

## How Do Women Construct Adventure Recreation in Their Lives?

### Why We Need to Re-Engage With the Essence of Adventure Experience

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#### **Abstract**

*Research into adventure recreation has tended to be located in the experiences of men. This is largely due to a history of dominant male participation, though it is acknowledged that more women are accessing these forms of leisure experiences. This paper reports a study of forty-two women who had participated in adventure recreation at some stage throughout their adult lives. These women were interviewed regarding their personal meanings of adventure recreation. This included exploration of how adventure was experienced and the types of issues that affected their participation in adventure recreation. The results showed that adventure for these women incorporated risk and physical challenge, but also a sense of newness, learning, personal development and creativity. The evidence presented suggests that while traditional definitions of adventure recreation offer a general differentiation of adventure activities from other forms of outdoor recreation, they are perhaps too limiting. The women's experiences indicate that adventure extends beyond labeled "adventure" pursuits and that broader understandings need to be incorporated into our meanings of adventure.*

#### **Introduction**

Adventure recreation has been reasonably and consistently defined over the last 25 years. A widely accepted definition of adventure recreation is that put forward by Ewert and Hollenhorst (1989:125) as, "a variety of self-initiated activities utilizing an interaction with the natural environment, that contain elements of real or apparent danger, in which the outcome, while uncertain, can be influenced by the participant and circumstance". Examples of activities which have been labeled outdoor adventure recreation include rock climbing, kayaking, white water rafting, SCUBA diving, mountaineering and backpacking (Attarian, 1991; Ewert, 1989; McIntyre 1991). Some differences of opinion occur over the full range of outdoor adventure, but in part this difference is explained by perceptions of whether or not the outcome of the activity can be deemed uncertain (Priest & Gass, 1997).

While adventure recreation has been defined as a specific subset of leisure activity, the independent term adventure is also readily used in the literature. Similar to adventure recreation, adventure is also seen to incorporate risk and an uncertain outcome (Priest, 1999). Adventure comes "from the risks inherent in the activity and becomes personally challenging when a person applies personal competence against the risks in an attempt to resolve the uncertainty" (Priest, 1990:115). Here, the greatest definitional difference between leisure that incorporates adventure, and adventure recreation, is the removal of necessity for a natural environment. Further, adventure is also seen to be a state of mind. Mortlock (1994) suggested that as long as participants feel the situation is dangerous and their actions can lead to harm or unpleasantness, adventure might be experienced. This does not need to lead to physical harm, but may include the potential for other forms of loss (e.g., loss of self-esteem, sense of identity or social security). These definitions of adventure recreation and associated elements have core commonalities. Adventure is seen to encompass risk, whether it be absolute, real or perceived (Haddock, 1993); it is self-motivating; and it is challenging. As such, it seems that an individual's perception of the challenge should define adventure, rather than the activity itself.

Until recently, studies in adventure recreation have tended to focus on the characteristics, involvement patterns and motivations of adventure recreationists as determined by predominantly male respondents (Ewert, 1986; McIntyre, 1989; Robinson, 1992). This is partially explained by the observation that women's participation in outdoor adventure activities is generally lower than that of men's (Anderson, Andrews, Edwards, Harris, & Saville, 1996; Mitchell, 1983; Roggenbuck & Lucas, 1987). A survey conducted of rock climbing sites in eastern Australia (McIntyre, 1991) demonstrated this pattern as typical, with only 23% of the 150 respondents being female. However, with the general increased popularity of adventure activities (Ewert, 1986; McIntyre,

1991), other research has started to indicate that women's participation is growing (Henderson, 1992). Even with such an increase however, the numbers of women involved in adventure activities continues to remain lower than their male counterparts (Cordell, Lewis & McDonald, 1995; Evans, 1997).

Research that has started to explore adventure recreation from different perspectives, e.g., women's experiences, has found that discourses based on more inclusive understandings produce some different results. Gender research of leisure in general, and outdoor adventure in particular, have found that women's experiences of these pursuits is often different from that of men (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1999; Humberstone, 2000; Pohl, Borrie, & Patterson, 2000). The reasons for this disparity are diverse and include that adventure recreation has been described as traditionally masculine, in culture and in practice (Humberstone, 2000; McDonald, 1996; Nolan & Priest, 1993). It has been seen to be "male defined and male dominated" (Knapp, 1985:7), and the outdoors has been identified as an area for masculine activity, subsequently denying access to many women (Humberstone, 2000). In addition, it has been suggested that women's needs in the outdoors are better met away from the "male ego" and socially acceptable, and confining, gender roles (McClintock, 1996).

