PEAKS AND VALLEYS
The Gendered Emotional Culture of Edgework

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In this article, the author examines the gendered emotional culture of high-risk takers. Drawing on five and one-half years of ethnographic fieldwork with a volunteer search and rescue group, the author details the intense emotions rescuers experienced before, during, and after the most dangerous and upsetting rescues. Lyng's concept of "edgework" (voluntary risk taking) is used to analyze how male and female rescuers experienced, understood, and acted on their feelings. The data reveal several gendered patterns that characterized this emotional culture. The article concludes with a discussion of gender, edgework, and emotional culture, focusing on the theoretical implications of their confluence.

> There ain't nothin' glamorous about taking somebody's human remains, stuffing 'em in a black bag, hauling 'em up a hill, and throwing 'em in the back of the sheriff's van. There is *nothin'* glamorous about that. And when I'm in those types of situations, there's a space I have to go to in my head. And it's real no-nonsense; it's time to say, "Let's get the job done."
>
> *Jim, 20-year member of Peak Volunteer Search and Rescue*

Action in emergency situations calls for rational thinking in the face of potentially overwhelming emotions. This article is about how male and female members of "Peak," a volunteer search and rescue group, "managed" their emotions (Hochschild 1983) before, during, and after their most dangerous, stressful, or gruesome rescues. At times their emotions and corresponding management techniques were consistent with broader gender stereotypes; at other times they were not. In this article, I explore these similarities and differences, showing how rescuers negotiated the (sometimes) conflicting demands of both gender and emotion norms in high-risk crisis situations. I also reveal how these negotiated courses of action resulted in power differences between the women and men in Peak.

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Any social group may construct its own norms and vocabularies to express and reinforce beliefs about particular emotions. The group's members then interact with each other and their environment based, in part, on their shared emotional belief system. Gordon (1989, 115) termed this phenomenon an "emotional culture," defining it as "the patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward emotions." As such, emotional cultures include beliefs about what emotions will result from particular situations as well as how such emotions should be interpreted, acted on, and expressed. These beliefs, by definition, vary from one emotional culture to the next.

Yet, beliefs and rules about emotions are not always consistent within one emotional culture. In their historical analysis of shifting love and anger norms in twentieth-century women's magazines, Cancian and Gordon (1988) showed how the messages being sent to women helped to define the acceptable dimensions of their emotions throughout different historical periods. Their analysis also revealed, however, that these messages were occasionally contradictory, especially during times of social and political change.

Scholars have examined various elements of emotional culture in physically and emotionally demanding situations: overcoming fear on adventure ropes courses (Holyfield 1997; Holyfield and Fine 1997), interpreting emotions during white-water rafting (Holyfield 1999), dealing with death in medical settings (Smith and Kleinman 1989), surviving rape (Konradi 1999), counseling rape victims (Jones 1997), and handling frantic callers to emergency hotline phone numbers (Jones 1997; Whalen and Zimmerman 1998). Although some of this work has empirically focused on crises in which gender plays a significant role (e.g., the rape victims in Konradi's and Jones's studies), gender has not been made a central feature of these analyses. Since it is well established that women are stereotyped as being less rational (and therefore more "emotional") than men (see Hochschild 1983; Kanter 1977; Pierce 1995), Peak's rescues provide an interesting setting in which to examine these dynamics.

Other research has illuminated the role of gender in high-risk activity by focusing on workers such as emergency medical technicians (Metz 1981) and police officers (Martin 1980), as well as on thrill seekers such as skydivers (Lyng 1990). Still other work has demonstrated that men perceive risk differently than women (Fothergill 1996; Harrell 1986) and engage in risky, thrill-seeking activities at higher rates than women (Harrell 1986; Lyng 1990; Metz 1981). Yet, this work has not systematically analyzed the role of emotions for men and women during high-risk activity.

Lyng (1990) has noted that men tend to take more physical risk than women and that they are more likely to engage in "edgework" (a term he borrows from Hunter S. Thompson [1971]). Lyng details how risk takers, such as skydivers and firefighters, negotiate the boundary, or "edge," between safety and danger, defining "the archetypical edgework experience [as] one in which the individual's failure to meet the challenge at hand will result in death or, at the very least, debilitating

injury" (1990, 857). He further contends that the edgework concept encapsulates a wider array of activities in which individuals also need to negotiate the edge or boundary line between two physical or mental states: "life versus death, consciousness versus unconsciousness, sanity versus insanity, an ordered sense of self and environment versus a disordered self and environment" (1990, 857). Thus, although the quintessential edgework experience is life threatening, the concept also has a broader application that extends beyond pure physical danger.

