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‘I'm going to do this, and I don't need your permission.’

Identity constructions of female adventurers.



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Abstract

With the shift from collective to individual, people started to increasingly reflect on their position in the society and potential for individual growth. Previously inaccessible services and initiatives promoting self-development emerged. However, women were found to have rather limited access to those opportunities, due to boundaries of social and cultural nature. In tourism and risk studies, there seems to be little research on female adventurers. No research seems to have focused on female adventurer identity from the perspective of self-work and potential benefits of taking risks. Therefore, this thesis attempts to understand identity construction for women who face social boundaries when engaging in voluntary risk-taking, focusing on different elements of self-work. Those are investigated through individual interviews, netnography and ethnography, taking rock climbing as an example of risk activity.

Pursuit of risk activity was found for women a fruitful opportunity for self-work and identity construction. Still, some barriers of social nature, some gender-related stand in the way of its free pursuit. Findings also point out to skills and attitudes learned through pursuing a risk activity being transferable to other aspects of women's lives. At the same time, the results point out to the importance of two additional themes: the nature and community aspect.

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1. Introduction

When the collective focus has shifted, emphasizing the individual, people started to increasingly reflect on their position and potential as members of the society. Participation in the modern world became a quest for distinctiveness, allowing what was previously inaccessible: an opportunity to shape and reinvent oneself according to their own needs and wants (Beck, 1992). At first, only some could truly enjoy this seemingly endless space of opportunities. Women, regarded rather as housemakers and carriers of new life, kept being seen through the lens of their social and cultural roles, with men being the ones pursuing chosen careers and experimenting with self-improvement. Where men seemed to be experiencing freedom of choice, women saw rather socially induced constraints. Expectations addressing how a woman should be and behave seemed to be leaving relatively little room for construction of the self through actions, behaviors and openly expressed opinions of their own choice (Wilson, 2002). As the society advances and various ways of ‘finding’ or improving oneself, also through consumption of services, are gaining popularity, one could assume that those will be accessible to anyone. However, the comfort of being able to focus on the inner self and its’ development seems to remain of limited accessibility. First, it could be said that the luxury of pursuing self-work is rather available to Western middle-class citizens. Second, even within this narrow group, women tend to be facing boundaries of social and cultural nature. Some of those

limitations consider risk taking. A woman engaging in risk activities tends to be regarded as irresponsible or somewhat suspicious. Meanwhile, men acting in a similar way are seen as brave, adventurous and interesting conversation partners (Elsrud, 2001). This dissonance shows in leisure travel, where access to certain practices remains limited for women, making them face various challenges (Elsrud, 2006). It seems rather extraordinary, that in times and society that favors self-development, restrictions are being faced due to no more than one's gender identity. It seems that in order to fully embrace the potential for self-development that the realm of today's world offers, this gender dissonance needs to be deeply understood and addressed. Only in this way it is possible to one day, hopefully soon, overcome 'the gender roles that act as identity cages' (Munar, 2017, p. 525)

1.1. Theoretical background

Within tourism studies, scholars have approached identity mostly as religion, gender, age and race. Few have attempted to study identity in its more puzzling aspect, as an issue of the self, the way one sees the world and themselves in relation to the world. Even fewer have considered looking at this self-oriented identity aspect in tourism from a gender perspective. Still, some research hinted on the existence of such need. For instance, Allman et al (2009) pointed out to the necessity for comparing identity formation for men and women in high-risk tourist subcultures. Although research on voluntary risk taking in tourism tends to be dominated by extreme sports (Allman et al., 2009), some also notice it in slightly more conventional forms, such as backpacking (Elsrud, 2001) or solo travel (Wilson, 2002). Risk and adventure were noticed as central to the backpacker identity (Lepp & Gibson, 2002). However, they were also argued to be constructed as masculine (Elsrud, 2001). Elsrud's (2001) findings point out to risk-taking women seen as men's 'negative counterparts' (p.614) due to boundaries of social or cultural nature. Despite of that, these women tend not to withdraw from participation (Lepp and Gibson, 2007). Instead, they adopt various strategies that help them fight against boundaries and constraints that are being put on them (Fendt & Wilson, 2012). Moreover, an added feeling of improving the self can emerge from the very fact that such boundaries are being faced and overcome which would then lead to overall satisfaction and psychological well-being (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). Consequently, recent study (Holm et al, 2017) argues for subjective well-being as an outcome of engaging in voluntary risk taking. However, it does not refer to gender or gender differences. Instead, authors point out to the existing literature focusing on the positivist perspective, which does not relate risk taking with negative emotion. This points out to knowledge on such factors as negative social norms or boundaries and the way they affect individual's identity creation as underdeveloped. Especially if gender perspective is to be

considered. A similar conclusion echoes in most recent literature review on risk and gender in tourism (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). The authors find existing research within the field as lacking depth and largely overlooking the topic of the social impact on gender in risk and travel setting. This hints towards a shift in tourism and risk studies as they start to open up for acknowledging and discussing gender issues. It could be commented that such a change can be of crucial importance for understanding the impact that social and cultural message can have on the individual and their self-perception as capable of facing the challenges of modern society. From the perspective of service management, understanding gender issues in this context could allow for more accurate approach towards the needs and expectations of female customers.

Engaging freely and without judgement in risk activities of one's choice could be considered their personal matter and therefore a right that shall not be limited by third parties. It could be noted that through boundaries of social and cultural nature, it is not only the participation but an important aspect of the 'self' that is being largely restricted. As a result, preventing a person from participating in risk activities could be considered leading towards limiting their self-development and means of self-expression. It can be believed that just noticing and paying attention to such limitations taking place in today's society could be a first step towards change. However, next steps would certainly be needed soon. Despite research such as Elsrud's (2001) pointing out to significant gender differences in risk taking over 15 years ago, little seems to have changed since. At the same time, no research seems to have looked upon female adventurer's identity through the perspective of self-work and potential benefits of taking risks. It could be that a clearer knowledge on potential link between risk limiting social boundaries and eventual consequences for individual's 'self' would attract more attention towards the subject and therefore also more actual action being undertaken. Also, more knowledge needs to be gathered regarding the self-collective continuum, to understand better how the interactions of individual with the group affect individual's perceptions of themselves individually and themselves in relation to the group. This study will attempt to broaden the knowledge on both aspects, through the analysis of individual meanings and experiences.

1.2. Aim and research question

Departing from the discourses on self-work (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002) and Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 2007) as well as literature within risk, tourism and gender, this thesis will attempt to understand the identity construction process for women who face social boundaries when engaging in travel-related voluntary risk-taking. Deepening the understanding of risk-

taking in leisure tourism seems important since risk has been found among key motivations for taking adventure holiday (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003). With increasing popularity of both independent and packaged adventure tourism it could be said that a larger focus on risk-taking as such is also necessary. The ultimate aim of this paper is to develop the existing knowledge within risk, gender and tourism by performing a study that unfolds individual constructions of female adventurer identity. Adding depth to the gender issues in risk and tourism, by looking at them through the lens of individual goals and struggles, would provide a better understanding of female adventure tourist. With most research so far being focused on male adventurers (Lepp & Gibson, 2003) it can be said that understanding the female ones can bring a new perspective to service management research, tourism in particular, as women are increasingly taking up adventure holidays and therefore consuming services related to such (Fendt & Wilson, 2012). Although this study will focus on independent travelers, ones that are not consuming organized holiday packages, it can be argued that the field of service management will still benefit from the knowledge produced. Understanding the identity construction of independent female adventure-traveler could, for instance, help design training facilities more accurately, as well as create adventure environments at the destination, where independent female travelers would feel free to exercise their chosen adventure activities. Understanding what constructs female way of identifying with risk and adventure could also provide a basis for future comparative studies, where both male and female adventurers would be considered. Still, this thesis is not focusing on male adventurers since previous research seems to be pointing out to women struggling more with freely performing activities and practices that contribute to their risk-taking identity. Although male perspective on identity creation through risk activities could be a potential for future research, the female one seems to be the one that truly calls for deeper understanding. Therefore, this thesis will attempt to answer the following research question:

- **How is female adventurer identity constructed?**

Achieving this will be possible through answering some related sub-questions:

- How do women who decide to pursue risky adventure activities perceive social boundaries they face?

Answering this question shall provide the knowledge on what behaviors of others are perceived by female adventurers as limitations to their free pursuit of risk-taking in leisure tourism. It can also be expected to find out how women respond to such behaviors. This knowledge will help establishing a link between the societal response and female risk-taking practices and

potentially the influence on women's adventurer identity, with a broader goal of deepening the understanding of the social aspect of adventure tourism.

- How is the risk activity they engage in related to their self-work project?

Through positioning risk-taking within self-work and therefore adventure tourist identity construction, it could be possible to understand whether and to what extent risk is 'good' for women's self-development. This knowledge could lead to better understanding of risk-taking in the broader context of leisure tourism and therefore also its potential for service management as a factor to be considered when designing or assessing adventure tourism destinations, facilities or offers.

1.3. Outlines about the method

This study will explore meanings and experiences surrounding risk taking using qualitative methods. The example of female rock climbers will be taken with the aim of understanding whether and how pursuing an activity regarded as risky and adventurous is contributing to their perception of the 'self' as well as how their identity in relation to the sport is constructed. The study will be performed using individual semi-structured interviews, ethnography and additionally, some comments from a Facebook group related to the sport. The methodology will also consider gender perspective. Since this study focuses on women, their practices and identities, such an input seems relevant. Having in mind that this study will touch upon some boundaries that tend to limit women in their practices and self-expression, it is rather justified to include a gender perspective.

2. Literature Review

This chapter is first going to include a review of existing literature concerning risk and voluntary risk-taking. It will focus on the way individuals construct their views on risk in everyday practices as well as in the organizational context, with the aim of providing an overview of studied perceptions of risk together with certain gender stereotypes. This section will embrace the construction of risk as something one does not necessarily fear or try to avoid, but rather seek in order to enhance their general quality of life. Consequently, next section will be dedicated to risk and pleasure in the context of leisure travel, adventure travel in particular, hinting to the importance of cultural and social boundaries and how their intentional contradiction can contribute to one's self-authenticity. With self-authenticity being one of the components of Lupton and Tulloch's discourses surrounding risk and the self, next section will discuss this and provide a new perspective by combining it with the Identity Process Theory. As a result, following part will embrace risk and identity in leisure travel, by analyzing how travelers' identities as 'risky' and 'adventurous' are constructed. It is also in this section that

the gender perspective will emerge, providing the background for a theoretical discussion on the research gap considering identity construction for female risk-taking travelers.

This chapter aims at providing the reader with clear understanding of existing research within the topic of the thesis. It will serve as a tool for gathering, analyzing and critically reflecting upon the findings of the study, with the explicit aim of answering the research question.

2.1. Risk and voluntary risk taking

Individuals undertake actions depending on their assessment of potential gains and losses involved. Risk, defined as a circumstance that involves potential danger (Lupton, 1999) is therefore a part of one's everyday life choices whether in personal, professional or leisure setting. Not all potential risk can be foreseen or prevented. Still, people continuously attempt to carry on with their lives avoiding risks and taking precautions. This section will introduce the topic of risk and risk taking together with related concepts and theories, with the aim of providing a general background for better understanding of further, more detailed issues.

Risk perceptions are constructed and negotiated in a subjective manner, relating to various factors such as power relations, social structures or aesthetics convictions. Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) emphasize the feeling of anxiety and aversion as dominating attitudes towards risk, with risk limiting actions seen as reasonable. They argue, therefore, for risk avoidance being a conventional behavior. Both authors refer to late modern age as crucial for both the attitudes towards risk and the emergence of the self as an important matter. Beck's concept of risk society embraces the emergence of self-monitoring of one's life and self-arrangement as opposing to previously dominating common meanings and needs. The society has become reflexive, that is evaluating and making decisions regarding themselves as parts of institutions. People became free to choose what is good and what seems unnecessary for their self-development. This shift also brought an increased sense of uncertainty, which provoked a greater than before sensation of facing risks (Giddens, 1991). Mary Douglas argued for people to be more than just focused on restless risk calculation and danger avoidance. She defines risk as 'the probability of an event combined with the magnitude of the losses and gains that it will entail' (Douglas, 1992, p. 40). She argues for risk perceptions, more than a matter of an individual, being a collective reaction shaped by cultural influences. Also Lupton (2013) underlines the inseparability of risk and emotion with other people, space and objects. This points out to the need for risk perceptions to be regarded together with their cultural context. It could be commented that only through reaching and unravelling those collective and culturally induced risk perceptions, one can access the individual. It could also be said that the individual

and collective perceptions of risk may vary significantly, and one should not be regarded as more important than the other. For instance, looking at voluntary-risk taking, although certainly marked by cultural boundaries and influences, it is usually the individual making the final decision whether or not to engage in risk filled activity. This was a hint towards positive aspect of risk, something one may voluntarily decide to pursue for their own benefit. In this situation, exposure to danger becomes a desired element of an activity that can potentially bring gains greater than those avoiding risks would. The question arising would be, what kind of gains are those and whether they tend to benefit the individual or the collective or both? The participants of this study will be asked about benefits that they see risk activity bring them as well as about the strategies of overcoming eventual fear when facing danger. The will to implement such strategies with the aim of getting something out of the experience, could point out to this 'something' being of the crucial importance for the individual. Afterwards, it could be verified, whether mentioned benefits are of more individual or collective nature. It can be commented that there is always certain amount of the collective in the 'self' of an individual and vice versa. The detail lies in seeing which of the two tends to dominate as a potential benefit or boundary when facing risk.