Compounding these factors is the pool of structural, inter-personal and intra-personal constraints that have been identified for women in leisure and adventure recreation. The traditional definition of femininity and the social construction of the gendered role, attributes "female" behaviours as including dependence, passivity, nurturing and other-directedness. Male attributes by comparison tend to include independence, mastery and inner directness (Kane, 1990). These "male" conditions are considered more suited to adventure recreation, which tends to be participated in by those with a desire for solo or small group experiences and who seek the opportunity to make decisions independently, rather than sharing the responsibility with others (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989).

The media also assails us with visions of skiers in avalanche areas, individuals parachuting off mountains, the rugged solo mountaineer. Television shows are dedicated to "extreme sports" and international eco-challenges, news reports highlight the risk and sacrifice of adventure challenges, print media emphasises the difference between the adventurer and the reader. Docu-dramas highlight the very real challenges and ego's of mountaineering (e.g., *Into Thin Air: Death on Everest*), while "real-life" television series highlight the discomfort, thrills and excitement of surviving the adventure of a remote island (*Castaways* (UK), *Treasure Island* (NZ) and *Survivor* (USA)). These social forces, that have an impact on perceptions of adventure, continue to reinforce not only the academic definition of adventure with its risk, challenge and uncertainty, but also a notion of adventure as escape from the chains of domesticity and focused on action oriented towards conquest (Zweig, 1974). This risks the continuation of gender stereotyping, as many women approach the outdoors with a different acculturation than that of men (Mitten, 1985; Warren, 1996). Hence, the masculine trend being portrayed in the media continues to reinforce a sense of adventure that is incongruent with many women's sense of adventure.

Practical examples of this reinforcement are seen in women's reduced experience with, and access to, the outdoors. Most of the publicly known outdoor adventurers, guides, explorers and naturalists have been men. Outward Bound, Boys Brigade, Scouts and Venturers were established to build "good men". While women's groups and mixed gender opportunities exist, traditional Western culture has led to women having limited prior experience or expectation of the relevance of the outdoors. A result is that women typically have fewer technical skills than men, fewer role models and an anticipation of failure (Little, 1997; Mitten, 1996; Warren, 1996).

From such a basis, it is evident that women's experiences of adventure recreation are often based on the activities of men, grounded in understandings developed by men. While this is not automatically an anathema to women, it does suggest a need to address our understandings of adventure to ensure a shared meaning. Such a notion has consistently been presented in recent history. Feminist writers have highlighted women's invisibility or "added in" component in theory construction (Shaw, 1994; Wearing, 1998). Subsequently, there are now perspectives grounded in women's views of leisure (Deem, 1992; Thomsson, 1999). There are also advocates for hearing women's voices in the outdoors (Collins, 2000; Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990; Henderson, 1996) and evidence that there is some literature focused on women's experiences (Neill, 1997). However, while some explorations of creating positive adventure experiences have been posited (Kiewa, 1994; Mitten, 1996), and women's experiences in the outdoors or wilderness have started to be examined (Angell, 1994; Pohl, Borrie, & Patterson, 2000; Warren, 1996), there remains little that directly explores women's meanings of adventure itself.

In order to explore these differences and understand how some women interpret adventure, the current study asked women who did participate in adventure recreation, what the experience meant for them and how they

perceived adventure. Following in the works of feminist scholars, highlighting the importance of women's voices and questioning the androcentric concept of leisure (Gilligan, 1982; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1989; Shaw, 1994; Thomsson, 1999; Wearing, 1998), the research aim was to allow the women to explain their perspectives of what adventure meant for them, in their own words and definitions.

## Method

The research used a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with each of the 42 women and the data collected was supported and extended by journals, which the women were asked to maintain to outline their adventure experiences. The women kept these journals for periods from one to six months, each contributing additional insights regarding their adventure activities, the frequency of their participation and their responses to these experiences. The journals also served to extend the depth of the research as the women recorded events as they occurred. The results were subsequently composed of a combination of the women's recall of past participation in adventure activities, along with any current participation.