Edgework gives individuals a feeling of control over their lives and environment while they push themselves to their physical and mental limits. At a psychological level, surviving the edge leads them to experience intense highs. It is this sensory experience on the edge that compels edgeworkers to pursue it repeatedly, each time pushing their physical and mental limits further to control the seemingly uncontrollable (Lyng 1990; see also Palmer 1983). Although it appears that emotions play an important role in edgeworkers' motivations to continue pursuing such high-risk activity, little consideration has been given to what seems to be the prominent emotional culture of edgework.

In this article, I examine the gendered emotional culture of edgeworkers. Through their search and rescue activity in the mountains of the western United States, the members of Peak Volunteer Search and Rescue experienced many physically and emotionally threatening situations, such as searching for missing skiers in avalanche-prone terrain and extracting mutilated bodies from planes that crashed in the wilderness. These extreme conditions—the most crucial life-and-death circumstances—called for members to engage in edgework. They had to be able to complete their task under intense stress, and members who could remain in control during risky situations—those whose edge was farther out—were more often sent on challenging rescues because they were considered better suited to handle them. Although it was important for them to have the skills to accomplish the mission, it was more important that they were able to regulate the intense feelings that arose from such dangerous or gruesome tasks; uncontrolled feelings rendered them useless.

In the next section, I describe the members of Peak and the methods I used in gathering data. I then outline the stages of urgent rescues, tracing members' specific feelings and the corresponding management techniques they employed before, during, and after the rescues. The data reveal two gendered ways rescuers prepared for, engaged in, and reflected on edgework. I conclude by discussing gender, emotion management, and edgework, and the emotional culture created by their confluence.

SETTING AND METHOD

These data are drawn from a five-and-one-half-year ethnographic study of Peak, a volunteer search and rescue group in a Rocky Mountain resort town. Peak County consisted of 1,700 square miles, 1,300 of which were undeveloped national forest or wilderness area lands. Local residents and tourists alike used this "backcountry"

land year-round for various recreational purposes such as hiking, camping, rock climbing, white-water rafting/kayaking, snowmobiling, and backcountry skiing. Occasionally, recreational enthusiasts became lost or injured in these vehicle-inaccessible regions. Because the county sheriff's deputies did not have the skills or resources to venture into these remote areas, the sheriff commissioned Peak, a volunteer group of local citizens, to act as the public safety agent in the backcountry. Since these emergencies could happen at any time of the day or night, members were given pagers so that they could be notified immediately when they were needed and respond if they were available. Frequently, this meant getting out of bed in the middle of the night to search for an overdue snowshoer or rescue an injured camper.

Peak's members had to have many specialized rescue skills to reach and help victims who were incapacitated doing a wide variety of recreational activities. For example, some members were adept at riding snowmobiles and were frequently sent to search for lost snowmobilers or backcountry skiers. Others possessed extensive white-water skills, and as such, their expertise was used for rafting or kayaking accidents. Many members, however, had only basic skill levels in several areas, for example, operating the rope and pulley systems used to maneuver victims and rescuers over cliffs, surviving for several days in the wilderness, and searching avalanche debris with radio signal receiving devices. Because all members were trained in these basic systems, they occasionally assisted the sheriff's department in rescues that did not take place in the backcountry yet required a certain amount of technical expertise to reach the victim, for example, when victims were trapped in their cars that they had driven over cliffs or into rivers. Of the 30 or so members in Peak, approximately 20 were men, and 10 were women.[1] All members were white, and most were middle class to upper-middle class. Their ages ranged from 22 to 55, and their education levels ranged from high school to the MD degree.

Searches and rescues, called "missions," were run by one of five members called "mission coordinators." When a call came in, it was the mission coordinator's job to obtain the information, to evaluate the urgency, to decide whether to launch a search or rescue effort, and if so, mobilize the other members. During missions, the coordinators sent teams of rescuers into "the field" while they stayed behind and plotted the teams' progress on maps laid out in the group's base building.

