

Competition vs Collaboration

Shaping Safer Cultures In Alpine
Rescue

ICAR 2025

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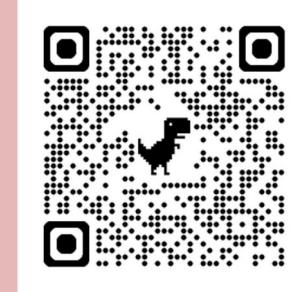


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*Feeling Safe Enough:
Psychological Safety in the
Mountain Guiding and
Avalanche Profession*
Journal of Rural Studies
September 2025
Rachel D. Reimer
Christine Eriksen



*From the Front Lines to
Exit Door: How to Keep
Women in Ski Patrol*

NSAA Journal
Fall 2025
Dana Kent

Resources



Why Do We Need This Conversation?

- Two types of hazards:
 - ***Mountain hazards***: avalanches, terrain, weather
 - ***Human-caused hazards***: exclusion, harassment, discrimination, ableism, racism, sexism, misogyny, trauma stigma
- Human hazards
 - Based on choice, behaviors and agency



We can't stop storms,
but we can change culture.
That's where safety
begins.



Industry Demographics

The Harsh Reality

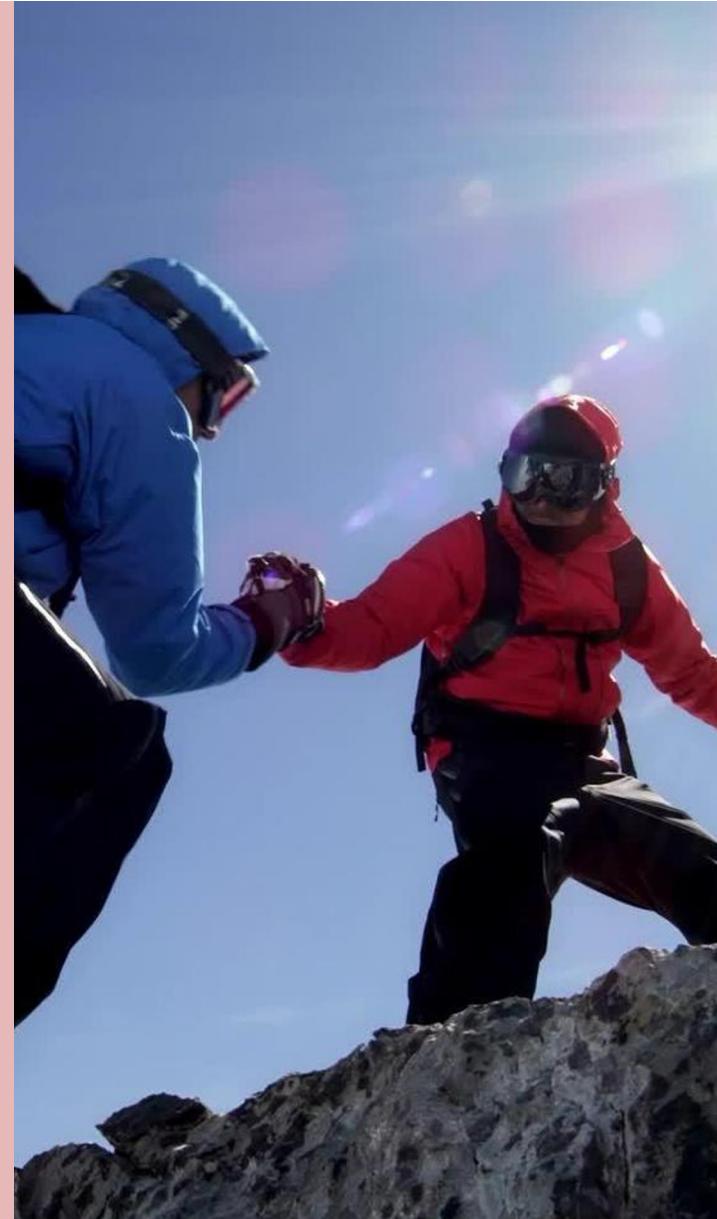


Women make up 2-15% of Avalanche Professionals (including Ski Patrol) in North America