### Pilot Interviews

The research process in this study adopted a multi-layered, interactive approach aimed at studying what the participants considered important. Guiding interview questions were developed based on broad pilot interviews with four women adventurers. Here, key points of concern, stories of experiences and the women's observations of adventure recreation were discussed. The ideas raised, combined with a review of the literature, formed the focus of the in-depth interview questions. While these were obviously much more detailed than the results presented here, they served to achieve a core purpose: to allow women to explain their understandings and experiences of adventure recreation at a pace and level appropriate to each individual.

### The Women Participants

The women who contributed to this study were accessed through theoretical or purposive sampling methods in order to increase the range of data exposed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A snowballing sampling approach was taken (Neumann, 1991), whereby initial contacts were made through acquaintances of the researcher and the women were asked to recommend other women. In addition, a number of the women self-selected for the study by responding to a newspaper article requesting women who participated in adventure recreation. The resulting 42 participants were a group of women who represented most phases of adult life and ranged in age from 30 to 86 years old (*see* Table I). Their adventure experiences included pursuits such as rock-climbing, kayaking, sailing, bush-walking and caving, and the women participated at a range of levels. For some women, their adventure consisted of trail walking or tramping, for others it was first ascents.

**Table I**  
**The Number of Women in Different Age Groups**

Age Range	Number of Women Research Participants
30-39	10
40-49	12
50-59	12
60-69	3
70-79	2
80-89	3

Representatives of all the Australian states (excluding the two territories) were included, with additional women coming from other international backgrounds. Two of the women were from New Zealand, two from the UK, two from the Netherlands, one from Germany and four were from North America. Fourteen of the women were married, ten were single, ten divorced, eight lived with partners and three were widows. Twenty-six of the women had children, eight with dependents still living at home. While the women represented diverse circumstances, it is important to point out that no group is homogenous and this research does not purport to speak of all women's perspectives. No active adventure recreationists of Asian or indigenous background could be identified for the research purpose and the research group were confined to women who did participate in adventure, not those who did not desire, or were unable to access, adventure recreations.

### **Data Gathering—Interviews**

The interviews predominantly took place in the women's home or workplace, though four were conducted in quiet coffee shops. Permission had previously been given to tape record these meetings which lasted from one hour to two and a half-hours. Additional time spent with the respondents varied from two to ten hours. While this time was not electronically recorded, the interaction allowed for a more relaxed and sharing relationship to develop between the researcher and the participants. Impressions from these interactions were noted by the researcher in a memo for use as clarification and as an additional source of understanding. While these 'results' were not objective, they played an important role in building shared understanding.

A common range of questions was asked of all the women (*see* Table II), but the interviews were also collaborative and allowed for digressions and expansion of stories. At the outset of the interview general conversation regarding the research and women's experiences were raised. Throughout this process key questions regarding women's motivations and definitions were asked of all the women, but the order was different allowing for accommodation of both the natural conversation that evolved and the women's individual comfort levels.

**Table II**  
**Sample Interview Questions**

#### **Participation**

- What adventure activities do you participate in now?
- How often do you participate?
- What adventure activities have you done in the past?
- If you are no longer pursuing adventure recreation, what factors influenced you to stop?
- Would you like to still be doing these activities?

#### **Choices**

- Why do/ did you want to do these types of activities?
- How did you get started?
- Why do you continue – motivations?

#### **Adventure**

- What is adventure for you? What defines it?
- Where do you have adventure in your life?
- How important is adventure in your - Personal life?
- Professional life?
- Recreational life?
- Are adventure and adventure recreation the same thing?
- Is adventure found in other elements of your life?
- What priority does adventure have in your life?

#### **Perceptions**

- What is your perspective of a person who is an adventurer? (the image)
- What activities do they do?
- What attitudes do they have?
- Do you identify with this? Why/ why not?
- Where does the image of adventure and adventurer stem from?

### **Data Gathering—Journal**

From the initial contact the women were made aware of the ongoing commitment required in the study. This included keeping a journal of their adventure recreations for a period of time following the interview. Upon completion of the interview, the women were provided with a template of key suggestions to structure this journal. These included the guidance to note what had they done, when, and with whom, to identify what opportunities they did have but could not attend, and to express how they felt about their choices and experiences. Response rates varied with this task, though all women sent an indication of their current actions. Some sent monthly updates, others completed the six-month journal and sent the whole package at once.