I became interested in Peak after reading several local newspaper accounts of their rescues. With no specialized backcountry skill or experience, I joined the group in 1994 to study it sociologically. I began attending the biweekly business meetings, weekly training sessions, posttraining social hours at the local bar, and a few missions. Through these initial interactions, I became intrigued by how members defined their participation in rescue work and how these definitions affected their lives (Blumer 1969).

During the next year, I developed strong friendships with several group members and was able to discuss some of my observations with them. I occasionally asked them for their interpretations of certain events, which enhanced my

sociological understanding through the perspective of everyday life (Jorgensen 1989). During this time period, I became an "active" member (Adler and Adler 1987) of the setting: I was given deeper access to members' thoughts and feelings as they began to trust me, both as a researcher and a rescuer.

For five and one-half years, I kept detailed field notes of the group activities in which I participated: the business meetings, training sessions, social hours, and missions. It was my participation in the missions, however, that most helped me to identify with other rescuers' experiences. I was struck by the intense emotions I felt during searches and rescues, and once I realized that other rescuers experienced some of the same emotional patterns, I began to ask about them specifically during casual conversations. In addition to taking extensive field notes, I conducted 21 in-depth, semistructured interviews with rescuers, focusing the questions loosely around their motivations for participating in Peak and their experiences on missions. I often probed the interviewees to elicit thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) of their feelings on missions. Following the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I then studied these data, searching for conceptual patterns of members' emotional experience. When patterns emerged, I restructured the subsequent interviews in an effort to draw out further conceptual distinctions. Some of the new data supported my working analysis, while other data countered it; I used all of this evidence to refine my analytic model accordingly, continuing the process until the data yielded no new conceptual patterns, a condition Glaser and Strauss (1967) called "theoretical saturation."

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

The levels of difficulty, danger, and stress varied greatly among Peak's missions. At times, members were asked to perform only slightly demanding, low-urgency tasks such as hiking a short distance up a trail to carry a hiker with a twisted ankle out to the parking lot. Other times, they were asked to perform very difficult, dangerous, or gruesome tasks such as entering a potential avalanche zone to search for a missing skier, negotiating the rapids of a rushing river to reach a stranded rafter, being lowered down a cliff face to rescue an injured rock climber, or recovering a body from a violent accident. It was these physically and emotionally demanding situations that most threatened rescuers' sense of control, requiring them to engage in edgework—to negotiate the boundary between order and chaos—not only during the missions but before and after as well.

There were four stages of edgework that members experienced in Peak's missions: preparing for the edge, performing on the edge, going over the edge, and extending the edge. These stages were distinctly marked not only by the flow of rescue events but also by members' feelings in each stage. Yet, despite passing through the same stages of edgework, women and men experienced edgework differently, interpreting and managing feelings in gender-specific ways before, during, and after the missions.

Preparing for the Edge: Anticipating the Unknown

Missions were variable events, and members were often required to use whatever resources they had to accomplish their task. Generally, the men in the group found it exciting not to know what to expect from a rescue, and they felt challenged by the prospect of relying on their cognitive and technical skills to quickly solve any puzzle that suddenly presented itself. Peak's female rescuers, however, tended to view the missions' unpredictability as stressful, and they worried in anticipation about performing under certain conditions.

Women commonly worried that they might be physically unable to perform a task either because they would not be strong enough or because they would not know what to do. Thirty-year-old Elena expressed uncertainty about knowing how to help an injured victim:

> I'm always wondering if I'm going to hurt somebody more than help them. I'm always wondering if I'm doing the right thing. "Do I move [the victim's] head, or could it break her back?" You know? I mean, I always second-guess myself in the field. I guess my problem is that I'm always unsure of myself. Like, I'd be afraid that I would do more damage than good, in a way. . . . And that's where my hesitation always comes in. I mean, it's a big problem too because, like, I know what's right, and I don't speak up about it because I'm unsure of myself. You know?

Not only did Elena, a member of four years, worry about her preparedness to help victims, she also saw this apprehension as problematic; importantly, she felt that her lack of confidence in her ability was the source of the problem, not her ability level itself.