Voluntary risk taking is defined as 'risk-taking that is undertaken without coercion in the full acknowledgement that risks are being confronted' (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002, p.113). It is therefore a conscious decision to engage in potentially dangerous activity. At the same time, assessment of whether an activity or situation is risky remains subjective. It is up to the particular individual to decide whether it is risky to some extent and whether they agree to engage in participation. Voluntary risk taking is explicitly mentioned as motivation for undertaking various adventure activities (Buckley, 2012; Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003; Caber & Albayrak, 2016), with a broader aim of self-differentiating by doing something uncommon, varying from one's everyday routines. Although this kind of risk tends to be perceived as less crucial than the one happening unwillingly (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002), it was found to foster group integration (Lupton, 1999) and serve as a tool for confronting gender stereotypes (Fisk, 2016). 'Risk' hints towards a possibility of threat for one's satisfactory state of being, and is rather passive, representing the 'negative' kind of risk, the one that 'just happens', potentially leading to harm. On the other hand, 'risk taking', pointing out to an active and conscious act of engaging in a risk situation aiming at completing it unharmed. With this in mind, one can look at responses to risk, which can vary from different degrees of tolerance to enjoyment and pursuit. Risk could also be understood as socially and culturally constructed. Notions of risk are therefore grounded in cultures and social groups. It is crucial to keep in mind

that notions of what is actually risky depend on one's previous experiences, with notion of power being the one mostly affecting risk responses in the leadership context. Although the primary focus of this study lies on leisure, leadership as such is an important value in today's society. A successful risk taker makes a better leader, someone who dares to use means avoided by others to provide significant gains (Maxfield, Shapiro, Gupta, & Hass, 2010). This use of risk as positioning tool is crucial for understanding the role of gender in determining one's capability not only to lead a group (Walker & Latosuo, 2015) but also to make conscious and 'right' decisions concerning their own lives (Elsrud, 2006). Leadership skills were found to be shaped in the first fifteen years of a person's life (Guerina, et al., 2011), which means that the actions, activities and societal response to those encountered in childhood influence the way in which one is taking responsibilities and also certain risks as an adult. One could wonder if being allowed to take moderate risks freely during this period would also be of importance for future attitude and confidence towards risk situations. If so, then significant gender gap found in leadership research would be worth looking at in this context. Risks were found to be assessed as lower by men than by women (Slovic, 2010), which makes the first to take more financial risks than the latter (Charness & Gneezy, 2011). This points out to men not really seeing certain situations as potentially risky, which could possibly be due to having more experience being exposed to potential risks and coming out of it unharmed. With women being found more risk sensitive in relation to costs than benefits (Maxfield, Shapiro, Gupta, & Hass, 2010), also the notion of fear seems to emerge, as women seem to be more afraid of potential negative consequences of taking risks than tempted by the possible positive outcomes. This points out to quite a cautious attitude and mindset on the female side, as they seem more afraid of what might go wrong than determined to reach for the best. Supposing that risk is socially constructed and relies on experience, those findings hint on women experiencing less risk filled activities and situations than men, which could make them more risk tolerant in consequence. And this has a significant impact on their futures. Men were found to be getting promoted more often thanks to risk taking (Fisk, 2016). Now, this is a tangible consequence of female risk avoidance that surely influences not only their careers but possibly also the inner sense of self-worth and self-improvement. Moreover, it turns out that men are more likely to engage in risk in the name of a group (Ertaca & Gurdalb, 2011) and the results of such risk taking are more often successful for them than for their female colleagues (Fisk, 2016). This hints to notion of taking responsibility for others, based on one's perception of themselves as capable. One thing is to take risk when only the decisionmaker is affected by the outcome and another, to make such decision in the name of third parties. Taking risks for other people adds pressure, which can be

overcome with holding on to the construction of one as capable of facing such situation. It also relies on experience and practice, only possible to gain if one has been exposed to a similar situation in the past. Therefore, it could be said that women cannot be capable to take successful risks for themselves or the group, if they were not taking any significant risks before. Neither can they truly rely on their ability to overcome risks, if they have no experience that would support constructing an image of themselves as capable of successful risk taking. Still, although women tend to show more risk aversion than their male counterparts (Eckel & Grossman, 2008), this difference is dependent on whether one is married and responsible for domestic finances (Rai & Kimmel, 2015). This shows another side of responsibility and taking risks for others. When in charge of a family, one tends to be more cautious about the risks they engage in. That points out to the image present in many cultures, of women being the one taking care of children and the household. Such construction could therefore be argued to even lower women's chances to take risks freely, as it adds a responsibility of crucial importance for them to count with. Unlike men, when engaged in caring for a home and a family, they seem no longer free to explore what may be considered risky. Regarding the possibility of family boundaries for risk taking for women, respondents of this study will be asked to talk about their family's or partner's reactions to their pursuit of risk activity.

One could come to a conclusion that women are just not that much of risk taking leaders, which would place them on a lower position in relation to men. Being regarded as less capable in terms of risk taking, makes women's choices and actions seen as inferior to those made by men and therefore requiring validation. Such tendency shows in research on women's leisure tourism practices, with narratives of discouragement and lack of approval emerging as constraints for female travels (Wilson & Little, 2008), showing that notions of power and capability are crucial for women to freely engage in activities and situations of their choice. An issue that arises from this is how does this affect women's lives in general? After all, risk taking being sort of a 'normal' thing to do for men but not that much so for women is a construction in itself. At the same time, risk activities should be of a crucial importance for self-development of both sexes. As this section argues, taking risks and participating in risk activities is crucial as a kind of training preparing a person to face challenges in their future lives. Therefore, excluding someone from such training through discouragement or restrictions makes them relatively unprepared for participation in modern society. In the long run, the self-perception of one as capable, prepared and brave seems to be grounded in their experience and therefore previous risk-taking practices. Taking that opportunity away from someone means putting them on an inferior position from the start.

The findings on women being more risk averse and taking smaller amount of risks than men are echoed in leisure tourism research (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017), which points out to the fact that the same pattern seems to be followed in both professional and leisure setting. Therefore, with the aim of deepening the understanding of risk taking in leisure tourism, the following section will focus on risk and pleasure in this context. It will also look upon adventure tourism, as risk is found among the characteristics of this form of holidaymaking. An issue within the field might be determining to what extent adventure tourism options are staged and therefore what if any level of risk is actually involved. This study is not focusing on organized adventure tourism packages, rather on a single adventure activity that practitioners pursue at their own responsibility and therefore the risk is not limited by a hired adventure tourism company. It is necessary to study independent adventurers to understand in what way risk is necessary for their self-work.

2.2. Risk taking and pleasure in adventure tourism

In tourism, the level of risk involved in a holiday option determines its' character and potential target group. For instance, organized package holiday offered by tour operators aims at limiting risks or risk-taking opportunities to the minimum, focusing on offering the customers an entirely safe and strongly predictable environment for spending their vacation. And that is, indeed, what the customers of such forms are expecting to encounter at the destination (Elsrud, 2006). On the other hand, risk taking is considered the core of many adventure travel options, as it is mentioned to be primary motive for tourists to choose such way of spending their holiday. Both concepts are strongly subjective in their nature. It is up to an individual to determine what adventure means for them and it can vary from a bird watching vacation to a mountaineering expedition or solo rock climbing ascents (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003). Also, the extent to which an activity is considered risk taking varies between people and their previous experiences. However, risk taking as a motive helps to understand that adventure holiday can be any travel practice that is outside of one's comfort zone and involves a certain level of risk and uncertainty. The purpose of this section is to provide a knowledge background for the study through understanding the meaning of adventure and adventure tourism as well as the place occupied by risk taking within this field.

Adventure travel can be divided into organized adventure trips and independent adventure travel, where an individual engages in activities not organized by any travel agent. The level of risk and kind of risk taken will vary significantly, as the travel agency provides the traveler with a certain amount of risk assessment and prevention as well as assistance of professional adventure guides (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998).

For independent adventure travelers, taking risks was found to have value of transforming the participant and positively affect their life quality (Allman, Mittelstaedt, Martin, & Goldberg, 2010), while an unsuccessful attempt to overcome risk situation could weaken one's self-esteem and lead to dissatisfaction (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003). Both aspects recognize the importance of risk for independent travelers not only during their travel experience but also for their long-lasting well-being. Risk and pleasure in independent adventure tourism can therefore be seen as complementary, where one cannot really be achieved without the other. Taking risks in a way leads to pleasure through increased quality of life. And pleasure is achieved through risk, as seen in a study on sensation seeking. Sensation seeking is mentioned as an element of adventure and a tool for making difference between tourists who avoid and who pursue risks. The former find enjoyment in the pursuit of emotionally strong experiences that exposure to danger involves, while the latter certainly do not. It means, that certain characteristics of a destination associated with potential risk will draw sensation seekers while those tourists with low levels of sensation seeking will most likely be repulsed by those characteristics (Lepp & Gibson, Sensation seeking and tourism: Tourist role, perception of risk and destination choice., 2008). It could therefore be said that adventure tourists go in places others would rather not in pursuit of pleasure and life quality enhancement. Taking risks seems to be a necessary component of their strategies to validate themselves and make life worth living. This study is considering individual constructions considering one's self-development and identity. Therefore, it could be commented that such efforts to enhance life quality and validate one's capabilities lies well within the very point of interest of this study.

Still, sensation seeking is only one of the concepts circulating around all the emotions related to risk taking. Buckley (2012) argues for rush to be closely related to both risk and flow, with very subtle differences between the concepts. Flow was treated in early research and found to be a state of intense focus with the activity being the only thing that absorbs an individual to the extent that the sensation of time is lost (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Rush, on the other hand, seems to be a relatively new concept, which the author characterizes as a state of mind that occurs when an intermediate or advanced practitioner of a certain adventure activity engages in the practice in almost perfect conditions, with the effort required oscillating at the edge of their skillset. The author argues that it is rush and not risk that the participants of organized adventure activities are in fact seeking (Buckley, 2012), which goes in line with previous findings of risk in the organized adventure tour environment being rather staged (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998). It can be said that achieving intense emotional states such as flow, rush and sensation seeking is determining the level of pleasure and satisfaction coming from pursuing adventure

activities. With certain degree of risk being a necessary component for reaching those states, risk could turn out to be again strongly linked to pleasure and satisfaction for adventure travelers. It seems reasonable to comment, that it is overcoming an obstacle that leads to a person's perception as capable, both in the eyes of others as oneself. The more dangerous the obstacle, the greater capability. This would point out to the necessity of risk component for self-development and identity construction.

Buckley (2012) in his study intensively argues for rush being a motivation for adventure instead of risks, as he points out that 'risks are deterrents, not attractors' (p. 15). It is important to note that he mostly talks about 'risk' understood as danger, situation in which an injury or death is likely to happen. The author mentions skill, caution, prior training, adequate equipment and responsible decisions among the ways of limiting danger. Therefore, it could be interpreted that it is not the danger but the possibility of overcoming the danger that attracts adventure people. Moreover, the danger is overcome thanks to one's skills, experience in the activity as well as psychological and physical strength. In this case, to be able to participate and achieve intense and apparently desired emotional states, one would have to be able to previously gain skills, experience and strength, possibly through taking lower risks along the way. Adequate equipment can be bought, but the above-mentioned values can only be achieved by staying involved with the activity. As for responsible decisions, the ability to make such decision in high-stress situation of danger exposure, could also be likely to come with the experience. As one would get exposed to similar situations in safer environments, being able to overcome them successfully, they could possibly get knowledge and confidence necessary for making reasonable decision in more dangerous environments. In other words, to become a skilled and experienced adventurer, one needs to be willing and able to participate in the activity, train and potentially also learn from other, more experienced adventurers. And, indeed, voluntarily take risks.

This hints towards risk as a necessary component of one's creation of themselves as an adventurer. People do things that contribute to their various creations in the eyes of themselves and others daily. They choose particular forms of entertainment, hobbies, other objects of consumption with a broader aim of constructing their identities in a desired way. This stays crucial for their day-to-day functioning as well as for the long-term goal of achieving outcomes they have planned or dreamed for themselves.

This section has placed risk taking in the context of adventure travel, pointing out to related concepts, such as sensation seeking, flow and rush. It provided a basis for understanding the emotions that accompany pursuing risk activity. Since this study is considering meanings

of adventure activity, it can be expected that those concepts may emerge in the data analysis. The next section will look upon risk and identity in adventure tourism, hinting on the potential for self-improvement that adventure-related identity project may have.

2.3. Risk and identity in adventure tourism

According to the Identity Process Theory (IPT), identity 'resides in psychological processes but is manifested through thought, action and affect' (Breakwell, 2007), which supports it as relevant when investigating people's attitudes and perceptions. Moreover, the manifestation of identity through action opens a potential for investigating it in the context of adventure travel. Adventure activities are based on action that involves risk taking. Therefore, it could be said that taking risks happens as a mean of constructing and expressing one's identity. Understanding of identity often comes down to the most straight forward aspects of the concept, such as religion, race or gender. Relatively little attention seems to be paid to the concept understood as more puzzling, complex and changing feature of a person. However, it is this more complex aspect of identity that often determine why do people choose particular travel destinations and activities. Although gender, religion or race are crucial for people and their self-perception, it is this other aspect of identity that can be shaped and created by an individual via participation or non-participation in various activities, events or social networks (Bond & Falk, 2013). It could be said that while the first, firm identity features provide a frame for who a person is, it is the other one that fills it in with depth and which makes them so different and interesting as individuals. Identity demonstrates how people see themselves. It also portrays the way they are seen by others, mainly based on their preferences and behaviors. Multiple aspects of a person can emerge in form of different identities, sometimes even contradictory to one another (Bond & Falk, 2013). This means that we don't necessarily need to construct ourselves as one thing only, for instance, an adventure traveler only. One can pursue experiences and services that help them support the adventurer identity on one side and, for instance, that of a reliable homemaker on the other. Understanding this seems important for this study as, regarded from such perspective, being an adventurer and a wife or mother does not necessarily need to stand in opposition. In other words, it is possible that there is no necessity of choosing between the social roles and one's drive for risk activity, which is an important premise for the analysis.