## **Ethical Considerations**

At all stages of the research process the women were assured of anonymity, informed of the research goals and made aware of shared researcher and respondent expectations. The women were identified after the interviews only by coded labels, interviews were conducted one-on-one, and the researcher was the only person to listen to, and transcribe, the tapes. The emphasis of the research was on shared commitment of attachment and respect, or relational ethics (Flinders, 1992). During recruitment, collaboration with women was the goal, and during reporting confirmation was sought (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Contact was maintained with the women on a number of levels. The journals required some maintenance and ongoing support. This was done in part by ringing or writing to the women as their six-month journal time frame was ending. Contact was also maintained through the sharing of a research newsletter. This served a number of purposes. It assured women that progress was being made and their contributions were valuable. It allowed for reminders to women to provide any feedback or further insights, and it acted as a conversational connector by including inspirational thoughts and quotes.

## **Data Analysis**

Following the interviews and receipt of journals, the data was transcribed verbatim and combined to create meaningful blocks of information and to begin to identify relationships. A developing process of coding was used to tag these units of meaning and to identify recurring themes and sub-themes (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss, 1987). The data was analysed inductively using the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once the initial coding was completed, the researcher summarised her understanding of the interview and sent this interpretation back to the participants for verification and clarification. All women reviewed and returned these summaries and very few changes were requested. To reduce the likelihood of the findings reaching erroneous conclusions or being researcher biased, critical friends of the researcher were used to extend data reduction, analysis and interpretation beyond one-person research. This began with cross-coder checking of clean transcripts to refine codes and meaning. Discussion of definitions, intent and clarity took place to determine inter-coder reliability and to revise codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the journals were received this data was incorporated into the specific women's responses and checked for fit with the emergent themes and codes. Few new insights were gained at this point, but they did serve to help validate the emergent results.

## **Results**

The results presented here document the women's definitions of adventure and adventure recreation. While broader questions were dealt with within the total research process, some of those have been reported elsewhere (e.g. Little, 2000). What follows is an account of the women's understanding of adventure as an experience and how they construct adventure that is accessible to them. In effect the results address three key questions:

1. What is adventure recreation for these women?
2. In what ways do women access a sense of adventure in their lives?
3. How do women perceive themselves as participators in adventure recreation?

Each of the above questions is examined using the women's own words. Pseudonyms are used for the women's names and the woman's age at the time of the interview is included. Other socio-demographic and cultural qualifiers are not included as no distinct differences were found based on these factors.

### **What is Adventure Recreation for These Women?**

The overriding theme of the women's definition of adventure revolved around their search for something different. There was an emphasis on participating in an unknown as they sought something new. Whether within the context of an outdoor adventure recreation activity or in another environment, pushing their skills in a new situation created adventure.

*Adventure recreation is stepping away from the ordinary everyday things that you are doing and doing something that I haven't done before. (Alice, 30)*

*Harder walks are an adventure to me because they're a challenge. ... You don't really know whether you'll be able to do it until you do it and that to me is an adventure. (Gert, 56)*

*Adventure is not part of the routine of daily life. It is something that is different—a desire to see what lies beyond. (Isabelle, 86)*

To learn, to explore and to surprise themselves were adventurous experiences for many of the women. As illustrated in the women's reflections below, this could be exploration of new areas and personal responses, learning new skills for practical use, and / or exploring and learning about the self.

*Adventure is any activity which involves exploration, both emotional and physical. Both involve an element of surprise and newness. (Clarise, 60)*

*It's a learning process. You're learning all the time and working out new ways of living and how you can cope. (Susan, 54)*

*It doesn't have to be out there. It can be in my own territory because the adventure is exploring unexplored facets of me. (Vera, 50)*

*It is extending one's own limits, not just physical, but a mental thing. Exploring yourself and getting rid of fear, that's what adventure is. (Rhonda, 51)*

Most of the women acknowledged some risk was involved in their definition of adventure, however, they minimised the potential of loss through gaining skills, or altering the adventure activity to match their abilities. As Abby, 42, noted "I train and I improve so that my skills reduce the actual risk of adventure." Very few consciously sought risk and adrenalin, but for those who did it was the uncertainty and testing nature of the activity which made it adventure,

*For me, it's going to that edge ... building on what you've done before so you're actually extending yourself and working towards that limit. (Gillian, 38)*

One woman who took up outdoor adventure recreation at the age of fifty, believed that adventure was part of the overall experience of life. It was not an activity, a time or a place, but a state of mind and an attitude to life.