Women also tended to worry about their ability to maintain emotional control, realizing that they could encounter a particularly upsetting scene on a mission. For example, Maddie, a 10-year member, told me that one situation she dreaded was encountering a dead victim whom she knew. She expected that this situation would be one that most threatened her emotional control, the one in which she would be most likely to go over the edge:

> I think my biggest fear has always been that [the victim] is gonna be, eventually, somebody I know. And eventually it was. With Arnie [who was killed] in an avalanche. And yet, I was okay with that. I was more okay than I thought I might be. I always *think* I'm gonna lose it but, I guess you expect for the worst, and then you usually do better. Or, expect that "What would you do if you lost it?" or "How would you get it back?" And so I've planned ahead.

Worrying about what could arise on a future mission compelled many women to make a plan of action ahead of time, speculating about their potential reactions to stressful events. Preparing for edgework by imagining numerous different scenarios gave them some sense of control over the unpredictable future, and through such planning, they were able to manage their uncomfortable anticipatory feelings about

the unknown, a dynamic found in other research on high-risk takers (Holyfield 1997; Lyng 1990).

Maddie's statement also typified another technique many female rescuers used in conjunction with planning and rehearsing future scenarios: They set low expectations for themselves. Part of their planning process was to prepare for the most demanding possible situations, the ones in which they were most likely to fail. This emotion management strategy served two functions. First, it made women acutely aware of their progress toward the edge on missions. Maddie said that on "gruesome" missions, she remained highly cognizant of her emotional state, always prepared to hand off her task to someone else. The second function of women's low expectations was that they would probably perform beyond them, which allowed them to remain within their limits while feeling good about surpassing their expectations.

Anticipating a poor performance was not very common among the men in the group, however. Most of the men in Peak used the opposite technique—sheer confidence—to prepare for emergency action. Brooke, a four-year member in her late 20s, told me that two seven-year members, 28-year-old Gary and 32-year-old Nick, were able to perform at very high levels because of their high expectations for themselves:

> I think that both of those guys see themselves as Superman. Which is not necessarily a good thing. They sort of see themselves as being invincible [and] I think that they might test their physical limits more than I would. They might go into a situation that I would stand back and say, "I don't think that's safe." But they're convinced that nothing's going to happen to them. . . . But then again, I think that has a lot to do with the mental aspect of it. You know, they see themselves as being more capable of doing something than I would. Therefore, as long as they see themselves being capable of it, they are capable of it. If that makes any sense.

According to Brooke, extreme confidence was effective for Gary and Nick, yet she did not think that it was a viable emotion management technique for her to employ.

When I asked Gary himself about his experience in extreme situations, he responded with incredible certainty in his ability, supporting Brooke's perception of him:

> *Gary:* I like being thrown knee-deep [into challenging situations]. I like it when the shit hits the fan and having to get my way out of it.
> *Jen:* Don't you get nervous that you might not be able to do that?
> *Gary:* Nope.
> *Jen:* Do you think you'll always be able to do that?
> *Gary:* Yup. I am a cocky, young, think-I-can-do-it-all kid. I can get out of a situation. Probably because I have never *not* done it. I perform tremendously under pressure. That's when I shine at my absolute, top of my game. And I love being put in the hot seat. That's one of the reasons I do [search and rescue].

Gary highlighted an interdependent relationship between confidence and ability: Not only did confidence enhance performance but past performance also enhanced confidence.

Other men were extremely confident too, even when they were accused by others of overestimating their own ability. Roger, a 27-year-old member of six years, was highly experienced. He described his ability to assess avalanche danger, a highly unpredictable phenomenon, as better than most other members'. On one occasion when the team was practicing avalanche skills, Roger walked out to the edge of a cornice (a windblown pile of snow overhanging a steep hill or cliff, which can break off and cause an avalanche). Another highly experienced rescuer, Shorty, questioned Roger's judgment because if he broke the cornice and caused an avalanche, he could easily have been swept up in it, carried down the mountain, and buried under several feet of heavy snow. Roger was angered because he was very confident in his ability to assess how far out he could walk on any cornice without breaking it, reasoning that his past experience gave him this knowledge. He told me he had spent much recreational time in the backcountry, examining cornices and, through trial and error, learning where they typically break:

> I could probably tell a lot more [about avalanche potential than other members], and I can usually say, "Well this is where it's gonna break and this is where it's gonna slide." And sure as shit, when I get out there and I jump around, that's right where it breaks and that's right where it slides. If you're just a normal person walking out there, you're an *idiot*, but I don't think I am because I know what I'm doing. Shorty even questioned me, like, "Do you think it's really safe to be doing that?" And it's like, "Well, I wouldn't be doing it if it wasn't safe. It's not safe for you to be doing it, no, but it's safe for me because I know what I'm doing."