Identities are socially constructed and subjects to intentional changes or improvements. They represent what one is but also what one is not in relation to others (Cohen, 2010). Certain identity features can be created, investigated, supported as well as left behind using consumption of tourism (Bond & Falk, 2013; Nelson, 2015), which makes the will or need to shape one's identity as a factor possibly influencing the ways one travels, places they go to and

the kind of activities they pursue in the destination. One may start wonder what identity features one is looking to reshape when engaging in adventure tourism. Unfortunately, there has been little research concerning identity in adventure tourism context so far. Allman et al. (2009) studied base jumpers as a subculture of high risk extreme sport practitioners. They pointed out to the need for research on identity for groups of such kinds. Moreover, they specifically mention it would be necessary to compare identity formation of the two sexes. Risk perceptions were studied in the gender context among professional mountain guides, which could be considered a high-risk environment (Walker & Latosuo, 2015), however, this research did not touch upon identity matters. However, in leisure context identity and gender matters appear in research on backpackers and female solo travelers. Although risk and adventure were found to be crucial for backpacker identity (Lepp & Gibson, Tourist roles, perceived risk and international tourism., 2003), both turned out to be constructed as masculine. Identity of backpackers and female adventurers was subjects of various Elsrud's studies (2001; 2004; 2006). The author has found taking risks as supportive to male identity creation as a brave and daring adventurer. At the same time, female risk takers are seen as their 'negative counterparts' (Elsrud, 2001, p. 614), as they oppose social norms that expect women to remain risk averse. The study points out to the fact that even the terminology seems to be entirely male dominated, with the term 'adventuress' being used and known as a negative, somewhat ironic one. This means a challenge for women who do not wish to act and live their lives according to the male dominated norms. By deciding to become the 'narrators' (Elsrud, 2001, p. 599) of their identity stories, they need to count with being disregarded when it comes to the positive side of adventure and risk taking. Instead, they would be seen as acting in rather foolish, irresponsible way. Challenges seem to multiply, as female risk takers are found to face constraints concerning participation in chosen risk activities that are grounded in not much more than the fact of being female. The example of surfers shows, how gender-related identity challenges can seriously discourage female surfers from pursuing the activity. The reason behind this were some demotivating behaviors of male surfers towards the female ones, questioning not only their skill but also right to train in a certain destination together with them (Fendt & Wilson, 2012). Similarly, constraints and limitations also appear in research on female solo travelers. Women traveling alone experience 'sense of restricted access' not only to certain places but also practices. For instance, the author points out to the fact that bonding with the locals in some more male-dominant destinations is rather limited for women, who feel like this limitation is affecting negatively their overall travel experience. They feel that they are missing out on something important and authentic due to no more than the fact of not being a man (Wilson &

Little, 2008). Moreover, female solo travelers tend to struggle with sexual harassment and undesired attention from men while traveling (Brown & Osman, 2017). Having all this in mind, it seems that being an adventuress means being challenged in an unequal way on a regular basis. Even though for many it would seem like a justified reason to give up, female adventurers do not. The surfers, instead of withdrawing from participation, would negotiate the constraints through holding on to the optimistic attitude, having a plan, staying prepared and, what seemed most important, remaining truly passionate about surfing. Overcoming limitations seemed not only not to discourage the surfers. It actually led to gaining additional satisfaction (Fendt & Wilson, 2012). Women traveling solo would, instead of coming back home or taking a husband or boyfriend along, adapt some safety strategies and precautions (Wilson & Little, 2008). Those in some cases also included trying to adjust their clothing and behavior to rather strict norms followed by local women at the destination (Brown & Osman, 2017). Reflecting upon the identity of female adventure traveler needs to consider above mentioned struggles, as they do shape their self-perception and the narration of travel stories. It seems like a woman who decides to pursue a risk activity or travel on her own, apart from all the risks involved with the activity or travel in itself, needs to additionally take the risks of being perceived negatively either by the male participants of same activities (Fendt & Wilson, 2012) or even by their social networks back at home (Wilson & Little, 2008). The dissonance between how risk taking positively impacts male identity construction and how it is creating struggles for female one, points out to the importance of cultural and social boundaries for identity construction. At the same time, women seem quite capable of negotiating these boundaries. Moreover, it seems like their intentional contradiction and going on with the chosen risk activity seems to be an additional source of satisfaction. Still, a question may emerge, concerning why do women decide to take those risks and expose to those consequences at all? The reason seems to lie in the identity itself. Women interviewed by Elsrud (2001) mention that they went backpacking so that they can be themselves. This strong need of connecting with the 'self' also emerges in other studies. Women refer to solo travel and their preferred risk activities as something that 'saved them' (Rickly-Boyd, 2012, p. 96), made their life better and allowed them to reconnect with the self. Intense dedication to the activity opens a possibility to reach certain level of self-authenticity, that seems to be additionally straightened by successfully overcoming difficult situations (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Also, gaining some self-esteem was found to be one of the main motivations for women to go on a solo trip (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). This may mean, that through risk and traveling, women seek and, in many cases, find a way of validating and improving the 'self'. Embarking on an adventure trip or insisting in pursuing the activity of

their choice may therefore be seen as a wider ‘practice of the self’ (Foucault, 1988 cited in Lupton & Tulloch, 2002) as well a way of proving themselves worth despite the unfavorable looks and social boundaries. Therefore, this study will take an example of risk activity, aiming to understand its’ relationship to women’s identity and ‘project of the self’.

The dissonance between the two sexes when it comes to risk and identity, opens a possibility for discussion on what is it that the female risk takers are actually losing? Although it might be believed that discouraging women from taking risk contributes to their safety and is therefore for their own good, it does also seem to be a strong limitation of their personal growth and freedom. With taking risks being crucial for self-authenticity and self-esteem it is important to look at the motives for identity formation together with the narratives of identity and the self.

This section has introduced the relationship between risk and identity, placing it within the context of adventure travel. The gender aspect was discussed, to point out that the identity creation opportunity emerging from risk taking seems to be somewhat restricted for women, while for men it remains broadly accessible. This points out to the sample for this study being female-only, as this accessibility-gap needs to be addressed and better understood.

Next section will introduce two concepts within risk and identity: the three discourses studied by Lupton and Tulloch (2002) and the Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 2007), with the aim of providing a theoretical connection between research on risk in tourism and identity research. A combination of those concepts will be proposed and used as theoretical framework for the empirical study. However, particular elements will be explained more in-depth in chapter 3, for they are in their nature relatively hard to grasp and often overlapping. This way, a direct and clear connection will be made between the concept and the empirical results of the study.

2.4. ‘Self-work’ and the IPT

Previous section highlighted the positive aspect of overcoming boundaries as leading towards self-authenticity through consequent participation in risk activities. This draws attention to the term ‘self-authenticity’ in itself, which will be used among the concepts for categorizing data in this study. Along emotion discourse, which self-authenticity is a part of, Lupton & Tulloch’s (2002) study on voluntary risk taking in everyday lives reveals two more: control and self-improvement discourse. Emotion discourse focuses on the inseparability of risk and strong emotions that those taking risks are experiencing. Control discourse, on the other hand, represents one’s uncertainty about the limits of both body and the mind, as risk taking implies challenging one’s physical strength as well as their fears. Lastly, self-improvement

discourse looks upon one's self-development through engaging in risk taking. Moreover, risk taking also appears as a contestation of social and cultural boundaries put on women, as one of the participants mentions this issue. She claims that for her, taking risks was a way of showing disagreement on the roles the fulfilment of which was expected from her as a woman (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). This points out to the fact that such roles do function as boundaries and should be understood more in depth. This study will therefore address this need, by attempting to explore participant's perceptions of social boundaries faced.

Overall, all three discourses combined together resulted in emergence of a more complex one, consisting of: self-authenticity, self-control, self-development and self-actualisation. Those are components of a broader matter of 'self as a continuing project that requires constant work and attention' (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002, p. 122). This falls in line with the literature on risk and identity in tourism, where identity construction emerged as a way of reaching similar goals, self-authenticity among them, with the self being constructed and reshaped through voluntarily taking risks. Interestingly, such focus on the 'self' and its' creation only emerged recently. With the freedom of an individual only starting to appear in early modernity, such concern with self-improvement can be considered an entirely modern trend that was rather not accessible previously (Beck, 1992). One may wonder what is it that such 'self-work' has to offer in the long run. Looking at Lupton & Tulloch's study as well as at the cases mentioned in the previous section, it seems to be necessary for one to undertake if they want to position themselves in the modern society. In the realm of the modern world, identity is constantly created, developed, enhanced and shaped. This offers a certain hope or maybe even a promise of finally finding or (re)inventing oneself. However, this is surely not available to everyone. Research on gender and identity in tourism is focusing on Western middle-class tourists, largely overlooking other groups regarding this matter (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). At the same time, for one to be able to truly focus on self-improvement, their most basic needs have to be fulfilled first (Maslow, 1943), which points out to the possibility of self-inventing as rather inaccessible for anyone below the middle-class status.

Looked upon from this perspective, the motive for identity creation seems to be gaining and maintaining a position in society. Still, The Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 2007) determines four motives for identity construction: continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self esteem. Among those, both self-efficacy (Maxfield, Shapiro, Gupta, & Hass, 2010) and self-esteem (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006) are explicitly mentioned in literature as factors impacting risk taking. Distinctiveness and continuity also appear in Lupton & Tulloch's (2002) study, although they are not explicitly mentioned there as factors. Those links between the IPT

and risk literature point out to the possibility of integrating motives for identity construction and the overall self-work theme found in Lupton and Tulloch's discourses with the aim of achieving deeper understanding of the complexity of voluntary risk-taking as a tool for one's 'project of the self'. Table 1 gathers those concepts together, presenting the elements of the three discourses on one side under a heading 'self work' and those belonging to the IPT on the other. The term 'self-work' was not explicitly mentioned in Lupton&Tulloch's paper. It was chosen for the use of this study, when referring to the three discourses. Because of their links to both risk and identity construction, those eight categories will provide a theoretical framework for structuring data analysis. This way, it will be easier to grasp particular elements of both self-improvement and the identity construction and better understand the meaning that those hold to the participants of this study.

self-work	IPT
self-development	continuity
self-actualization	distinctiveness
self-authenticity	self-esteem
self-control	self-efficacy

Table 1. Eight premises for identity construction.

Integration of the two concepts results in emergence of eight premises for identity construction, that seem to complement each other while being strongly interrelated. Continuity, which primarily aims at having an individual and their identity survive and last, require self-control which would adapt behaviors to one's assessment of risk situations. At the same time, self control could be argued to contribute to both self-esteem and self efficacy. First, contributing to one's self-perception as capable and in control. Second, as possibly reliable in terms of achieving desired outcomes. Self-esteem can also be enhanced through self-actualisation, as one's possibilities are being discovered and broadened, leading to self-development and therefore, also sense of being unique and different than the 'other'. All those elements contribute to establishing a closer relationship with the 'self', as following what one believes to be their path towards personal development should be considered a desire of their authentic being. Therefore, the quest for self-authenticity lies within each one of the previously mentioned elements. With this in mind, the eight premises for identity construction rooting in Lupton and Tulloch's (2002) findings and Breakwell's (2007) Identity Process Theory will be used as a theoretical framework for this study. Both, the discourses and the IPT, were identified as gender-neutral and so would they remain when integrated. However, the aim of

this study is to explicitly focus on female risk and adventure-related identity construction. Therefore, the framework will only be applied to women.

2.5. Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an overview of existing publications within risk, gender and tourism. First, risk and voluntary risk taking were introduced, together with constructions surrounding risk perceptions in everyday practices as well as in leadership context. The topic of leadership brought us to a gender gap identified when it comes to risk taking and possibly rooting in social and cultural boundaries stressed on women. With the aim of looking upon risk and gender in leisure tourism, the following section has placed it within the context of adventure travel, aiming at pointing out to the inseparability of adventure and risk taking. Establishing this link led to a reflection on the meaning of one being an ‘adventurer’ and a discovery that the implications of being classified as such are significantly different for men and women. With this in mind, the topic of identity construction was looked upon, focusing on the choice to pursue the ‘adventurer’ and ‘risk-taker’ identity constructions and its’ consequences for women. Some constraints that female risk takers have to face were named together with the ways they are being negotiated. Findings that suggest that women do not withdraw from participation but gain additional satisfaction from overcoming limitations led to a reflection on risk taking possibly contributing to their ‘project of the self’, a wide concept that in the long run aims at finding oneself through identity construction and enhancement. With this in mind, two concepts were introduced. First one were three discourses surrounding voluntary risk taking: emotion, control and self-improvement discourse. Themes of self-work that emerged from there confirmed some identity-related values found in other studies, such as self-authenticity found in Elsrud’s (2001) study on backpacker identities. Second one, the Identity Process Theory, offered a theoretical framework for identity construction, presenting four motives. A combination of those two concepts was proposed under the term of eight premises for identity construction, with the explicit focus on women pursuing risk and adventure activities.

This literature review has confirmed the concern expressed in recent study that ‘existing research concerning travel risk and gender remains at a surface level’ (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017, p. 98). Therefore, this thesis will attempt to adress this gap and deepen the understanding within risk, leisure tourism and gender through an empirical study. The next chapter will be dedicated to establishing a methodological approach towards the study, providing information on how the study was performed as well as the sample and research environment.

3. Methodology

This chapter will introduce the methodology of the study and justify the research methods chosen. It will then address issues related to ethical aspect, sample size and characteristics as well as limitations or difficulties encountered on the way.

Tourism research has benefited a lot from the academia gradually accepting and embracing qualitative research and its' potential for tourism and service management studies. Social and cultural meanings within the field were provided with attention and tools, enabling more profound understanding. Currently, many complex issues are addressed using qualitative methods of a different kind, allowing for individual as well as collective constructions to be heard (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). An increasing number of sources is being broadly used and accepted, recently including also travel blogs and social media content (Nelson, 2015), which points out to the very nature of qualitative research as constantly reshaping and adapting to the changing environment. As this thesis aims to understand rather fleeting notions of the self in the tourism context, the choice of qualitative methods over quantitative ones feels natural. Although identity understood as gender, race, age or nationality could and most likely should be investigated using quantitative methods, this other, more vague aspect of identity that this paper focuses on, relies almost entirely on added meanings, constructions and is shaped and changed by social influences. Also, such features as self-esteem, self-authenticity, self-actualization and other characteristics forming part of both the IPT and the discourses, seem to rely a lot more on personal opinions, feelings and interpretations than numerical data. For those reasons, this study will use qualitative methods to address the research questions, hoping to contribute to the existing knowledge within tourism and service management studies. To achieve this, the material gathered should be able to picture individual's perceptions regarding themselves as well as the broader context of the risk activity in general and other people involved. Therefore, women's individual narratives should be regarded, touching upon the above through talking about their overall experiences and plans. Moreover, those stories shall be complemented by providing a background, established through observing the perceived functioning of interactions within the context of risk activity. Such background would provide better understanding of situations occurring at the places related to the risk activity as well as how interactions in such places are being interpreted by women, which could result in meaningful information about service spaces in tourism. Certain attention should be given to activity online, with the aim of providing an additional source of individual perceptions, which may be expressed more freely when online and within a like-minded and supportive group of users.

Many of the concepts that emerge in the following sections of this thesis will be of strongly subjective nature. Notions of both ‘risk’ and ‘adventure’ are constructed (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003) as well as identity and the aspects of ‘self’ (Elsrud, 2001) that this study will touch upon. This calls for methods capable of capturing meanings surrounding those subjectivities, with a broader purpose of understanding the essence of participant’s self-work. What this study will be after are stories and interpretations standing behind female identity creation as a risk taker and adventurer in the wider context of overcoming boundaries of social and cultural nature. The study uses purposive sampling, with the participants being chosen among available individuals fulfilling certain criteria. As the main interest of this study lies within adventure tourism and risk activities, participants were to pursue an adventure/risk activity. With this leaving a very wide range of different sports, groups and subcultures, it was decided to limit the sample to one risky adventure activity. The activity chosen was rock climbing, since it represents all the characteristics of an activity needed for this study: it involves certain degree of risk and is likely to be practiced by individuals independently (Caber & Albayrak, 2016). Moreover, some decide to pursue it full time, as they claim the sport to provide them with gains of self-enhancing or even spiritual nature (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Since this study is interested in the self and identity matters, rock climbing seems to be a good example.

3.1. Feminist or gender inputs?

Before focusing on the concrete methods applied in this study, it seems important to understand and determine the perspective that the study will adopt regarding gender issues. Gender issues together with the feminist approach are increasingly present in tourism research, making gender awareness a trend that hopefully would one day lead towards increased openness on alternative approaches to tourism issues (Wilson, 2002). This section will briefly introduce both approaches, specifying their importance for this thesis.