*My whole life is an adventure—since I was 50 anyway. Life offers chances, choices and challenges. (Bet, 71)*

Other women who highlighted their individual abilities to make life an adventure reinforced this approach,

*To me it's a state of mind rather than a physical thing. (Dot, 48)*

*It's part of life. I mean life's an adventure. (Lisa, 44)*

This sentiment was repeatedly identified as the women strove to make the most of their opportunities and circumstances—they found positives because they looked for them.

*I guess people can make something into an adventure. And as an adult you can still do that, its just the way you see it. (Pat, 36)*

Another reinforced the importance of personal perspective in defining adventure when she explained:

*I think adventure comes from within and in many forms. You have to make it happen ... To me, adventure lies within the soul of the individual who is seeking and inquisitive. Adventure is more than the physical in that the concept also encompasses the emotional and spiritual. (Denise, 55)*

### **In What Ways do Women Access a Sense of Adventure in Their Lives?**

The women's understandings of adventure included elements of risk and uncertainty, challenge and control. This illustrated similarities with Ewert and Hollenhorst's (1989) definition of adventure recreation and Priest's (1990; 1999) definitions of adventure. For women with easy access, adventure recreation was often an outdoor challenge with an unknown outcome that incorporated elements of risk.

*Outdoors. You can have an adventure inside, but it has to be something that has an outdoor element for me. And there's an edge. So an adventure requires me going to that edge or somewhere new. (Gillian, 38).*

Another active climber expressed a similar, traditional perspective, seeing adventure as:

*Facing a challenge in a natural environment where you use your skills or wits to minimise risks.*  
(Lisa, 44).

By comparison, other women emphasised the universality of adventure in their lives as it encompassed leisure, life, work, art and relationships. Some women, with demands of caring for dependents or with priorities focused on relationships or work, found adventure in their music, art, home or children,

*It's doing something new. So my painting classes are now an adventure.* (Sally, 54)

One woman with a broad experience of traditional adventure activities also found,

*The problem solving I did when building our house was an adventure.* (Bet, 71)

For these women, the activities they classified as adventure recreation changed over time and according to other commitments and responsibilities. Similarly, so did the boundaries of their definition. As new skills were gained, abilities changed and perceptions shifted, the parameters of adventure definition were broadened.

*The older I get, my sense of adventure is still with me, but its dimensions have changed, with a focus on the smaller delights of this world and involving academic and intellectual pursuits as well.*  
(Clarise, 60)

*I guess adventure changes. The walks I used to do were adventures because they were new challenges, but now even if there's no danger in doing something— if it's new, it's a challenge and an adventure. I'm back to the belief that adventure is something that is different to everyone.* (Gwen, 51)

*I think that things that I used to do are to me less adventurous than what they used to be.* (Lucy, 39)

The women's comments serve to remind us that adventure is dynamic and linked to people's skills. That which is most risky at one stage of life becomes less so with developed abilities to cope with the situation. The essence of the adventure comes from the match of mind and pursuit and can be created in multiple personal challenges.

### **How do Women Perceive Themselves as Participators in Adventure Recreation?**

While the women's pursuits included adventure activities such as first ascents, white water kayaking, ocean sailing and mountaineering, many did not see themselves as adventurous. A woman who had worked in outdoor education and sailed ocean solo races found the media perceptions of adventure restricted her own acknowledgment of adventure in her life,

*I think it comes from the Robinson Crusoe type image and the big lonely savage type image and that type of imagery that's portrayed through the media. But before that it was portrayed through books.*  
(Peggy, 43)

Another highly skilled kayaker, windsurfer and canoeist did not see herself as adventurous because of the comparisons she made with well-reported adventurers,

*I wouldn't say I'm an adventurer, because I see adventurers as someone who goes on a journey perhaps. And they do expeditions and they go different places and they go to unknown places. So I wouldn't say I'm an adventurer.* (Gillian, 38)

The label of "adventure" was perceived by the respondents to build images of danger and extreme challenge, and for these women it could be a struggle to subsequently acknowledge their own achievements. While they recognised the risk involved, they reduced its impact by using their skills and knowledge, thereby reducing their willingness to group themselves as adventurers. They continued, however, to desire some recognition for what they did and for the level at which they did it,