Roger's confidence helped him prepare for edgework in the event of a real mission. By stating where he thought cornices would break, he was quite literally reaffirming his ability to assess the edge—the boundary between safety and danger—which allowed him to feel in control of the situation. One way to view his activity was to consider it objectively dangerous: Roger had crossed the danger boundary, as evidenced by the many avalanches he had caused. Yet, he considered his actions safe: Even though he had caused many avalanches, each time he proved he was right, demonstrating his fine awareness and superior control of the edge, which signaled to himself and others that he could approach it and work there without going over it.

Many of Peak's men used these confidence displays to assert that they could outperform each other, which created a highly competitive environment. I witnessed many of these bravado sessions, mostly during social hours at the bars, where men discussed their own strengths as they anxiously awaited the opportunity to prove themselves on future missions. Several gender scholars have suggested that masculinity, but not femininity, must constantly be proven—that men are "only as masculine as [their] last demonstration of masculinity" (Beneke 1997, 43; see also Connell 1987; Kimmel 1996; Messner 1992). Thus, perhaps Peak's men were not only anticipating a chance to prove themselves as rescuers but also as men.

Wanting to prove oneself and having confidence was much less tolerated for women in Peak, however. For example, when Robin, a six-year member in her early 30s, did display confidence about her abilities and experiences, other members doubted and criticized her. Although she held high rescue certifications and had a great deal of experience in many of the activities required for search and rescue, such as white-water rafting and searching, other rescuers found her to be strange and weird, basing these judgments on her displays of confidence. Elena described what she thought bothered her (and others) about Robin:

> She brags a lot. About herself. And she shows off a lot. And I think that people perceive that as not necessarily a good thing. . . . Sometimes I wonder if she doesn't feel like she just needs to always prove herself.

Clearly, Robin was being held to different standards than male rescuers, as she was negatively sanctioned for performing what I observed to be "masculine" behavior. Brooke, also commented on Robin's boasting: "That tells me something about this girl. That something's not right there. She's pumping herself up, you know?" Apparently, Brooke objected to Robin's displays of confidence because she saw them as gender inappropriate: They conveyed important information about "this girl." In preparing for missions, most female rescuers did not display confidence like their male counterparts; instead, they remained cautious and modest.

There are several explanations for this gendered difference in preparation strategies. First, in general, men were more experienced than women. Through their own recreation as well as through group-related activities, men's exposure to risk was both more frequent and more hazardous than women's. Yet, this gendered confidence pattern was not totally explained by differential risk exposure. For example, when I talked to equally experienced men and women, apprehension still dominated women's anticipatory feelings (except for Robin's), and confidence dominated men's. Furthermore, even when women performed well on missions, it did not seem to boost their confidence for future situations, while conversely, men's poor performance did not erode theirs.[2]

A second factor in explaining this pattern was that the masculine nature of rescue work made men feel more at ease in the setting, and thus they tended to display unwavering certainty that they could handle any situation that might arise. Women felt disadvantaged by this masculine environment and, taking this into account, set low expectations for themselves. In one way, their feelings were based in reality: They were aware that, on the whole, the men in the group were physically stronger and thus able to perform harder tasks than they. Brooke said that it was "obvious" and "completely understandable" that she would be second choice as a rope hauler because she was physically weaker than a man.[3]

In another way, though, women's insecurities were due to cultural and group stereotypes about men's superior rescue ability. For example, the belief that men are emotionally stronger than women made women question whether they would be able to perform edgework in potentially upsetting situations, while the same stereo-

type enabled men to have confidence that they would maintain control in those situations. Yet, my observations (discussed later in this article) yielded no gendered pattern of emotional control. Another stereotype that made women worry about their rescue ability was the belief that men were more technically inclined than they were. This stereotype came into play during trainings and missions when the group used any kind of mechanization, such as rope and pulley systems, helicopters, or snowmobiles. Cyndi, a three-year member in her late 20s, told me she felt "hugely" intimidated in her first year by the technical training, yet she later became quite adept in setting up and operating rope and pulley systems. Elena had a similar experience. She told me that during her first training, she looked around at "all the guys" and thought, "What am I doing here? I'm not even qualified for any of this." Cyndi's and Elena's feelings of inferiority acted as "place markers" where "the emotion conveys information about the state of the social ranking system" (Clark 1990, 308). In this case, they felt inferior because performing gender-appropriate behavior, or "doing femininity" (West and Zimmerman 1987), was inconsistent with "doing" edgework, which they perceived as a much more "masculine" endeavor.