Tourism scholars themselves recognize the need for better understanding of gender perspective in research as well as the way gender related issues are being studied. For instance, it’s been found that most methodologies among gender studies published in tourism journals relied on quantitative methods, while those using qualitative ones tended to be issued by gender or women research publishers. This in itself shows that although tourism studies increasingly notice gender related issues, there seem to still remain some pressure towards using quantitative methods (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero, 2015). As previously mentioned, this study will entirely rely on qualitative methods, since those are the ones that seem most adequate to address the research question. Still, having in mind the general

tendency in tourism academia is crucial for providing the methodological context and eventually acknowledge potential limitations.

The situation of gender awareness in tourism research is crucial for this paper, due to its' strong focus on women's experiences and impressions. At the same time, since this study will not focus on women only, but rather on their perceptions and experiences in relation to men and with men being present in the situational context, it cannot be explicitly called a feminist study, but a gender study instead. However, this thesis may also be argued to include some feminist influences, especially since it also aims to point out to certain boundaries and limitations rooting in different approaches towards risk taking for men and women. With this in mind, it seems necessary to look at feminist studies and feminism as well, for better understanding of the paper together with chosen research methods and the ethical aspect. It is also important to take into account that the feminist identity tends to be associated with negative features such as being distant, aggressive and presenting overall negative attitude towards men in general (Munar, 2017). Therefore, it seems relevant to note that no emotions of such nature are being held against male individuals by the author of this study.

Feminist perspective suggest for the study to reach an outcome that to some extent improves women's quality of life or increases consciousness regarding issues that are of crucial importance for women (Wilson, 2002). Although this study is unlikely to have a tangible influence on women's lives in general, it does aim at making a step towards increased gender-awareness through showing the importance of participation in risk activities as a crucial part of one's self-perception and an experience necessary for full integration into post-modern society. Hopefully, as they share their experiences, backgrounds and identity stories, the participants of this study would become more empowered to modify their responses to negative social boundaries and be therefore encouraged to take more positive risks in their lives. With that intention in mind, next section will introduce the methods chosen for gathering data: individual interviews, ethnography and netnography. Those were selected with the ultimate purpose of reaching a profound understanding not only of the particular risk situation setting and current mindset of the participants, but also of their social backgrounds, beliefs and plans for the future. It seems worth reflecting whether there is a particular methodology suitable for studying women and indeed, previous research confirms that qualitative methods are desired with the aim of understanding women's experiences (Wilson, 2002).

3.2. Interviews

First method chosen for the study are semi-structured interviews. Use of semi-structured interviews as a method enables for the interviewed women to freely express their ideas and

thoughts. They provide enough flexibility for the participants to express themselves and for the researcher to ask additional questions, but unlike unstructured ones they offer a possibility of establishing a basic script of issues to be talked about (Wilson, 2002). The ability to engage in storytelling or adding reflections in a relatively free way can be argued to provide depth to the data. Moreover, topics touched upon in the interviews are of rather delicate nature. One's identity creation and reshaping does not seem something they are regularly and consciously reflecting on. Therefore, it may be relatively difficult to put into words and insert into a strict structure. Moreover, interviews seem an effective method in feminist studies, since when it comes to capturing and understanding women's experiences they 'allow for a level of connectedness and interaction between researcher and participant' (Wilson, 2002, p. 75). This study will include individual interviews with risk taking women aiming at gaining a deep understanding of their identity stories.

3.2.1. Individual interviews

For this study, nine individual interviews were performed, each lasting about one hour. Initially, the interviews were planned to be carried out in person, including members of one climbing gym. However, with the aim of seeking diversity and different perspectives, the choice was made to carry out Skype interviews, using a videocall option. Being an affordable method that enables reaching out to research participants anywhere in the world, Skype was found to be equally effective in gathering quality data as face-to-face interviews would. In some cases it can even be argued to be a better tool, as participants are at a place where they already feel comfortable, like their own homes, and can dedicate more time to the interview (Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). Therefore, the background in case of most interviews was quiet, which enabled both the participant and the researcher to focus on the interview. At the same time, it was possible to reschedule some of the interviews for a different date upon participant's request, which would not always be possible if the interviewer would follow a tight research travel schedule.

The goal of having individual interviews with adventure and risk seeking women would be to capture their experiences and impressions regarding various topics. Since topics studies for this paper are of strongly personal and often non-entirely conscious nature, individual interviews would start with a conversation concerning interviewees social and cultural background. The interview would enable understanding on the conditions interviewees grew up in, the kind of activities they were likely to undertake as children as well as hopefully the kind of response from their friends and family to the choice of those activities. Then, the participants would be asked to identify when was it that they started to get interested in the sport

or risk activity they engage in at the moment and, again, how did they perceive the reaction of their social network to that decision. Did they get encouraged or rather discouraged? Did particular members of their network show any extreme reactions? What were the reactions and who were the people? These are some of the questions that the participants of the study would be asked. Experiences accompanying taking part in risk activities would be gathered, starting from the beginning until the moment of the interview, with a focus on how the interviewee perceived the societal response as well as how they would perceive themselves throughout this time. Any possible changes or influences they would have noted in themselves would be given highest attention. During the individual interviews, participants would be encouraged to talk about the activity in the context of finding oneself, self-improvement and eventual influence on their personality or self-esteem. Some comments regarding the feelings associated with overcoming limitations of social nature would also be welcome. Participants would be asked questions related to how they feel gender is related to the risk activity they pursue. Also, some attention would be dedicated to the social network surrounding the activity they pursue and the social interactions within this group. They would be asked about how the network was formed, how did they join and how do they feel as members of this network. The interview would continue with questions regarding interviewees future and the plans or hopes that they have for themselves in a ten-year perspective.

The reason behind collecting data on participant's childhood and background lies in the intention of seeing how their 'self' was shaped and what were the attitudes towards their risk taking expressed by early friends or family members. Childhood is considered a period when people's personalities, preferences and biases tend to shape and so it was found a necessary material for this study as well as a good way of leading the interviews towards more puzzling issues of one's self-perception as an adult. Some patterns are expected to be found when it comes to risk taking, since children encouraged to take risks may potentially grow up to be more daring and adventurous adults. At the same time, questions regarding the future aim at spotting the theme of self-improvement, how one perceives their perspectives and possibilities and whether taking risks and pursuing risk activity is part of this vision of the future as well as to what extent. It is important to point out that participants' childhood stories are being treated here as constructs and not objective facts. Therefore, this study will attempt to embrace the stories that the participants constructed. It is not aiming at finding out facts from participants' early lives.

3.3. Sample

The participants for this study were chosen using purposive sampling (Silverman, 2013), which means that they were found and selected according to some characteristics as well as their accessibility for the study. Participants were to be female, of any age and social status, that engage in adventure activities. However, with adventure activities being a broad concept that many sports, practices and activities fall into, it has been decided to choose one particular form of adventure activity that can portray characteristics of a risk taking activity. The activity chosen was rock climbing, for several reasons. First, 'risk taking' was found to be an important motivation for rock climbers (Caber & Albayrak, 2016). The sport was also included among high-risk activities (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003). This makes rock climbing a relevant example of an adventure activity that require the participants to voluntarily take risks. Second, some rock climbers decide to take the sport to the next level by becoming 'lifestyle climbers' (Rickly-Boyd, 2012, p. 85), that is leave their current jobs or homes with the purpose of embarking on a long-term travel with rock climbing as the ultimate purpose. Although such cases are not to be sought for this study, this level of involvement of some rock climbers shows that the activity can be as engaging and rewarding that some decide to make it a lifestyle. As the study shows, those who decide to make climbing a lifestyle do so hoping to become liberated from social boundaries and some find that the sport has made changes to their life that are of more spiritual nature (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). It could be said that rock climbing has a potential of an activity that pushes people towards self-improvement or reflecting upon one's identity in relation to the sport and to risk. Third, partnership and relationships between members of groups of rock climbers are something that the climbers particularly value (Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Kulczycki, 2014; Wood, 2016). For that reason, equality and support are to be expected among group members. Therefore, if any gender-related boundaries or constraints occur in such group, it can be argued not to root in the very nature of rock climbing communities as such. Among this group, the aim was to choose participants with different cultural backgrounds as well as different levels of experience when it comes to climbing. The interview participants were women between 21 and 36 years old, coming from and living in different countries. The detailed demographics are shown in Table 2. They differed when it comes to the experience in rock climbing, with the shortest being around a year and a half and longest – 29 years. All have at least once travelled to another place than their place of residence with rock climbing being the ultimate purpose.

Country of origin	Country of residence	Age
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Germany	Germany	36
Germany	Sweden	25
USA	USA	22
USA	USA	28
USA	Germany	22
Canada	Germany	25
Austria	Sweden	21
Albania	Sweden	30
Czechia	Great Britain	32

Table 2. Interview participants demographics.

3.3. Ethnography

Another method chosen for this study is ethnography. Ethnography aims at observing patterns, habits and interactions between a certain group with the aim of getting an insight into the dynamics and reality of this group. It involves engaging in group's conversations, participating in activities and, one could say, getting to know them as well as it is possible. The findings are documented using field notes that are then being analyzed more in depth after the time of observation is over. Although observation is the main purpose of this method, the researcher aims at being somewhat included in the group he is observing, becoming a part of it. Therefore, ethnography is, at the end, way more complex than just a simple observation. (Bryman, 2012). Because of time limitations and the nature of this study, the ethnography carried out here cannot be treated as complete one, since ethnographies tend to last a lot longer. Still, the method employed here can be treated as micro-ethnography, which despite of its shorter duration, focuses on a concrete feature of the subject and brings some additional perspective to the interview data.

Observations were carried out in three different settings, with the aim of providing a perspective rooting in familiarity with all the contexts mentioned by the interviewees. At first, the aim was to only include the outdoor setting. However, the interviewees consequently mentioned indoor climbing gyms as crucial for interactions between climbers as well as places where the existence of community manifests the most. Also, from the perspective of service management, gathering information about interactions in climbing gyms could be interesting as they are service spaces. Therefore, two additional settings for ethnography were added: casual opening hours at two different climbing gyms in Poland as well as a competition day at

one of them. The aim was identifying potentially different behaviors and interactions between climbers at the gym and outdoor setting and taking a closer look at some issues mentioned by the interviewees. Altogether, a two-week long ethnography was performed, out of which one day was dedicated to observing a bouldering competition, one week at two different climbing gyms and six days at an outdoor climbing trip.

3.4. Netography

The study on female solo travelers has used emailing, as a form of asking additional interview questions (Wilson, 2002). Taking certain inspiration from this method, this study has attempted to use closed Facebook groups in a similar way. Data was gathered, accessing two different closed Facebook groups: 'Girls Who Climb' and 'Flash Foxy Girls Climbing Forum'. A post was created, in which the purposes of the study was explained, and which encouraged group members to answer, in a form of a comment below the post or a private message, a question: What does rock climbing mean to you? This resulted in 16 comments overall, in which group members shared the meanings around the sport.

3.5. Ethics

Before each interview, participants were informed about the purposes of the study and that their answers will remain anonymous, with only the initial of their first name being published in the study. They were also informed about the interview being recorded and all agreed to such condition. Interviewees were encouraged to add on to the questions with their own reflections and stories that would come to their minds, despite if a specific question was asked or not.

Regarding ethnography, the reception staff at the climbing gyms was informed about performing ethnography, however, such information was not distributed to everyone present at the gym. When outdoors, a group of climbers was informed that the observations are taking place.

3.6. Limitations

It is important to look at the role of the researcher, particularly in gender studies, since emotional engagement is possible and thus may affect data interpretation. As the author of this thesis is a woman herself, it could be argued that some level of bias and/or emotional entanglement is very likely to appear. However, it can be argued that as a woman and an amateur climber, the researcher can approach research participants with an increased level of familiarity, trust and empathy.

Moreover, the use of Skype as a tool for individual interviews could potentially result somewhat controversial. Similar technologies are considered as lacking the connection between the researcher and the participants, as no person-to-person gestures are involved (Iacono,

Symonds, & Brown, 2016). However, no difficulties were identified when using Skype for this study. It could be said that the lack of familiarity and closeness potentially caused by the use of Skype could be somehow compromised by the fact that the interviewer was also a woman climbing herself which might have caused a sensation of talking to one of the interviewees' kind. Still, Skype did not seem to cause distance or difficulties when communicating with the interviewees. As previously mentioned, in most cases the interviewees were at their homes, in a quiet space where they could talk privately. Only one of the interviewees decided that she wants her husband and child to be present during the interview, which might have affected her answers regarding the gender issues and interactions when climbing, since she was the only interviewee to mention lack of boundaries rooting in such interactions.

Due to relatively small sample for this study and the fact that only one risk activity was considered, generalization of the results is not possible. Still, hopefully it can be treated as a basis for understanding the female risk taker identity and inspire further studies to further develop on the topic.

This chapter has introduced the methods chosen for the study with the aim of gathering some quality data for analysis. It touched upon some potential difficulties and ethical aspect encountered on the way. Consequently, the next chapter will be dedicated to the data obtained, attempting to integrate meanings and constructions with the theoretical background.

4. Data analysis

I went with my friend and we did a five-pitch climb in Yosemite. It was my first Yosemite climb, first outdoor climb, first multipitch. And it was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. And I got to the top, I was way up there, above the rest of the world... I actually did it! My hands were bleeding and everything hurt because it was December and it was very cold. But we sat there, ate lunch and drank hot chocolate at the top and we just looked out and that was probably one of most accomplished moments of my life. And that is the moment I think of every time I climb. I want to relive that moment. All of it. Everyday. Forever.

(J.)

At the beginning of most interviews, the participants were asked about how their climbing adventure began. It turned out that most of them started climbing because of a female friend who either invited them to go to a climbing gym together or took them along for an outdoor climbing trip. One respondent got initiated in climbing by her father, as the sport was a family tradition. One decided to start practicing the sport because of a male climber she dated at the

time. As the stories and details differed, one thing stayed clear and common for all interviews – it was another person that has introduced them to climbing. This was first out of numerous manifestations of the crucial importance of the people aspect for risk activities. Other people's appreciation was found motivating for pursuing the activity and lack of community or family support - a major reason for withdrawal from participation in the activity or its' more risky aspects. As for potential limitations, similarly to the study on surfers (Fendt & Wilson, 2012), they tended to root in gender relations and certain degree of underestimation of women's capabilities by men. Also, as in the mentioned study, women negotiated those limitations adopting various strategies, yet they did not quit the activity. Also, certain degree of satisfaction seemed to be gained thanks to overcoming the difficulties. The next sections will respectively answer the research questions, with the aim of introducing research results categorized according to the aspect of the study aim that they address. It is common for meanings to intertwine, it being sometimes complicated to assign them to one category only. Still, efforts were made for the structure of this chapter to be as clear as possible.

4.1. How do women who decide to pursue risky adventure activities perceive social boundaries they face?

This section will analyze the limitations faced by climbing women. Main ones identified during the interviews were: the expectations gap, overtaking the experience, personal barriers, family induced boundaries and 'feeling of isolation'. The focus will be placed on the way the respondents perceive the limitations rather than their actual impact. This means that their responses will be analyzed looking for keywords and themes corresponding to low expectations, domination and unwanted interventions, fear or worry, partnership and inclusion and, lastly, family response with the focus on support or discouragement.