*I have trouble comfortably defining adventure even for me. I know it's a range of challenges, but not everyone accepts my adventure as good enough.* (Clara, 63)

*I'm not climbing anymore, I'm not trekking, but exploring my local bush land, raising my children, learning new things are adventurous for me. I might go back to the other things sometime but for now I want my local adventures recognised for the challenges they are. (Roslyn, 37)*

## Discussion

As can be seen in the range of experiences expressed, women's adventure recreation was found in a collection of activities that were as diverse in action as they were in context. Though adventure may occur in outdoor wilderness regions and include physical challenge (rock-climbing, white water kayaking), it could also be found in urban regions and creative challenges (indoor rock-climbing, art, music). Where problem solving and challenge could be found, so too was adventure. Given the diversity of adventure behaviours and wide range of approaches, women's adventure recreation could not be confined within a set of strict parameters. As well as adventure recreation being "self-initiated activities utilizing an interaction in the natural environment, that contain elements of real or apparent danger" (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1989:125), women emphasised a flexible perspective of adventure.

Defining adventure as something new, challenging, an exploration and discovery of both an area or of themselves, the women were able to find adventure in many formats and locations.

*Adventure is a cerebral and physical activity with an element of risk, and a challenge. When the scope of the activities and the outcome are unknown, that constitutes 'adventure'. You must do, venture, dare. So this sense of adventure, it is hard to come at it. But once you've got your mind into that frame of mind, every day's an adventure. (Bet, 71)*

For these women, adventure was not confined to a place (natural environment) or an activity (kayaking, rock climbing, backpacking), but was, as Mortlock (1994) proposed, a state of mind. As a result, adventure could be created to suit the needs and circumstances of individual lives and could be found in the new, in the act of learning and in demanding circumstances encountered throughout life.

The women's flexible and broad definition of adventure allowed them to maintain a connection with their recreation of the past and provided opportunity to remain involved in adventure activities by creating the mindset to find satisfaction in a variety of sources. All the women acknowledged the diversity of adventure, with outdoor adventure recreation a specific and desired experience which was not always accessible. Thus, rather than limit the activity of adventure to an outdoor high-risk challenge, the women created and reshaped their own approach and meanings to fit with their changing circumstances.

While such a process indicates a sense of agency and personal control (Wimbush & Talbot, 1988), it was also found that the women did not connect with the labels of adventure and adventurer. For them, the public meaning of these terms were located in the media and socially generated ideals of extreme adventures performed by hard, bearded men, rich foolhardy explorers, or individuals whose professional experiences allowed them to leave their friends and family to adventure in remote sites.

*I remember driving past (climbers) and thinking 'No, I'd never want to do that'. Actually I probably thought it was too hard. Whenever I saw anyone do it, on TV, in person, it was always a guy and he was big and muscly. I always felt I was not really strong in my arms and it looked like you needed to be. I thought it wasn't the sort of thing I could manage. (Lou, 44)*

Other women noted similar feelings of the irrelevance and inaccessibility of adventure activities,

*I'm not into mountaineering. I've seen those pictures in magazines and the news. I'd die of exposure up there. ... The only women you do see have a very different support base to most us. How do they leave their children and go away for months? (Mary, 39)*

Not only do such preconceived notions exist, they are exacerbated by the male domain of some pursuits. A number of the women spoke of the fight they experienced trying to engage in established adventure arenas. Male hierarchies that undervalued women's contribution and ability to perform also undermined the determination of women seeking to participate in organised adventure pursuits such as sailing and flying. One 34-year-old sailor found she had to struggle to gain access and acceptance to the ocean sailing community,

*I find that I have to work at being accepted as a sailor, not as the cook on the boat, not as the bimbo of the boat. ... Men want to do their boy stuff together on the boat and you're a real intruder in that.* (Kim, 34)

Two women aviators found just 'being a woman' was restrictive as there was a lack of belief in their ability or commitment. One woman, who took up gliding in her 50s, found the organisation provided no welcome or support,

*With the aeroplanes and the gliders the men have been doing it for years and they see women as gate crashers and breakers in. ... If your instructor is male and you're female (particularly if you're 54), he doesn't think you are ready.* (Esme, 71)