Because women felt this gendered tension, they may have devised these distinct ways to moderate it. By remaining trepidacious and maintaining low expectations that they would often exceed, the women reaffirmed their place in the group as useful. Although they feared admitting when they would be unable to complete a task, because as Cyndi said, it meant "you're admitting to everyone else that you're not as good as them," many women in the group felt that bowing out early was preferable to competing and failing. Cyndi said others would think, "At least they didn't fuck the mission up. They stayed, and they helped, and they did something." Thus, trepidation and confidence emerged as gendered emotional strategies used in preparing for edgework.

Performing on the Edge: Suppressing Feelings

During Peak's urgent missions, clear thinking and rational action, core features of edgework, were seen as especially crucial. However, in such demanding situations, members' capacity for emotional and physical control was seen as more tenuous: Emotions threatened to push them over the edge, preventing them from physically performing at all. Rescuers who were easily scared, excited, or upset by a mission's events were considered undependable. Members employed several strategies to control these feelings during the missions, allowing them to perform under pressure.

Rescuers were particularly wary of the onset of adrenaline rushes because such potent physiological reactions threatened their composure; they felt that the emotions they experienced could "get in the way" of their performance. Yet, adrenaline was not totally undesirable; in fact, at lower levels, both male and female rescuers welcomed it because it helped them focus and heightened their awareness. Mostly, though, Peak's emotional culture cast adrenaline rushes—the involuntary physiological response that causes increased heart rate and breathing—as an important

situational cue, one that rescuers should heed as a warning that they were at risk of losing control.

Although Peak's members talked about adrenaline as though it were an emotion, Schachter and Singer (1962) demonstrated that the physiological arousal associated with adrenaline does not signify a particular emotion in the absence of other situational information. After exploring what rescuers meant by the term *adrenaline rush*, I discovered they were actually referring to two distinct (and potentially problematic) emotional states associated with adrenaline: fear and urgency.

Excessive fear was dangerous because it could paralyze rescuers, rendering them ineffective and thus increasing risk for both their teammates and the victim. Cyndi expressed a typical perspective when she described the difference between helpful and harmful levels of fear. She described a time when she was trying to cross a river on a series of slippery rocks, each of which was just beyond her comfortable step, requiring her to jump from one to the next. Other rescuers were waiting for her to cross, and she knew that they would be able to reach her if she slipped and fell into the rushing water. Nonetheless, she could not do it:

> I mean, I knew that I was perfectly safe. And I was trembling like a leaf, and my heart was racing, and there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it! I could sit there all day long [saying to myself], "You're gonna be fine, you're gonna be fine, you're gonna be fine," and I just stood there shaking. I was just in one of these sort of states: huge adrenaline rush. . . . There's a point where some fear is a good thing—adrenaline—and it helps you focus, because you know that you need to be careful. If you're in a situation where there is some fear, maybe an avalanche or a river, you want to get whatever it is you're doing done quickly because the faster you get out of it, the safer you are. But then there's a point where it stops being an aid and it becomes a hindrance: Fear outweighs your ability to act. I think that's the worst thing in the world you could do for a mission, just freeze and panic, where you spend more time combating your fear than thinking about the situation you're in.

Interestingly, Cyndi equated adrenaline with fear. She used these terms interchangeably, noting the edge between useful and detrimental physiological reactions, both of which she experienced as fear. Her description highlighted both sides of the edge: the controllable side, where "some fear is a good thing" because rescuers could use their aroused feelings to create order and perform at higher levels. She also explained the chaotic side, where too much fear impeded rescuers' ability to act rationally and efficiently. They would become overwhelmed with emotion, a phenomenon that strips individuals of their ability to make self-indications and thus monitor and control their actions (Mills and Kleinman 1988).