4.1.1. The expectations gap

The aim of this section is to introduce the first out of five boundaries faced by women who pursue risk activity, in this case rock climbing. The following sections will introduce the other four boundaries respectively.

As a woman you are in a better position because they expect a little less from you than they would expect from a man.

(S.)

Seven out of nine interviewees pointed out that throughout the years they were climbing they faced, in one way or another, what will here be referred to as expectations gap. It was mostly characterized as men overlooking or underestimating women's performance or capabilities

based on their gender. As the quote above shows, not always such behavior is explicitly mentioned as something negative. One of the interviewees refers to the expectations gap as something that gives her a 'small bonus', because since the expectations are lower, the performance seems greater. In this context, the expectations gap acts not as a boundary but rather a form of encouragement. Still, it is important to note that the interviewee is aware that she is being perceived as less capable. However, she does adopt a positive attitude towards this and does not see it as a boundary. Situation seems to change when lower expectations manifest in concrete behaviors on behalf of male climbers. This other side of the coin is mentioned by another interviewee, as she recalls a following situation:

I was at the gym and there was a guy. He'd see me warm up for a boulder and he was like 'yeah, I don't know if you should do this one'. And I thought: 'What?! Cause you know, I'm going to do this, and I don't need your permission.'

(S.)

Here, low expectations towards the interviewee are expressed in form of doubt whether she 'should' attempt to climb a problem that she is preparing for. It is interesting, as the use of word 'should' tends to hint correctness, suggesting it is not right that S. is even attempting to climb the chosen problem. Such manifestation seems quite extreme, especially that the interviewee specifies that the person making such comment was a stranger. Despite of that, S. did not resign from her attempt. She recognized that no other person is necessary to authorize what she can and cannot climb, largely ignoring the comment. This kind of resilience was mentioned by more interviewees as a common response to similar situations that occurred to them while climbing. One of the women mentions certain strategies she adopts when climbing together with men. The situation here could be expected to vary, as the men mentioned are her friends or acquaintances from the climbing gym. The theme of low expectations emerges here, as the interviewee talks about her male partners expecting less from her than they seem to from one another or from other male climbers. Such situation seems to make the interviewee a bit uncomfortable, as she talks about strategies that are meant to help her adapt to the male-dominated environment and reduce the potential expectations gap. This shows when she enumerates the restrictions that she puts on herself when climbing with men and of which the purpose is to seem more like 'one of the guys' and using expressions such as 'have to' or 'need' that suggest that she, in a way, feels obliged to use those strategies in order to be able to be a part of the male group. So, to fit into her climbing group, the interviewee makes compromises

regarding the way she dresses and behaves, with the aim of presenting features that are usually associated with men. At the same time, she resigns from behaviors regarded as feminine. She says:

So, I find when I'm outside climbing, I kind of have to put on my outdoorsy girl uniform. Like, be one of the guys (...). The way that applies for me is that I try to act like a guy: say the same jokes, not wear any pink or purple and of course not cry or show too much emotion.

(J.)

Asked about what she thinks would happen if she would stick to the feminine looks and behaviors instead, she was concerned that it may affect the way she and her performance would be perceived. It seemed to her that by manifesting features commonly seen as ladylike, the quality of her climbing will be seen as lower because of them acting as a constant reminder to her partners that, unlike themselves, she is a woman.

If I were to be my feminine self outside, I guess it would probably remind them that I'm a girl. But they also know I am, so it's not like I'm hiding. It's not like I can just trick them all into thinking I'm a boy. And I don't want to be a guy. It's great to be a woman outdoors. I hope they're inspired by it. I hope it makes them proud of women to see more female climbers at the crag. But yeah, I guess if I wore pink I would feel like they wouldn't expect me to climb this hard.

(J.)

While reflecting on this, the interviewee pointed out that these limitations are particularly hard for women to deal with, since they do differ from men in terms of upper body strength, which is quite crucial for many climbs. Other interviewees confirm this, referring to women having to mostly relying on technique rather than strength in order to keep up with or beat their male counterparts. Some also underlined that their progress in climbing, especially in terms of strength, happens much slower compared to men. They underlined that although at times frustrating, this has made them humbler and more patient in climbing as well as in life in general.

Observations during an amateur bouldering competition did not seem to confirm the expectations gap being much of an issue. Women present at the competition were cheered and supported equally as men, with many of them wearing flashy color clothes, pink included. Even

though less women would attempt to climb the boulders in the highest difficulty category, those who were did not seem to be underestimated. They also seemed to remain in good relations with both male and female climbers and attended the awards ceremony with their hair let loose, not hiding their femininity. Similarly, expectations gap did not emerge as a particularly visible phenomenon during observations outdoors. However, observations during casual opening hours at a climbing gym did enable noticing some possible tension around female performance that might have root in lower expectations. For instance, a woman was preparing to attempt a problem that was previously climbed by two men, who were now seating close by and resting. One of them, as he noticed the woman approaching the climb commented: ‘oh, now we will see how it’s done’, which was followed by a short laugh on the part of his friend. As long as there may have been absolutely no bad intentions on the part of the male climbers, the comment and reaction did seem somewhat ironic. Still, it did not discourage the woman from attempting the climb multiple times.

4.1.2. Overtaking the experience

Another limitation emerging from both the interviews and observations had to do with men, as one of the interviewees put it, ‘consuming the experience for women’. This manifested mainly as providing unsolicited advice to stranger women climbers. Women often commented on men giving them unwanted ‘beta’ which in climbing stands for figuring out which sequence of moves is necessary to finish a climb. Some of the respondents had a strong impression that by providing such unwanted advice, men would suggest that they were not capable of figuring it out themselves.

I feel like I would have done exactly the same thing without the guy telling me. And now it looks like I can only do it with his help. Help that I did not ask for.

(S.)

Interviewees claim that this is not only the case outdoors, when such behavior could be motivated by preoccupation for women’s safety. Ethnography data confirms this. In the climbing gyms observed, there were cases of a man approaching a woman working on a boulder and telling her how that boulder shall, according to his skills and knowledge, be approached. Often the imperative was used, with sentences starting as ‘You should...’ or ‘Now put your foot there...’. Few of the women would thank for the advice. They were also unlikely to continue the conversation, but rather come back to the climb without paying much attention to the male climber or move on to another climb. As one of the interviewees pointed out, there may be

different motivations behind men approaching women in climbing gyms in such way, one of them being flirting and intention of starting a contact on a subject they both surely share – climbing. It could be argued that no negative intentions are truly driving unsolicited advice, but a sheer need for interaction and self-presentation as knowledgeable. Also, two of the interviewees pointed out to the fact that recently this kind of male behavior was given a lot of attention and was broadly discussed in climbing forums and groups, which may have led to women being overly aware of it and therefore more sensitive than before. Still, most interviewees tended to find unsolicited beta rather disturbing.

In some cases, unwanted advice considered also the use of climbing gear and belaying, an important safety feature in rock climbing. A., who is since several years working at a climbing gym and teaching other people to belay, claims that it tends to happen to her a lot when she climbs outdoors. She recalls various situations when men gave her unwanted advice on climbs she has already done before, belaying her regular climbing partner and the use of basic equipment. All this, without asking about her experience as a climber or dedicating time to observe, whether she is or not performing in the right way. Some of those situations resulted in her changing the climbing spot to avoid repetitive male interventions.

I just want to go and climb, be able to just be there and not have someone watching over my shoulder, giving me beta and telling me how to do things that I already know how to do. I've been doing it for years.

(A.)

Interestingly, when A. would point out to them that she is a climbing instructor and knows what she's doing, they would immediately step back and treat her as equally experienced as themselves. A. also mentions that sometimes the advice is adequate, in which case she is open and thankful for it.

As the section shows, when facing unwanted interventions, female climbers feel that the male ones do not perceive them as capable. However, it seems that such behavior has no influence on women perceiving themselves as such. Therefore, overtaking the experience functioning as an actual boundary could be arguable.

4.1.3. Family induced boundaries

My mom says I should wear a helmet when I boulder.

(J.)

Clear majority of the interviewees claimed their families to be supportive and encouraging in their choice to climb. For one of the women, climbing was a part of a family tradition, with both her parents and grand parents being rock climbers. Another three mentioned that their mothers also were climbers when they were young. One said that her mom started at the same club that she later did and she even got her first climbing gear from her mom. Generally, parents of the women interviewed seemed to support, or at least tolerate the risky hobby of their daughters. However, parents did tend to express their concern with child's life and well-being, suggesting that there are safer ways of spending free time and encouraging them to take all the possible precautions. Despite those suggestions though, most of the women who do notice certain concern of their parents, pursue the activity nevertheless. Although they are aware of their parents being a little bit afraid of the potential consequences of their risk taking, it does not seem to affect the way they engage in the activity. So, similarly as in the cases of other barriers, climbers tend to rather negotiate the limitations than compromise on the activity of their choice.

Well (laughs), my hobby before I started climbing was sky diving. So, my mom was a bit relieved. Even though her cousin... he died rock climbing, you know. So, she was like 'Oh my god, again, why can you not find a normal sport?'. But obviously, that's my mom, that's a bit different.

(Z.)

Still, in some cases concern of the parents may be of major importance for risk taking women, making them resign from some aspects of the activity. This seems to be when family's fear of their daughter can act as discouragement that stops her from getting more involved.

'My dad said 'Oh, your hands will be so like...bad. Please don't ruin your hands, don't ruin your beauty'. So what I do is that I put a lot of cream after climbing to protect the beauty of my hands. They were just worried for me not to get hurt. And they don't want me to go extreme in terms of going for free climbing, like to go extreme on a sport: train a lot, develop a lot and then go in the outdoors on those crazy trips and do crazy climbs (...). So, I guess I am trying to keep climbing a little low pace.

(O.)

An interesting aspect emerging here is the notion of 'beauty' associated with delicate hands that are likely to become a lot less soft after years of training and gripping on the rock. Such a

change, in the eyes of interviewees family, seems to be affecting the perception of the daughter as ‘ruining’ one of her feminine features through the pursuit of the sport. If this can still be negotiated through appropriate skincare, the interviewee admits resigning from fully immerse in the activity due to her parents’ standpoint.

This section has identified family induced boundaries as meaningful for female climbers, as there is a case of withdrawal from certain aspects of the sport that according to interviewees words is mostly caused by boundaries of such nature.

4.1.4. Personal barriers

The interviewees also shared some intimate stories concerning their personal limitations, that have in one way or another stood as a barrier to their climbing. Most of the respondents mentioned fear, especially when lead climbing outdoors, and various strategies to overcome it with focusing on the breath being the most common one. Some mentioned limited amount of time due to their other social roles, such as that of becoming a mother. One referred to the fear of heights that she managed to overcome through rock climbing, particularly outdoors. Another, admitted that while heights do not scare her, she is afraid of falling and getting hurt, which pushes her to stay in her comfort-zone and only attempt climbs which she knows to lie well within or below her skill level. At the same time, self-consciousness was also pointed as a barrier, since it made the climber realize that others are watching her failures. She referred particularly to a man that she has had a romantic relationship with in the past and who was working at the climbing gym that she frequented.

I just didn't want to climb in front of him, where he could see, because if I messed up or if I fell or whatever... I just was afraid, and I just felt like he thought I was weak. In combination with my self-consciousness about it, this was horrible. There was a period of time when I almost stopped climbing all together because I just hated the feeling that I get when I am on the wall and someone is watching me. I feel so much pressure. And I don't want to be seen as stupid or dumb or weak or whatever.

(R.)

Since her former partner was an experienced climber, the interviewee felt like her mistakes are being watched and silently judged. Still, she kept climbing and going to the same gym after all. Moreover, overcoming this unpleasant sensation and not quitting neither climbing nor this particular climbing gym, made her feel strong and resistant, not only physically but also emotionally.

4.1.5. 'Feeling of isolation'

Another factor seen as a potential limitation to climbing was referred to by one of the interviewees as 'the feeling of isolation' and meant lacking or not truly feeling part of a climbing community. The interviewees claimed that they found it rather hard to get into the community, once they were new at their respective climbing gyms.

During the first year that I was here I didn't feel that there was a community, but there was for sure. I was just not a part of it. And I felt that they all were so good and showing off in their inner, closed circle. They were not very open. And I had that feeling a lot, also when I studied in Germany I had that feeling that there is always a core of climbers and if you are new at the gym you are not part of it. And they are not super interested to make you a part of it.

(S.)

However, it resulted much easier and faster if they knew someone who was already a community member and introduced them to the rest. Otherwise, the 'newbies' felt rather left out and had the impression that it took them quite a long while to get accepted as one of the regulars.

I personally think it was hard to break into without knowing someone who is already inside, who introduced me to people and almost gave the permission.

(A.)

This feeling, shared by most of the women interviewed, manifested in various difficulties that they found to root in those community entry barriers. Some pointed out to lack of mentorship and guidance when it comes not only to the technical but also to the ethical aspects of the activity, especially when climbing outdoors. It also referred to the necessity of having all the gear and a car to be able to reach the climbing areas and therefore, in a way, being dependent on other people. This turned out to be even more specific when it comes to female climbers. 8 of the respondents mentioned that they would like to climb more with other women but they found it difficult due to either the fact that there were not many women at their climbing gyms or the fact that if there were any, they tended to be 'closed off in their little groups' and, as one of the interviewees notices, rather ignoring other women in the club. This seemed interesting, especially since there are numerous Facebook climbing groups for women only, where female

climbers support and cheer each other. When asked about this, some interviewees said that this seems to be a bit different in reality than online.

Despite women bonding on the Internet, I don't always feel a lot of comradery in person. Like when you're climbing outside, and you see another woman, you get quiet. I don't know why that is. I think typically male climbers will talk to the women more often than women will talk to anyone else.

(J.)

However, observations during both the bouldering competition and casual opening hours at the climbing gyms, showed that women were likely to support other women. Even though it seemed that it was, indeed, men who would rather initiate a conversation with a female climber, girls were likely to observe the performance of other girls and cheer them with a supportive 'come on!' or 'good job!'. Observing the nature of potential entry barriers for new climbers would, most likely, require more time.

This study identified some limitations faced by women who pursue rock climbing. Most of those limitations were rooting in interactions with other climbers and in one case also family of the respondent. Perceptions of those limitations varied, with one aspect remaining in common: interviewees who claimed to have their own group of friends to climb with were less likely to see themselves affected by the limitations, underlining that although annoying, they have no impact on their dedication to climbing. They tended to talk about strategies of reacting to such or means to avoid them. Climbing seemed to also be an important part of their plans for the future, with some just generally stating they would like to become 'better climbers' and others having very concrete goals. On the other hand, one respondent identified herself as not really dedicated despite climbing for two years already. Her plans did not include rock climbing. She also admitted having no stable companions to climb with. When talking about the limitations, she did admit some of them to be the cause of her withdrawal from certain aspects of climbing. A question may be raised if the boundaries identified could be treated as gender-specific. For the most part, it is likely that they are, especially when looking at risk taking being seen by women's families as potential threat to their female features.