The notion of adventure for the women was, therefore, often remote from their experience and framed in male experience and expectations. These results reinforce recent concerns highlighting women's lack of access to outdoor space and the continuing domination of male culture in the outdoors and adventure (Carter & Colyer, 1999; Curson & Kitts, 2000). In addition, the results highlight concerns about the impact of these cultures. While individually strong and capable, many of the women expressed a lack of self-concept stemming from socially constructed definitions of adventure. Seeking acknowledgement and appreciation for their personal challenges and risks, they failed to receive these. Rather, narrow and inappropriate views of adventure and adventurer were reinforced through media, companions and self-doubt. Given the difficulty in reconciling women's participation in adventure recreation and their personal acceptance of applying the term adventure to themselves, it is time to revisit our understanding of adventure and work to discard the perception of adventure as purely remote, harsh and defined by real physical risk.

The women's stories of adventure, of their pursuits, of their meanings and of the essence of adventure highlight an "otherness" of meaning that exists within the experiences of women. They highlight a glorious challenge, a diverse activity pool, and very individual perceptions of what constitutes the act of adventure recreation. What they also offer is a similarity: of feeling, of gain, and of difference. The women indicate a sense of not quite fitting with existing understandings, and of reconstructing adventures to fit with personal circumstances and abilities. In contrast, the social understanding of adventure continues to consist of much more remote and alienating constructions. This impact is one that needs further exploration if women's access to adventure recreation is to continue to grow. Such an impact also needs alteration to increase women's sense of validity in adventure environs and shift the intangible barriers that undermine and delimit participation. An illustration of how such a shift can be achieved is highlighted in the provision of therapeutic and experiential adventure programs for women, which offer opportunities to adventure through acknowledging a supportive environment, connection with the environment (not conquering) and individual validation (Mitten, 1994; Warren, 1996). While these may not be the format desired by all women, the initiatives begin the process of validating different experiences of adventure and acknowledging a broader understanding of the parameters of adventure.

## **Conclusion**

Adventure and adventure recreation is variously presented in modern society. There are definitions and understandings that guide academic interpretations and analyses, there are personal experiences that inform our individual interpretations and there are media representations that present socially guiding impressions of adventure and adventurers. Such a composition of perceptions present a diverse package of meaning and influences that are potentially confusing for the receiver, but each plays a role in constructing our understanding of adventure recreation.

For the women interviewed, definitions and experiences of adventure recreation are grounded in each of these facets. As a result, their understandings incorporate not only the traditional masculine qualities of challenge, uncertainty and danger, but also entail learning, newness and the exploration of risk in its social and esteem based elements. While these factors are not excluded from established definitions, they incorporate additional understandings that extend the complexity and accessibility of adventure. Not only can adventure be a physical challenge, an heroic quest, or action oriented toward conquest, it can also be a journey, a discovery, an exploration of self. In addition, rather than adventure recreation being an imposed and structured range of activities, the women found it could be created and reshaped to fit with their changing circumstances.

Just how these processes occur is still unclear and the current research raises many questions that could be explored through further study. For example, while the women spoke of positive outcomes from their adventure, why were many unable to integrate these into their sense of self? How invasive are social/ media messages in influencing not only meaning, but an individual's ownership and sense of relevance of adventure

recreation? How can we extend and reattach to the essence of adventure, so that more people may find identification and access to the benefits to be achieved?

In part, research highlighting participant interpretations begins this latter process. By unpacking the meaning of adventure to focus on the experience and not the activity, the women's stories help to increase our opportunity of meeting the diverse needs of the clients we work with in personally relevant ways. In addition, such an exploration allows an extension of our understanding of the social and practical meanings of adventure. As we start to demystify adventure recreation by questioning its meaning, it potentially becomes more individually accessible and defined on individual terms. In this way adventure can move away from being elitist and extreme, masculine and alien, and a site where women are often denied access (Humberstone, 2000), toward being more inclusive and acknowledged for the flexible experiences of personal challenge.

The history of adventure recreation is steeped in intra-personal development. Challenge to ourselves, constructed in a multitude of forums allows adventure recreation to be something for the many, not just the few. If these women's experiences can be shown to be indicative of broader meanings, then as an industry we must become more aware that adventure can be promoted as a state of mind or an attitude toward life, rather than as a pool of activities, or an ultimate challenge reflective of Ulysses-like separation.

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