Loss of control due to fear, however, was almost always associated with women's reactions to adrenaline, while becoming too "excitable" or feeling excessive urgency was only associated with men's reactions to adrenaline. Like too much fear, members considered excessive urgency to be a detrimental emotion during missions because it could cause rescuers to act irrationally and thus, unsafely. On one occasion, the mission coordinator selected two experienced members to enter a

dangerous avalanche gully and evacuate a snowboarder who had a broken leg. While they were tending to the victim, two newer members, Patrick and Mitch, skied down into the gully without getting authorization from the mission coordinator, which endangered the two experienced members already in the gully by creating the possibility of triggering an avalanche above them. Furthermore, Patrick was unable to ski the difficult terrain, causing him to spend extraordinarily more time in the gully, thus exponentially increasing the risk to himself and others. Group members accused Patrick and Mitch of letting their adrenaline override rational, controlled action: They skied into the gully because it was exciting and risky, not because they were needed on the scene. Brooke said, "It was just poor judgment, they jumped the gun, they had the adrenaline running. I can't imagine what they were thinking." When I asked Patrick about this, he accounted for his actions by interpreting his adrenaline as urgency. He said, "The reason I went is because I wanted to get down to the victim. I wanted to help."

One reason men and women might have experienced adrenaline rushes differently was because they were simultaneously "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987). Men tended to be confident at the prospect of undertaking risk, which may have caused them to interpret their adrenaline during the mission as pleasurable and exciting. Since women, on the other hand, reported more cautious mind-sets in preparing for missions, worrying about their ability to exercise emotional and physical control in risky situations, perhaps they were more likely to define their adrenaline rushes as fear. It is important to note, however, that while too much adrenaline, whether it be feminine fear or masculine urgency, was considered detrimental to the safety of the missions, urgency was less stigmatized than fear, perhaps because it was seen as easier to conquer or because it was a more pleasurable sensation than fear. As a result, women had a harder time gaining status from their successful mission performances because they (and others) defined their adrenaline as fear.

Nevertheless, men and women managed their feelings of urgency and fear similarly: They suppressed them. For example, the most critical mission I experienced had four casualties. A van had driven off the side of a dirt road and tumbled to the bottom of a 400-foot ravine. Search and rescue was called because the accident was inaccessible to the paramedics, who needed ropes to get down to the victims and a hauling system to get them out. Cyndi told me that while on that mission, she was in control of her emotions, successfully suppressing them, because she was working the rope systems up on the road, unable to see beyond the drop-off down to the accident site. She felt differently, however, when one of the accident victims reached the top of the hill in a panicked state. The victim, who had a broken arm, had managed to climb up the 400-foot embankment in an effort to catch up to the rescue team who was evacuating her critically injured mother. Cyndi was thrown off kilter by this sight:

> Because I was up at the top, it wasn't real. You know, I could sort of disassociate, it's like, "Okay, let's just get the job done and not think about it." But then you're meeting this person [climbing out of the accident scene] who is just out of it. I mean, she was

> panicked and [she had] adrenaline [rushing], and I was just kind of like, "Okay, there really are real people down there, but I'm not gonna get panicked. I need to calm this person down, because she's not gonna help rushing up to the scene, and getting in the way of the paramedics [while] trying to get to her mother."

Cyndi's emotional control was threatened when the victim emerged from the trauma scene. The sight forced her to the edge, where her ordered, controlled action was threatened by her feeling of chaotic, uncontrolled panic. She quickly narrowed her focus further, successfully managing her own impending panic by monitoring the victim's behavior. In this way, she was able to keep her feelings at bay while she continued working. High-risk takers frequently report similar reactions: They narrow their focus so dramatically that they lose awareness of everything extraneous to the risk activity itself (Holyfield 1997; Lyng 1990).

Another way emotions interfered with performance was when members were disturbed by the graphic sight of the accidents they encountered. Recovering the body of a dead victim, for example, held great potential for upset feelings, especially if the death was violent or gruesome, leaving the body in pieces, excessively bloody, or positioned unnaturally (such as having the legs bent backward or a limb missing). Such situations could cause extreme reactions in rescuers, possibly preventing them from doing the job they were assigned. On the whole, men were assumed to be better suited for these graphic jobs because they were perceived to be emotionally stronger than women. For example, Brooke made a statement that reflected the idea that emotional strength and masculinity were intertwined when she said that under such extreme conditions, Peak's members had to "have the balls to go in and do what needs to be done . . . I think you have to be [emotionally] strong to see what you see and to deal with what you deal with in this group."