4.2. How is the risk activity women engage in related to their self-work project?

Climbing to me represents what I'm willing to put forth and work on myself. It's my own practice on the wall, my own progression. Feeling the rock under me and trusting my body to get me up that mountain. It's a meditation of its own kind.

(V.)

V. underlines that to her risk activity means self-work. It is through climbing that she finds the ways to improve herself, see progress, trust her capabilities and her body. She also points out to the meditative aspect of the sport which makes her truly focus and stay in the moment. As the following sections will show, V.'s words sum up what most of the interviewees and Facebook group members said.

To encourage the respondents to talk about the relationship between risk activity and the self, they were asked to identify and talk about possible benefits that climbing brings to the other areas of their lives. The theme seemed to emerge also when they talked about their climbing communities as well as when they shared stories of how they started climbing. Self-work appears also in the content of Facebook group comments. Among the comments, most common word used is 'meditation', present in more than half of the comments. Also, some of the interviewees used the word when referring to the benefits of climbing. This hints to risk activity functioning as a space free from possible preoccupations coming from other areas of life. This section will attempt to grasp the relationship between risk activity and the self, using eight potential premises for identity construction as categories for various self and identity related themes.

4.2.1. Self-development

Self-development means a quest for continuous work that benefits the self in the light of the overall 'project of the self' (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). When talking about climbing, many underlined how in their perception, the sport has improved their quality of life. Some focused on how it helped them to develop better relationships with other people. Some emphasized that it just simply allowed them to relax and have fun. Some talked about developing certain skills that they would find to be helpful in their professional or private lives. Despite of what domain the development considered, climbing seemed to benefit its' practitioners, providing room for improvement that goes beyond the sport itself. S., at first says that it seems to her that there are not many benefits of climbing actually and that she does not think that climbing makes her better at anything. She sums up that 'it really just has to be about passion'. Yet, soon, when reflecting on another question, she adds:

Split second thinking is something that I have always struggled with. I am a terrible decision-maker and I think with climbing you have to make those split-second decisions, you just can't wait. You are at your limit and you don't want to fall so you need to decide what to do next and how to best overcome the situation. So yeah, climbing makes me a better decision maker.

(S.)

This shows that sometimes the self-development aspect may not be obvious at first glance. Also, that it tends not to be the purpose when undertaking the risk activity. With this in mind, it can be argued that self-development happens somewhat accidentally, as a kind of side-effect of risk activity. Still, all of the interviewees and comment authors identified some kind of development that climbing has provided them with.

4.2.2. Self-actualization

Progress is argued to be impossible without taking a certain degree of risks in everyday lives, for without it an individual would just ‘stay put’ (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002, p. 117). Progress is crucial for self-actualization, the need for one to fulfill their ambitions and explore their potential (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). The theme of fulfilling one’s talents and potentials emerged in both the interviews and comments, as climbers emphasized being able to do things that they did not realize they were capable of. Improvement in the sport, that is being able to climb routes of higher difficulty than before, seemed to be a source of great satisfaction, as the interviewees shared stories about climbs that they did and their latest climbing projects. They often mention how they were themselves surprised by their own progress sometimes. Keeping an eye on the progress seems to make them more aware of themselves, also in relation to others. As one of the interviewees talks about other climbers who in her view underestimated her potential, she sums the topic up with the following:

I become stronger than I think. So, I am definitely stronger than they think.

(R.)

This quest for improvement, realizing one’s potential and becoming capable of more with the time is something that climbers refer to a lot. It seems to get them to think about their capacities and ask themselves, how far can they go if they have already come this far. It points out to the sport offering the possibility of constant improvement, if they do decide to train and stay involved.

I enjoyed really the... you know, the time at the beginning when you are really bad and you think you have no muscles... And you don’t. And then it takes ages to progress but then you get to this moment when you can finally do things that you couldn’t do before. And things become easy and you are able to hold on to little holds and.... I enjoyed that really. I still do.

(R.)

This shows the importance of continuous progress in risk activity and the great satisfaction taken from the fact that one is capable of doing something they were not able to do before. The interviewee mentions that this notion of progressing is something she especially enjoyed when she was a beginner climber, when the progress is easily visible and happens rather fast. However, at the end she also admits that the opportunity for self-actualization is still something that makes her feel capable, despite having pursued climbing for many years now.

4.2.3. Self-authenticity

Climbing makes me feel connected.

(M.)

It is rather hard to grasp the notion of self-authenticity, as the term itself seems rather underdefined. Identified as a part of the emotion discourse in Lupton & Tulloch's study (2002), self-authenticity touches upon true experiences of being in the state of complete unison with the 'self', where no culture or social-bound limitations seem to matter. Participants of Lupton & Tulloch (2002) study associate self-authenticity with risk taking, for it is when they take risks to do what they truly want to that they feel one with their inner being. Data from this study also reveals certain notion of connectedness, focus and feeling in peace, which seem to hint toward inner integrity and therefore self-authenticity. R., when asked what it means to her to be a climber, talks about all the features that climbing requires, such as strength, balance, flexibility and endurance. Declaring herself proud to identify with such features and note them as her own new capabilities, she sums up:

I feel very whole. Which maybe nobody else understands but that's how I feel when I say I am a climber.

(R.)

Then she talks about a major medical issue she has suffered before she started climbing and which left her paralyzed and unable to perform basic daily routines. Fighting the results of the issue through climbing helped her not only to redevelop the bodily aspect of the self but also to establish a new meaning for herself. It seems important that the interviewee uses, without being previously suggested or encouraged to do so, the word 'identity' as she refers to her perception of herself before and after she started climbing. Such strong emphasis on recreating oneself through an activity hints towards strong awareness of the self. Authenticity seem to emerge

here in the shift from the feeling of being somewhat identity-less to this strong notion of rediscovering the self and giving it a new, authentic meaning, that to the interviewee was a result of long-lasting and consistent hard work and effort.

I almost had like an identity crisis after I got sick. Because before, you know, I had been this one way my whole life and really independent and all these things and then all of a sudden, I can't even walk to go to the bathroom. So that completely turned my life upside down. And I think of the first couple of years after that and it was like I had to almost relearn my entire body. Cause nothing was the same. (...) And I really think that climbing has helped me discover or rediscover this, I guess. Like, who I am, what my body is and how my body can function, what it's capable of. It made me feel really like I actually have an identity again, I think.

(R.)

Self-authenticity emerges here not only as a state of unison with the inner-self but also as an integrity and harmony between the self and the body together with its functions. The interviewee underlines the importance of both aspects: the mind and the body in recreating her identity through risk activity.

4.2.4. Self-control

Stepping out of one's comfort zone requires self-control that will often keep a person going instead of giving up. It is also self-control that, in case of risky activities, helps one to stay focused and therefore avoid actual danger. At the same time, it shall not be treated as a constraint, since it comes from the 'self' rather than being socially or culturally induced (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). Self-control emerges in both interviews and comments indeed not as restrictions on one's needs and wants, but rather as a way of limiting the impact of stressful or negative thoughts and experiences. The meditative aspect of climbing is emphasized. The interviewees mention that climbing allows them to free themselves from negative thoughts or events of the day.

Rock climbing is therapy for me. I cannot think of the stresses of my life as a wife, mother, friend, teacher, student, etc... Climbing forces me to focus on only one thing when I am climbing: climbing. It renews me.

(S.)

The amount of attention necessary in risk activities seems to occupy the space that would otherwise be consumed by thoughts related to stress accompanying different social roles that the climber attempts to fulfill on a daily basis.

I love the fact that it is not only physical exercise but somehow mental exercise as well, you know? It makes you forget everything. I also run a little bit, but when I run I have too much time to think. When hanging on the rope I just have no time to think about anything. Like, what's happening in my professional life, for example. It's like a complete wipe out in a way.

(Z.)

Z. points out to the self-control aspect of rock-climbing as something that provides her with an opportunity for calming down her thoughts. It seems that the amount of focus and control over the body and the situation when climbing leaves no space for other thoughts. This way, what she gets from the risk activity is not only strength and exercise, but also an opportunity to ease whatever unpleasant or worrying thoughts are occupying her mind while pursuing other activities which do not demand such high level of control.

Although it could be expected that self-control will tend to be associated with danger avoidance in risk situation, it turned out to be related rather to the control of movement and enjoying the focus that it requires. This hints towards a strongly positive aspect of self-control, described as the ability to focus entirely on the risk activity and the body.

4.2.5. Continuity

Continuity relates to one's will to engage in the continuing 'project of the self' (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002), with lasting and satisfying existence being the purpose (Breakwell, 2007). When reflecting on risk activities, one may think that they would tend to be accessible only or rather to younger people. However, data shows that not only climbing is a sport that people do practice in more advanced age, but that it can actually be passed on through generations. R., in her interview, talks about climbing as the family tradition.

I think the first time I climbed was when I was like 7. So, I come from a climbing family actually, my dad was a rock climber, even my grandparents were rock climbers.

(R.)

For her, from the start climbing was a way of bonding with her father. She mentions two brothers of hers that also climbed at the time. This continuity aspect of the sport being passed

on through generations creates potential for practitioner's identity. The connection of the person with the sport seems really strong, as it is associated with family bonds and may be given a meaning of a kind of heritage, something that has been passed on in the family and that shall be maintained and passed on further. It can be argued that the importance of the activity for a person increases, since it represents, in a way also family values. It becomes a lot more personal. It seems to be confirmed by the interviewee, when she talks about her parents' divorce and the fact that after that, climbing remained something that still connected her to her father and let them spend time together. In fact, she says that she still climbs with her father now, as she is 36 years old. Which brings us to another aspect of continuity in climbing. Father of the interviewee was a climber almost all of his life and is still climbing now, at the age of 74. This hints towards the activity being possible to pursue for people in more advanced age, despite of its reputation as potentially dangerous.

Moreover, most interviewees, when asked about how they see themselves in a 10-year perspective, still considered climbing being an important part of their lives as well. Z., who's husband is also a climber, recently got a baby. Her dream, as she said, would be that her daughter becomes a climber as well, so that they can share the passion in the family. A., who is soon to be married to a climber as well hopes to connect both her personal and professional life with rock climbing. She also mentions becoming a mother soon, especially that some friends at the climbing gym recently got children who are visiting the climbing gym with them. S. is hoping to 'have a climbing family or a climbing man at least'. R. hopes to become a climbing instructor and help other people to get initiated in the climbing culture. S. and S. both hope to be climbing as long as it is for them physically possible. R. says she cannot imagine her life without climbing anymore anyway. J., being 22, wishes to climb at least until she is 40 and see where that will take her. This shows that climbers do find continuity in the sport and are willing to maintain it and, in some cases, pass it on to their children.

I hope that it's something that stays forever. I don't want it to just fade away. There is people at the gym who climb in their late 70's, early 80's. And I think that's so cool. I really want to be one of them.

(A.)

Such will to pursue risk activity throughout one's whole life hints towards the activity being its important part. Therefore, it could be said that the risk activity does not provide threat of one's existence terminating through an accident or injury but a promise of a long-lasting life while

pursuing a sport of one's choice. It could be assumed that a drive for continuity and taking risks would stand in opposition since the first one aims at making one's life as long as possible, while the second would imply exposure to danger or even death. However, data shows that voluntary risk taking and continuity are harmoniously interrelated in case of female rock climbers.

4.2.6. Distinctiveness

I feel so good saying that I am a climber. I feel like as soon as you say it, no one can accuse you of not being adventurous, athletic and outdoors-y and a risk taker. So, being a runner doesn't necessarily mean you're doing something dangerous, like lots of people run. There are lots of different styles or like types of running situations. Some people jog, some people do triathlons but with rock climbing, especially outside, by necessity you have to be thought of as adventurous. Because it is so dangerous.

(J.)

Distinctiveness, identified as being an individual differing from others around (Breakwell, 2007), hints to the very core motive of voluntary risk taking – desire to be different (Lupton, 1999). In the interviews, climbers often talked about how when they tell friends or acquaintances outside of climbing world about their passion, those often are impressed. Although no interviewee expressed a direct need to be different, all recognize and seem to enjoy being regarded by non-climbing people as brave, outdoorsy and adventurous. They underlined feeling and being aware of being seen as people who do 'cool stuff'. This image of climbers together with climbing communities possibly considered as rather closed, presents an opportunity for practitioners to treat the risk activity as a source of their uniqueness, both in the eyes of others as well as themselves. One of the examples emerging from the interviews is when a climber talks about the way she started climbing. She talks about a group of climbers, going to the same school as she did at the time. A friend of hers knew someone from the group, so one day both the interviewee and her friend got invited for a climbing trip with that group. As she reflects on why she felt like she wanted to try climbing at all, she says:

I think I admired them, like they were cool and they could handle all the gear, they knew what they were doing and also that was, yeah, I don't know, it was something that could make me stronger... But also, I wanted to be a part of this, so that maybe I would get admired by other people, too.

(S.)

The quote points out to a certain hope for recognition, which could be interpreted as representing rather a need of increasing her self-esteem than that of distinctiveness. Although this interpretation also seems adequate, it seems important to note that it is not recognition from other climbers, but that of non-climbing people specifically that the interviewee was hoping to achieve. Therefore, it can be argued that it was a need of presenting herself as different in relation to them, as being able to do things that they don't do and belonging to a group they do not belong to. On the other hand, one of the interviewees also points out to the distinctions within the climbing world itself. She talks about different styles of clothing or behavior that make a certain 'kind' of a climber, like living out of a van or wearing a beanie when climbing indoors. Although she does not develop on what do these features mean and what kinds of climbers can she identify, she does point out to one important distinction that seems meaningful to her:

Climbing is supposed to be an adventure. But we're losing the adventure. We are growing up a new generation of really hard gym sport climbers. Like... people who are bred to compete in indoor competitions.

(S.)

The interviewee seems to make a clear distinction between herself and the people she talks about. The use of word 'bred', which is commonly used when referring to animals, hints towards the possibility that those people, despite being climbers as well, are not perceived as ones of her kind. Conversely, they are seen as somewhat inferior, not what a climber 'should be' in the interviewees opinion and therefore something she does not seem to want to be associated with.

People are afraid to fall on top rope in the gym sometimes. It seems like we are losing that kind of adventure and identity of what a climber was and should probably still be. And there is a side of me that is obsessed with it. It's like... you love it and you've been doing it for a few years... You have to be a bit sad that some people are using it for just scratching the surface of what climbing really is.

(S.)

