addition, to expanding specialist networks, information and guidance such as Women In Mountain Training Facebook group.

10 Challenging Sexist Client Behaviour

Sexist client behaviour should be robustly challenged at a policy and organisational level and a positive campaign to address this needs to be implemented. Such a measure could enable women to use more collaborative forms of leadership that alleviate stress and emotional impact. Research that aims to understand how such a campaign should be framed is required.

11 Providers of Mountaineering and Climbing Courses, Holidays and Experiences

Intra-personal constraints relating to women's self-doubts in their climbing skills, climbing ability, speed, and concerns regarding a lack of knowledge of the climbing routes were found to be key barriers to participation. Therefore, providers should address these constraints in their communication with female clients (Doran et al., 2018). Many providers already provide guidance on what level of fitness and experience is expected. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that more is needed to help women recognise and have confidence in their abilities in order to facilitate participation and reduce the perceptions of risk and the resulting emotional impact.

Additionally, the findings from this study can also assist providers in appreciating the complexity of women's constraints and the strategies they use to negotiate these, which can facilitate the development of soft skills and emotional intelligence of their guides and leaders (Doran & Pomfret, 2019).

The findings can also help providers to manage their clients' expectations and recognise when they need encouragement through verbal persuasion to enhance their confidence in their ability to succeed (self-efficacy). Guides and leaders may detect more easily potential constraints during participation and whether this reflects reduced motivation, a weakness in their ability or a lack of confidence.

Finally, understanding the benefits of participation for women gives mountaineering providers some information on which they can structure their activities and promote their products.

While this study has helped to address a research gap in women's mountaineering participation, more work still needs to be done, particularly given that guided and led climbing and mountaineering experiences are enjoying strong growth. Investigations should explore other types of constraints faced by women in a range of climbing and mountaineering activities, and the negotiation strategies they employ before and also during participation to overcome constraints. It is also worth noting that the above recommendations are not exclusively for women and men may also benefit from these.

> " *You put your goggles on, and you are in a different world and it feels great, all seems calm and peaceful. Yet it is all kicking off and I relish the fact that you are just surviving and choosing to carry on. It just feels like you are accomplishing something, in that you refuse to be blown back [by the wind] and [not] to give up and managing to do it... It is a sense of achievement that you have done what you set out to do. That is what keeps you coming back, that need to feel a sense of achievement and feel happy. If I did not mountaineer I would have to find something that challenged me and gave that sense of achievement... everybody in the outdoors is like that; it is in our nature (Jo).* "

Photo: Louis Hume

Action: Next Steps

Conduct Research

- Define what gender-specific means and how this can be translated into coaching, training, assessing and leading strategies.
- Define, formalise and rename softer-skills and explore how these could be incorporated formally into coaching, training, assessing and leadership.
- Assess if women face alternative constraints to what was found in this study and the nuances of these.
- Examine the role the leader has in helping women to overcome the constraints they experience during participation.
- Explore the impact mountaineering media has on women's participation in mountaineering.

Conduct Research

- Identify tactics for managing emotions, self-doubts and taboo topics.
- Examine negative forms of gradism and how they impact on women and the wider peer group.
- Explore how family commitments can best be supported.
- Explore the impact of gendered recruitment practices.
- Analyse mountaineering media through the lens of gender.
- Evaluate the models of delivery for national qualifications from a gender-specific perspective.

Build a Campaign

- Highlight the gender divide and the impact such imbalances have on the wider mountaineering community. This should aim to unpack and challenge the discrimination women experience institutionally and from clients and peers.
- Implement clear pathways for accessing 'knowledge networks'.
- Promote the benefits of mountaineering for women, particularly in terms of women's well-being, and highlight how women will be supported in overcoming their constraints.

Assist Reform

- Good mountain leaders are assets to be nurtured and facilitating returners to the industry could be addressed through tailored CPD.
- Widening access through producing and implementing a strategy for women as part of a broader diversity action plan.
- De-gender the terms 'hard' and 'soft' in mountaineering and move towards gender-sensitive pedagogies of teaching, learning and guiding.
- In promotional materials and media show real women actively participating in a range of climbing/mountaineering activities and environments.

This research has focused on women, but further research could also explore the experiences of other marginalised groups, such as LGBT+ and BAME participants, as well as the experiences of men. Furthermore, millennials will constitute a significant proportion of future mountaineers and research that examines their preferred learning styles and if these are being met within the current provision of mountaineering training, skills development courses and organised mountaineering experiences , for example, would be of benefit to the providers of these.