The culture is sometimes described as: exclusive, ego-driven, male-dominated, bro-culture

Cultural Barriers

- **Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC):**
show no weakness, work first,
competitiveness, **suppresses
vulnerability**
- **Mountain Masculinity** can be the
biggest barrier to inclusion and
belonging
- On going myth: Masculinity =
competence
- **No evidence that cis-white men are
'better suited' for the work**
- **Non-dominant groups (women)**
**potentially are not feeling
psychologically safe**





Psychological Safety

- **Definition:** Feeling safe enough to show one's full self and speak up when unsafe
- Built on **trust, interconnection, reciprocity**
- **Low psychological safety** → poor performance & potentially more risk ; high level of unnecessary competition
- **High psychological safety** → openness, better teamwork, smoother decision-making; high level of collaboration



What Contributes to Competition

How It Impacts Safety

- Scarcity belief
- “I had it hard so you should too”
- Personal Biases
- Internal competition with yourself
- Bias of women in leadership





Human Hazards in Action

- Harassment
- Gender Bias
- Discrimination
- Unhealthy competition
between women

Rise Study

50% of women faced discrimination (vs 3.5% men)

30% of women faced sexual harassment (vs 4% men)

Harassment source:
40% clients, 60% colleagues/supervisors/examiners

Primary Contributors to Discrimination:
Perceived Incompetence
Motherhood
Hostile/Sexualized Environments





Team Non-Starters

Inappropriate
jokes and
locker room
posters

Tolerance of
Legacy
Practices

Encourage and
tolerate a “fake
it to make it”
culture

Psychological Safety ↔ Physical Safety



UNSAFE ENVIRONMENTS
→ CHRONIC STRESS, PTSD,
RISKS BECOME
NORMALIZED



ACCIDENTS MAY OFTEN BE
TRACED TO
PSYCHOLOGICALLY UNSAFE
DYNAMICS
“HUMAN FACTOR”



AN UNSAFE TEAM IS A
FAILING TEAM



Behaviors in Psychologically Safe Environments



Teams operate
with efficiency,
compassion,
curiosity



Mistakes are
treated as
learning
opportunities, not
punishment



Contributions
heard and
valued

Key Factors Supporting Psychological Safety

Vulnerability

Authenticity

Teamwork

Gender Diversity

Physical Safety



Human Factors Influencing Change Culture

- Human-caused hazards = changeable (based on choice) Intentional change vs. assuming it will just happen
- Prioritize psychological safety training into your organization
- Normalize **stress continuum** check in's
- Ensure **safe reporting systems** and inclusive leadership
- Seek and recognize diversity
- **ASK**



Collaboration Best Practices?

Make The Time

- Create Mentor Programs
- Watch your biases
- Embed Psychological Best Practices into your organizational training....daily and annually.
- Decide what you would have needed early in your career and ACT on it for the next generation
- Reward collaborative safe behaviors over competition
- SPEAK UP



Future Research Opportunities

- Additional research on the link between psychological and physical safety
- Team dynamics vs accidents/near misses
- Harassment, discrimination, and mental health outcomes
- Low retention rates linked to exclusion & accidents
-and more

Key Takeaways

- Psychological risk from human hazards directly impacts physical safety in the mountains and team dynamics

When we build trust, we build safer rescues and safer lives

Collaboration is our most reliable piece of gear





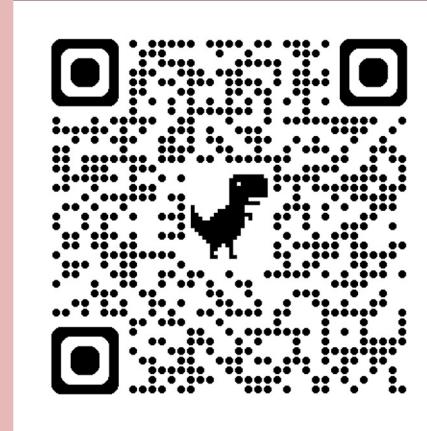
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