This points out to adventure component being crucial for the activity. It may also suggest that some climbers are preoccupied with the sport losing its' adventurous image, therefore making

them lose it as well, in a way. Uniqueness of climbers being seen as the brave, adventurous and outdoorsy would be significantly weakened, if the sport would be mainly associated with the safe environment of indoor gyms and not at all with the thrill and risk of the great outdoors. Another interviewee mentions similar concerns, referring to the 'climbing culture' which risks being negatively affected by increasing popularity of the sport in its safer version.

Those that come from the gym and go outdoors...there is more of a consumer attitude to it. And that makes me a little bit sad. Maybe it isn't true, but I can see it, like, in the climbing culture. You know, for a long time it was a very niche sport and now it's becoming popular. And that's an awesome thing, there is no judgement in that, because nobody should exclude anyone from this. Because the other side is that before it was just guys who did it. But you know, on the other side it creates that...the danger is there, of the consumerist attitude to it. (...) Most of my friends who start climbing they really have no idea what climbing actually is. They have no idea, they have never been outside, never climbed outdoors.

(R.)

It is important to note that she does not suggest excluding newcomers from participating, as it points out to the fact that it is not an increasing number of climbers that seems to be the issue, but rather the quality of their involvement and the way they represent the sport and its' culture, with the attitude towards nature in particular.

This emerging distinction between the indoor and outdoor climbers seem to play a major role in the quest for distinctiveness within the climbing world, as outdoor climbers seem to be willing to preserve the image of the sport and therefore also themselves as emphasizing adventure and the nature aspect. They do not seem to agree to be associated with the new indoor-only tendency, which is overlooking both of those elements. The fact that both interviewees identify themselves as 'sad' because of this, hints towards very personal and touching nature of the concerns.

4.2.7. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is described as one's perception of themselves as capable and worthy. One with high self-esteem will be more likely to look at themselves and their actions in a less critical and more forgiving way than a person whose self-esteem tends to be low (Breakwell, 2007). Different themes, referring to climbers' self-esteem were identified. An important aspect seems to be increased confidence considering the body. All of the interviewees and most of the comment authors mention getting physically stronger as an outcome of climbing. One of the

interviewees mentioned being overweight before she started to practice the sport. Another, that she was too thin. In both cases, they perceived climbing as something that helped them to reach the body weight that they felt comfortable with. Another interviewee, although she did not mention having any weight issues in the past, said that she really likes the way her body looks when she climbs regularly. However, a significant transformation in the body and consequently also self-perception of the climber strongly shows in one of the comments, as the author reveals how the risk activity changed her attitude towards her own body from rejection to acceptance and recognition.

As a woman, climbing has changed me in so many ways. I never thought of my body as powerful or even as a part of me until I really got into climbing. I never felt like my body was capable of much and almost saw it as a burden; another way to be judged or objectified. Then I started climbing and realized all of the amazing things I can do with my body and started to see the line between myself and my body fade. I've been climbing for three years now and have grown to love and appreciate all of myself, body included.

(C.)

I lost 40 lbs climbing. I'd like to think it saved my life. I could never keep up with other method of exercise like running. I hate running. But I never hesitate to wake up to climb!

(L.)

The theme of self-esteem also resonates in other forms of transformations that seem to happen through risk activity. One of the interviewees, after getting through an end of a love relationship with a climber, realized that the sport, although until that day associated with her former partner, became an activity that she decided on calling 'her thing'. She claimed this to be a moment of self-discovery, as she begins to see herself as strong and capable, something she did not thought of herself before. Moreover, she became aware of the fact that her strength and potential does not depend on whether the partner is present or not but is a power of her own.

Since we broke up, it's been a really important discovery to have this thoughts like: No. This is my thing. It doesn't have anything to do with him and I am strong and capable of all these things without him in my life. This has definitely been a self-discovery journey for me.

(R.)

Another interviewee points out that climbing taught her to be more daring in her personal and professional life as well. She talks about how during hard climbs, she often felt like her foot was going to slip or that she was going to somehow miss the hold. Yet, she realizes that there were very few situations that this has actually happened. In other words, she recalls the times during the activity when she decided to take risk, despite being afraid of failure that comes with potential consequences, such as pain or fear when falling. Being conscious that only few out of those times she did fall and, moreover, no real pain was involved, she can translate those experiences to other areas of her life, making her aware of the power she has and that this power should not be overlooked.

I get to know myself better each time I climb. Even if I don't know if I can make the move I'm still gonna try. And I like it. It shows me that I am capable of things that are on the line of my skillset. So, I don't hesitate to try things that seem to be almost out of my reach. I think that's really something I have learned through climbing. To not underestimate my power.

(S.)

Women also find the achievements and challenges of the risk activity as benefiting their self-esteem, not only through their own perception of those successes but also through feedback given by others. It is common in rock climbing to cheer someone who is climbing a route at the moment with short encouragements such as 'come on!' 'good' and similar. This was confirmed during observations, in and outdoors as well as during the climbing competition. Such short messages of support tended to be shouted by both friends and strangers to the person climbing. This form of encouragement and support seemed to always be taken positively, which also echoes in the interviews. Interviewees found such comments encouraging and motivating, but also, they seemed to make them feel good about not only the performance but about themselves in general as well. Some climbers commented that sometimes they got such short positive feedback on the climbs that did not go as well as planned. Still, despite being conscious that the performance wasn't all that much of a 'good job' itself, they appreciated the nice words and mentioned that they made them feel good.

Climbing itself is really benefiting to your self-consciousness, self-worth... And for that you need to climb with people who will give you feedback. And yeah, that's good for the ego. And I feel that's easier in rope climbing, because there someone really looks at you all the time. And maybe motivates you and tells you 'that was so nice! Good, how did you do it?'. I have a close

friend and he is super good at bouldering but really hesitating on the rope so when he leads he doesn't dare so much and then he sometimes tells me 'Oh, you have what I don't have: the balls!'. And that's good to hear.

(S.)

It could be said that pursuing a risk activity makes women feel more recognized and appreciated, as they receive positive feedback from both men and other women. Receiving such response in the context of taking risk seems to enhance interviewees self-esteem making them feel strong and capable as climbers and as women.

4.2.8. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy stands for one being confident that the responsibility or task that they have been assigned or they themselves decided to accomplish will be fulfilled successfully (Breakwell, 2007). Climbers, when talking about the future and their potential perspectives, maintained positive attitude. An important aspect of self-efficacy emerges when the interviewees and comment authors touch upon the topic of establishing and pursuing goals. Except for one, interviewees' plans for the long-term future included climbing. Some mentioned generally that they would like to 'become better climbers' or become better at one particular aspect of rock climbing. One decided she would like to 'keep going and see how far she can make it'. Some had more concrete goals, like climbing a route with a certain difficulty level or visit a particular climbing destination. Interestingly, some claimed that it was climbing itself that motivated them to push themselves harder in general, establish goals and work to accomplish them.

I didn't have any real goals or purpose until I began climbing. I stopped being depressed and started working to get stronger and my goal is now to climb El Capitan in Yosemite by the time I'm 25.

(D.)

Two of the interviewees were aiming at introducing other people to climbing by becoming or still working as a climbing instructor. One, as she studied to become a primary school teacher, planned on helping the children to pursue their passion for activities of any kind, based on her own experiences with climbing. Another, teaching at the university, aims at inspiring students to find a passion that will help them get some distance and fresh perspectives on challenges and difficulties encountered in the school environment. This openness to undertake a mentor role for others, hinted towards an awareness of oneself as self-efficient and capable of taking responsibility for new practitioners.

I feel like climbing is my outlet and my advice to new grad students, now that I am a mentor as well, is to find something outside of school that allows you to just be yourself and escape, almost. I feel like having that break is almost like having mindfulness. Climbing each week allows me to come back to school more refreshed and not so stressed and I can approach things differently.

(A.)

Self-efficacy emerges also in commonly emerging theme of trust. The interviewee talks about the ability to believe, that whatever stands in one's way, it can be overcome when looked at from a different perspective. What it takes is 'just one step', just taking action, trusting that it will go well.

I think climbing or some parts of climbing can be a good metaphor for other things in life. Like, you know, like this thing of knowing that you can change, you can trust. You can trust little things, you can understand that sometimes the situation in climbing looks completely impossible but then you know you step up just one step and then the situation changes completely.

(R.)

It could be concluded that through risk activity, women learn to trust that if they continue with the task instead of giving up when facing difficulties, the chances of them succeeding are high. The quote above points out to the need of self-efficacy in climbing, as to accomplish a difficult climb one must believe that they can do it. That being potentially transferrable to other aspects of women's lives shows the potential for increasing one's self-efficacy that lies in risk activities such as rock climbing.

4.3. Additional themes

This section will attempt to compliment the content of previous two sections with two additional themes that emerged in the data, with the aim of unfolding the construction of female risk taker identity. The themes that will be introduced are: the relationship with nature and that with the community. Section 4.1 already hinted towards the community aspect of risk activity, as some of the boundaries were strongly dependent on the attitude and openness of climbing community that the interviewee was or was not part of. Also, the benefits of climbing mentioned by interviewees strongly emphasized the people aspect, as they talk about their social network, sometimes including boyfriends or husbands, being to a large extent composed of other climbers. It does also resonate in most of the Facebook comments. At the same time, the

relationship with nature turned out to be a value shared by all the interviewees, for whom the possibility of being outdoors and pursuing their passion seemed to be given a meaning of its' own kind, one that differs significantly from that attached to climbing indoors.

4.3.1. The nature aspect

Most of the climbers interviewed claim that what they truly enjoy is climbing outdoors. Indoor climbing is treated more as a training or a form of after-work relaxation. S. admits that she only climbs indoors to get stronger and better and therefore be able to climb harder routes outdoors. O. talks about the meditative aspect of the outdoors, which provides an opportunity for relaxation deeper than the indoors ever would. Z. also claims that it is being outside, whether its climbing, camping or hiking that makes her happy. She talks about a long-term travel she has done with her husband around Europe, where outdoor climbing was the purpose. All those stories reflect a great connection of the women with environment and the great importance of being outdoors and 'feeling the fresh air'. Yet, two of the interviewees go deeper into the subject, emphasizing not only the benefits for the climber but also their impact on the nature. A. points out that climbers should act like protectors of the environment, especially in the climbing areas. She takes the mentoring role, attempting to encourage new climbers to be conscious about their environmental impact from the start as well as to raise that consciousness in others at the crag.

One of the things I try to do at the gym is that when the people come, I know that they are interested in the outdoors too, I'm trying to tell them that they are not only just there to climb rocks but they are like environmental stewards, too. And it's their responsibility to protect the areas that we are using.

(A.)

R. shares those values, however, she takes the meaning of the nature and climbers' impact even further. To her, the very fact of changing the rock by inserting metal rings for protection and pronouncing it a place to climb is stepping, in a way, against nature and destroying it. The interviewee talks about how, despite being a dedicated climber herself, she struggles with the fact that the sport involves some interference into nature and the rock. She expresses particular worry about what she refers to as 'new generation' of rock climbers, who's experience is mostly indoors. She seems to fear that they will not be able to protect the environment. Conversely, they would be more likely to be the ones to adopt a 'colonial' and 'consumerist' attitude towards the rock, somehow depriving it of its natural and environmental aspect. The use of the

mentioned words together with the word ‘conquer’ in relation to climbing itself suggest a kind of opposition between people and nature, as the first seem to invade the latter. She says:

We are nature. We should take care of it in the best way we know. We have to live in some sort of synchrony. Become friends. I'm not conquering the rock. I have to understand it and read it and then, I can climb it. But there is a lot of conquest involved in it. I think especially in the climbing gym culture, generally. And the whole drilling holes in the rock, you know, of course we also destroy nature, doing that. Or, appropriating it. We had an argument about this with a friend, when I said that in climbing, the attitude is really colonial. Climbers take space and rock and say ‘this is now a climbing spot!’. And they start coming and you know, everybody goes there.

(R.)

This hints towards a crucial importance that the nature aspect has for the climber as she is talking about it in a rather emotional way. At the same time, it seems that she finds herself in a difficult position, somewhat between climbers and the nature. This may hint towards a certain conflict between on one side identifying herself as a climber but on the other remaining critical about climbers’ impact on the rocks. One can consider care for the nature as an important part of climbers’ identity. A part that makes them not only see the negative impact of others but also be self-conscious in this aspect.

4.3.2. Community

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, other people play a big role in one’s immersion to climbing, as they usually introduce them to the sport and sometimes also to the network of other local climbers. Thanks to this introduction, the entry barriers seem easier to overcome and new members are welcome to the community, which provides mentoring, partnership and support. Data shows that these are important for one’s full engagement in the activity. Among 9 climbers interviewed, 8, who felt that they are a part of a climbing community or have friends to regularly climb with, included the activity in their plans for the future. It also seemed that it has an important role in their day-to-day. On the other hand, one interviewee who claimed not to have any stable social relationships within the climbing world at the moment, also admitted being less engaged with the sport that she was when such relationships were present in the past. Moreover, when asked about the future plans, she mentioned doing other sports, as well as some private and professional goals. She said that she will ‘maybe climb’, but that she is not sure. First, the sample in this study is too small to draw clear conclusions when it comes to

relationship between the community and engagement in risk activity. Second, there may be other factors influencing such a difference between this one interviewee and the others, that the interview did not identify. Third, it may also be that it was the lower engagement that made it hard to get involved with a community in the first place and not the other way around. Still, it can be argued that this points out to a great importance that the social aspect has in climbing, despite of it being, especially in the case of bouldering, rather an individual sport. In the comments, most women write that among other things, what climbing means to them is ‘the people’ or ‘great people’. This resonates also in the interviews. A. met her fiancé through climbing and they are now working at the same climbing gym together. When she talks about her first steps into the climbing community at that gym, she sums up:

I became close with a number of people and now they would be...like one fourth of the guests at our wedding are the people from the gym.

(A.)

Also Z. met her husband through climbing. They took a gap year together to travel around Europe in their van and climb whenever possible. She points out to the partnership aspect in climbing, which brings another dimension to their marriage, as they share an activity they both identify themselves with as individuals.

It's the additional value, that we have a hobby in common and that really, you know, makes us not only husband and wife but also partners in something we both enjoy.

(Z.)

S. and her current boyfriend, although met at a friend's birthday party, found that they have been members of the same climbing gym and ended up training together. R. started climbing because of a man that she dated at the time. But establishing romantic relationship within climbing, although happens often, is not a rule. Both R. and S. admit that although they have tried to convince their boyfriends to start climbing, both men consequently avoid the sport.

I tried to get my boyfriend into climbing and he hates it. Sadly. I met him in Manchester, where I was climbing like 4 times a week. So, the only way he could ever spend any time with me was to go to the climbing gym as well. And he hated it and still hates it now.

(S.)