Jenny Hall

Photo: Louis Hume

Academic

I am a cultural geographer interested in embodied experiences of adventure and tourism in extreme environments in terms of gender, emotion, affect and more broadly in heritage and sports. My current research spans both philosophical and applied contexts in mountaineering. I am currently working on projects that concern sensory experiences in extreme environments. I am a specialist in the use of mobile video ethnography to record real-life experiences. I am Treasurer of the Geographies of Leisure and Tourism Research Group, a postgraduate fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and a member of Behavioural and Social Science Network.

Professional

Before undertaking my PhD, I worked as a cultural producer and curator in the arts and heritage sector founding and leading major venues, festivals and cultural development programmes. Along with directing University public engagement, enterprise and knowledge exchange programmes. I live and work in North Yorkshire and enjoy the mountains through mountaineering and ultra-distance mountain marathons. I am a member of my local mountain rescue team.

Research

Hall, J. (2018). Women mountaineers: A study of affect, sensoria and emotion, Thesis, York St John University
For the first time, this research has explored the experiences of British female mountaineers, from the earliest antecedents through to the present day. The research has demonstrated how gender matters in the male space of mountaineering revealing how this culture impacts on women and their mountaineering practices. The study challenges the masculine space of mountaineering demonstrating how women, as outsiders, mountaineer differently. In doing so, it offers the potential for growth and development in the world of professional mountaineering.

Hall, J. (2018). Women Mountaineers and affect: Fear, Play and the Unknown. In: Saul, H., Waterton, E. eds. Affective Geographies of Transformation, Exploration and Adventure: Rethinking Frontiers. London, Routledge, pp.147 - 164.

My published work can be accessed at York St John University https://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/

Adele Doran

Academic

My research focuses on the experiences of adventure participants. Primarily the experiences of female climbers and mountaineers, the constraints they encounter and negotiate when accessing and participating, and the benefits they gain from these experiences. Additional projects include an investigation of women's representation on adventure social media and the impact adventure activities have on women's mental well-being. I employ a range of methodologies to study the experiences of adventure participants, including survey research, interviews and focus groups, ethnography and social media research.

Professional

I was previously a snowboard instructor in America and I am an enthusiast of the outdoors, which has inspired my research. I am a member of the Adventure Tourism Research Association (ATRA), an organisation which seeks to bring together academics, adventure professionals and commercial operators, and I sit on their steering group committee. I am also a core member of the Outdoor Recreation Research Group (ORRG), which is a group of Sheffield Hallam University research experts with expertise in diverse areas of the outdoor recreation sector.

Research

Currently, I am working with Sheffield City Council on a project to develop adventure-based city breaks designed to attract international sports enthusiasts. The project was awarded by VisitBritain and their Discover England fund.

My published work includes:

- Doran, A., Schofield, P., & Low, T. (2020). Women's mountaineering: Accessing participation benefits through constraint negotiation strategies. Leisure Studies, https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2020.1763439.
- Doran, A. (2019). Women's mountaineering tourism experiences: The constraint negotiation process and benefits of participation. (Doctoral thesis).
- Doran, A., & Pomfret, G. (2019). Exploring efficacy in personal constraint negotiation: an ethnography of mountaineering tourists. Tourist Studies, 19(4), pp.475-495.
- Doran, A., Schofield, P., & Low, T. (2018). Women's mountaineering tourism: an empirical investigation of its theoretical constraint dimensions. Leisure Studies, 37(4), pp.396-410.
- Doran, A. (2016). Empowerment and women in adventure tourism: a negotiated journey. Journal of Sport and Tourism, 20 (1), 57-80.
- Pomfret, G., & Doran, A. (2015). Gender and mountaineering tourism. In Musa, G., Thompson-Carr, A., & Higham, J. (Eds.) Mountaineering Tourism. (pp. 138-155). London: Routledge.

My published work can be accessed free via my Sheffield Hallam University profile: https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/staff-profiles/adele-doran

CONTACT

j.hall@yorksj.ac.uk

+ 44 7505 360032

@laughinggrouse

www.jennyhallgeographer.com

a.doran@shu.ac.uk

+ 44 7792636013

@adele_doran

Est. 1841 | YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

Sheffield Hallam University

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