Although both interviewees would like to share passion for climbing with their partners, they seem to accept the fact that those are not much into the sport. However, the quote above shows that in such case, the non-climbing partner needs to also, in a way, prepare to compromise on the time together as it may often have to be shared with the sport. Still, the women whose partner is not climbing with them, say that they have stable group of friends, both male and female, that they regularly climb with. It can therefore be said that the partnership is still needed and that need is still fulfilled within the climbing community. A theme that also emerged when talking about the risk activity and romantic relationships, is that some of the interviewees noticed, that it is usually a man who introduces a woman to climbing, for example by bringing her to the climbing gym as a date. They point out that it is unlikely for a girl to bring her non-climbing boyfriend. Such point of view is interesting, since data shows that only one of the interviewees really started climbing because of a man she had such a relationship with and that it was in most cases a female friend inviting the interviewees to climb for the first time.

And a lot of times I just feel like girls that show up to the gym, often come with a boyfriend or a guy brings them. So, they don't really stick with it or like go anywhere with it. It's more like the boyfriend's sport or like the guy who brought the girl's sport. And there is a few of us who are there just because we are there, and we didn't come because of a guy or anything like that.
(R.)

Being also another example of distinctiveness within the climbing community, this quote hints towards a possibility that the girls who climb because of a man, do not truly identify themselves with the sport and therefore do not stay involved with it. Still, the data shows otherwise, as R., despite ending the relationship with the mentioned man, continues to climb and strongly bounds her future with climbing.

Most climbers underline that the social aspect of climbing is what makes their training days more enjoyable. Also, some admit that on a day with low motivation to go climbing, it is the perspective of meeting people at the gym that makes them go there anyway. Data shows, that it is important for the interviewees to feel that they are a part of a group. R. talks about the friendships she had made at the gym. She points out that in case she is absent for a longer time than usual, other climbers at the gym she goes to notice that and ask about the reason. This notion of being noticed, makes her feel important and included. She says:

I feel like everybody at the gym is my friend for the most part. Someone I can climb with and connect with. And that definitely makes me wanna go back, because when I show up and I haven't been there for a while, people will notice. They are like: 'oh, where have you been? I haven't seen you'. So, I feel...I feel an important part of the community.

(R.)

It seems that the construction of female risk taker activity is composed of a set of boundaries that are being successfully overcome, as well as the potential for self-work, provided by the sport. Both crucial for the self. At the same time, the community aspect and relationship with nature compliment this construction by providing the feeling of togetherness and unity with other people as well as enjoyment of the outside world and environment.

This chapter has provided a data analysis with the aim of answering the research questions. Findings that emerged from interviews, Facebook comments and ethnography enabled identifying various themes of the self and self-awareness as well as of the self in relation to others and the world. The next chapter will provide a concluding section and a discussion on the possible meaning of those findings.

5. Conclusions and discussion

5.1. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to unfold the complex construction process of a female risk-taker identity, through discovering gender-related social boundaries and meanings surrounding the themes of self-work and Identity Process Theory. The paper aimed at deepening the knowledge within risk, tourism and gender by focusing on female experiences regarding their pursuit of a risk activity. With rock climbing as example, data was gathered and analyzed with the purpose of answering the research questions and therefore providing new knowledge that deepens the understanding of how voluntarily taking risks in the leisure setting is beneficial for women's self-work and construction of themselves as strong and capable.

The findings lead to several main conclusions. First, skills and attitudes learned through pursuing a risk activity seem transferable to other aspects of women's lives. They recall situations faced when climbing in the context of personal or professional challenges, which makes them approach those challenges with greater confidence and sense of capability. Moreover, seeing progress in climbing and themselves getting physically stronger, makes women also feel stronger emotionally, as they gain more self-esteem and become more aware and proud of their bodies.

Second, pursuit of risk activity is for women a fruitful opportunity for self-work and identity construction, as all the eight premises were successfully identified in the findings. This hints towards the need of increased awareness on risk taking being ‘a good thing’ for women and young girls. Something that is not aiming at ruining their feminine features but rather offering an opportunity for growth.

Third, there are boundaries of social nature, some gender-related, that stand in the way of free pursuit of risk activity for women. Although most find ways of negotiating those boundaries, often through finding an optimistic explanation or avoidance, some do get discouraged enough to disengage from more risky aspects of the activity, which seems to make them lose certain passion and involvement, compared to those who decided to take the risks despite social reactions. Due to the case of disengaging women being only one in this study, this aspect should be given more attention and could potentially be developed in further research.

Fourth, the nature aspect is an important part of female adventurer’s identity. Impact on the environment remains among the main concerns of outdoor female climbers, motivating them to embrace the mentoring role with the aim of teaching new climbers how to intrude the natural environment the least possible.

Fifth, other people are crucial for satisfactory pursuit of risk activity and therefore full embracement of the related identity. A community of climbers, a group of climbing friends or a climbing partner were necessary for free pursuit of the activity. They seemed to make women feel supported and an important part of a like-minded group. It could be said that even if social reactions from the non-climbing world would discourage women from pursuing the activity, the support and partnership they could rely on within the climbing world would outweigh that negative message. However, this was not explicitly investigated in this study and could have potential for future research.

This section has summed up the findings in relation to thesis aim and research question. Five main conclusions were drawn, based on the empirical data presented in chapter 4. The following section will provide a discussion of the findings, with a focus on the female risk taker identity construction in relation to the individual-collective continuum.

5.2. Discussion

At the beginning of this thesis, a shift from collective to individual focus was presented. Such change was supposed to help the individual to put their own needs first while identifying with the ‘self’ more than with the group. The popularity of various services and initiatives promoting self-work, finding oneself and similar increased, leaving an impression that it is the ‘I’ and not

the 'us' that matters these days. Some reflections were raised in the former chapters of this thesis, for instance considering the way interactions of individual with the group affect individual's perceptions of themselves, as well as whether gains risk taking brings tend to benefit the individual, the collective or both. Previous chapter has addressed those issues, focusing mainly on the research question and the aim of the paper. It has already been pointed out by Lupton (2013) that there certainly and always is a link between risk and contact with other people. However, one cannot miss the fact that the findings of this study hint towards this link being larger than expected. Therefore, in this section, the role of risk taking in women's self-work and identity construction will be discussed developing on the perspective of it's relationship to the people aspect and in relation to previous research.

According to Mary Douglas, risk perceptions are more of collective reactions than an individual response (Douglas, 1990). Indeed, an expected result for this study was to find that it is the culture and background that shapes one's risk perceptions. However, while it could be argued that culture played the role in shaping risk perceptions of, for instance, the families of rock climbing women, it did not seem to apply to the women themselves. The results of this study seem to point out to perception of risk as such being largely individual. Rock climbing women seemed to rely on their own assessment of whether the sport was dangerous to them or not. What seemed to be shaped by the collective was the decision to engage or disengage, when the voices of family or other climbers were considered. With perception being individual and response influenced by the collective, it could be argued that the collective is limiting the individual in their free choices to take risks. Still, as this study shows in line with Fendt & Wilson's (2012) research on surfers, it is up to the individual whether they will adapt to the collective and withdraw from the activity or find the ways to overcome the boundaries and follow their own judgements and preferences. Fendt & Wilson's study (2012) also shows that travelling with like-minded surfers helped them overcome social barriers at the place of destination. This echoes strongly in the findings of this study. Even when talking about various elements of self-work, women refer to others, particularly climbing friends and other members the climbing community, as sources of support and motivation. Also, observations show that support of others is desirable when pursuing risk activity, both in and outdoors. Time spend climbing seems as important as taking breaks together to talk, have a meal or watch others climb. This seems of importance for service management overall, especially when thinking about spaces designed for sports and leisure, such as for instance the climbing halls themselves. Recognizing the social needs of customers could be considered crucial for understanding how such a space can be created in the most efficient way to provide the customers, especially female

ones in the case of this study, with a safe environment to exercise their self-work projects. At the same time, when thinking about the case of climbing gyms, it could be said that the importance of the community for individual climbers is an important hint for managing such facilities. Organization of events or gatherings within the facility could, potentially, help strengthening the community as well as integrate the newcomers and therefore make such gym a service space where customers can fulfill their very personal needs.

Other people were claimed important from the very first stages of an adventure with risk sports, from bringing someone to the sport area, introducing them to a local group of practitioners. Then, if a newcomer was to truly engage in the sport, they started to deepen those bounds or broaden the network to finally establish a group they felt a part of. This notion of 'being a part of something' or 'being something' like being a climber, appears a lot in the interview data, pointing out to the crucial importance for an individual to identify with a concept that other like-minded ones identify themselves with as well. It could be said that even in the times of emphasized individuality, the individuality seeks a like-minded collective and its' approval. A question that arises there is, can we really talk about a shift from collective to individual, if such a strong necessity for identification with a group is still present? It seems like it is rather the very concept of 'collective' and not its importance for the individual that has shifted. One used to be a part of an institution, largely overlooking their personal preferences in this regard (Beck, 1992). Nowadays, what seems to be happening is that we are a part of institutions, groups or communities that are more of a subject to our own choice. Distinctiveness seems to manifest not that much in the 'I' being different than 'them', as seems to be suggested by Beck (1992) but more in 'us', meaning my collective, differing than 'them' and their collective. As this study shows, climbers mostly underline distinctions not between single climbers but between certain groups of climbers and tendencies supported by those groups within the climbing world as well as between climbers and non-climbers. This offers certain potential for understanding how new trends can be introduced within risk sports, emphasizing the characteristics and values of a smaller group within a group of practitioners, which could be a valuable information for brand managers.

Moreover, it seems that before individual was there for the benefit of the collective, fulfilling certain tasks that would help the machine run smoothly. Now, it is the collective which benefits the individual, for it allows them to create an image of themselves, that they find most desirable. By choosing what they are part of, they choose what they want to represent, what values they identify with and largely, what they wish to come across as – in this case: adventurous, daring, outdoorsy. Women in this study seemed proud to characterize themselves

as such, unlike in Elsrud's (2001) study, where the author notices that women tend to use irony when describing themselves in such way. It could be said that the reason for this lies in the community support as well as the fact that some non-climbing friends of female climbers find what they do rather impressive and therefore the adventurous image gets validated as positive.

One can identify with things to find what they are, which also allows to determine what they are not. As this study concerns leisure setting, it can be said that individual seeks the collective even in their free time. With the shift to individual focus, shouldn't it be, that when left with time and choice, we embark on our individuality to the fullest, instead of making efforts to be a part of something? With this question in mind, one could conclude that the individuality happens through the collective. In other words, an individual and their identity is constructed through identification with a community, its values and lifestyle. As stated in previous research on identity, there can be more than one (Bond & Falk, 2013). This study confirms this, as the women interviewed identified themselves also as mothers, wives, students or professionals. This would mean, that an individual is largely a mixture of different collectives of their choice, combined in different proportions. The study shows how some respondents have attempted to make rock climbing rather dominating, connecting the sport to their professional careers and romantic relationships. This points out to the potential lying in risk sports, for one to find the 'something' that they want to be and the values and lifestyle that they wish to develop themselves according to. However, to be able to embrace such opportunity for growth and fulfillment, one needs to be guaranteed access to the sport and the group.

It could be said that despite directly benefitting the individual, pursuing a risk sport largely benefits the collective as well. Women claimed climbing to help them building and maintaining relationships with people, a skill that was used within as well as outside of the climbing world. Increased confidence about one's body, strength and capability combined with transferability of skills learned through climbing could lead to a conclusion that one who recognizes themselves capable on the climbing wall will later recognize themselves capable in, for instance, leadership context. A study by Elsrud (2001) supports this finding, as it points out to adventurers admitting that they find the skills learned while taking risks as helpful in other areas of their lives. One could think of the potential of this finding for service management, as allowing women to freely practice risk activities of their choice could result in them becoming more daring and confident leaders. Following this thought, it could be that thanks to risk sports the number of female leaders and managers could potentially increase. However, a relationship between risk taking and increased leadership skills was not explicitly studied for this thesis and could be a potential for further research within service management.

Strong potential for self-work and identity construction in risk sports, if recognized could benefit individuals as well as communities. Moreover, it could be of use for tourism management, as new spaces encouraging risk activities could be created and emphasized. However, it should be guaranteed that the access to such opportunity is available to people of any gender. A need of constructing one's identity through risk taking should not be overlooked, and no one shall be categorized as not capable or strong enough based on gender-related impressions. As long as such categorization takes place, it will be not only the individual but also the collective that would lose a great opportunity for growth.

This thesis has attempted to identify the ways that female adventurer identity is constructed. It has taken the example of rock climbing, with a goal of looking upon social boundaries involved, as well as whether and how pursuit of risk sports contributes to one's self-work project. Further research could potentially address the issue of accessibility and social barriers for risk sports related to other factors such as race or social status. Moreover, some issues raised in the thesis could be given more attention, for instance the relationship between community support and engagement in risk sport as well as between engaging in risk activities and potentially increased leadership skills. Also, the consequences that giving up on the sport because of social discouragement or lack of inclusion in the community would have for one's self-work could be worth investigating, with the aim of determining the dangers of exercising social pressure on female risk-takers.

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Appendix 1. The interview guide

4. Where are you from?
5. What were your favorite games as a child?
6. What do you remember the most about your childhood?

7. Current life situation – study, work, children etc?
8. How long has she been climbing?
9. What do you do to relax?
10. What motivated you to start rock climbing?
11. What benefits rock climbing provides for you?
12. What is important for you when climbing/what do you try to achieve?
13. Has anyone inspired you to climb? Who was this?
14. Challenges related to being a female climber?
15. How do you deal with the challenges?
16. What were the the reactions from your family/friends/coworkers when you started climbing?
17. How are those reactions now?
18. What kind of reactions do you get from other climbers?
19. Male/Female? Is there difference?
20. What is your perception of other female climbers?
21. How about male climbers? Do you see any differences?
22. Do you travel to climb? Is climbing the main purpose of such travel? What else do you do? Who do you travel with?
23. How do you ‘fit’ climbing into your life?
24. What do you enjoy the most about rock climbing?
25. What does rock climbing mean to you?
26. Does rock climbing impact any other parts of your life/day? Which ones and in which way?
27. How often do you climb?
28. Who do you usually climb with?
29. How do you feel as a member of this group?
30. What do you guys do together apart from climbing?
31. How often do you climb together?
32. Can you tell me a story related to climbing that you remember best?
33. Why did you choose this one?
34. What is your plan for the future?
35. Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What are you doing? How do you see your daily routine by that time?
36. Any additional thoughts/words?

37. Are there any questions you would like me to develop further?

Appendix 2. The Facebook post

Hello ladies!

My name is Karolina, I am from Poland and studying at Lund University in Sweden. I have been climbing for two years and now I have also decided to write my master's thesis on the topic of meanings of rock climbing for women. I thought of asking a question here, to reach as many female climbers as possible. The question is:

What does rock climbing mean to you?

If you would like to contribute to the thesis, please share your thoughts in the comment.

Answers will be kept anonymous, only an initial of your first name will be used to quote the comment. No other posts/comments/contents of the page will be used. Only those published as a comment to this post.

I hope this is allowed. If not please let me know. Thank you all in advance for your time and answers. I'm really curious to hear your thoughts!