Other members stated these gendered expectations more blatantly. Maddie told me she had noticed a common pattern in the 10 years she had been in the group:

> I think there's an emotional consideration [to being in this group], because our society says men need to hold their emotions in check more so than women. It's expected. It's an expectation from our society. So in any kind of situation where emotions could come into play, you know, something that's really gruesome, [the mission coordinators] aren't gonna ask [the women], they'll ask the guys first.

Maddie's statement highlights how emotional stoicism was not only a critical feature of doing edgework but also of "doing masculinity." These two concepts, edgework and masculinity, were often so confounded that the gender order in Peak was implicitly justified, a point I return to later.

Jim, a mission coordinator, confirmed Maddie's observation when he told me that he tried to assign members to jobs according to their ability, regardless of gender, except in one situation:

> I do, however, hesitate to use women in body recovery-type situations. . . . I want to protect 'em from exposure to that type of incident. I can't tell you why I wanna protect

> 'em, but that's what it is. 'Cause I think it's a horrible deal. My wife asks me all the time, "Why do *you* have to go do the body?" Been there. Done that. I can do that. Why subject somebody else to it?

Yet, men were not immune to the potentially disturbing effects of gruesome rescues. In fact, Meg, a member for 10 years, told me that despite stereotypes of masculine emotional strength, she had seen experienced men who had trouble dealing with dead bodies, even though they were willing to assist in the recovery task:

> I've seen people that are very, very macho and strong and opinionated become very sheepish in those situations. . . . [They] march right in and as soon as they get a visual on [the body], they're off doing something else. [They] walk away. Can't look, can't touch. . . . And for me, a body recovery is just like recovering a living person. You know, it's just a body of who was there, and the "who" part is gone. . . . So body recoveries are not so difficult for me, but for some people it's a real struggle.

Thus, emotional upset even threatened some men who were expected to be emotionally tough.

In these gruesome situations, both male and female rescuers reported using one primary emotion management strategy to combat their upset feelings: depersonalizing the victims. Meg alluded to this by saying a body is not a person because the "who" part is gone. Such detachment is a common way people maintain instrumental control in emotionally threatening situations (DeCoster 1997; Jones 1997; Smith and Kleinman 1989). Tyler, an eight-year member in his early 30s, told me how some members detached when recovering dead bodies:

> Some people don't look at a dead person's face. And the reason is that a face is someone's identity. Someone's body—I mean, pretty much a body is the same on everyone. But a headless body lacks an identity. You know, you need to put a face with a person. You don't put feet with a person. And by not looking at someone's face, you really can take some of the identity out of it. And it almost can seem more surreal, and that what you're dealing with really isn't even a body. So it can be easier for some people. It really helps them control how they feel about it.

Members like Meg and Tyler had their own ways of depersonalizing their actions on missions—acts of bravery and heroism that would seem to be logically motivated by a deep concern for other human beings. Yet, in these intense incidents, rescuers emphasized the need to depersonalize the victims, to think of their bodies as inanimate objects that belonged to no one. Although group members believed that men would be able to accomplish this more easily, my data show no gendered pattern to this ability.

Fear, urgency, and emotional upset were some of the powerful feelings that threatened rescuers' control during missions in very gendered ways. Male and female rescuers, however, reported very similar ways of dealing with these threatening emotions to maintain "affective neutrality" (Parsons 1951) during missions: They suppressed their feelings by closely focusing on their task and depersonal-

izing the victims. This group norm of displaying affective neutrality signified a coolheadedness that was considered safe and effective, and the group considered those who could achieve it in the most critical of circumstances—those who could push the edge the farthest—their most valuable members. At times, these evaluations were based on individuals' past performances; at other times, they were based on gendered stereotypes of emotional capabilities.

Going over the Edge: Releasing Feelings

Immediately after missions, members' suppressed feelings began to surface. Both women and men viewed the sensations they got from successful mission outcomes, like reuniting victims with their family, as the ultimate reward, and I often witnessed them expressing these positive feelings upon hearing the news of a saved victim. They instantly discarded their objective demeanor and became jovial, slaphappy, and chatty. They released the pent-up stress that had been tightly managed throughout the missions by shouting, high-fiving each other, making jokes, and talking about what they had been thinking and feeling throughout the mission. Generally, they felt energized, which they regarded as a positive feeling of control and competence. For Lyng's (1990) skydivers, the whole point of edgework was to experience these feelings after a jump.

Not surprisingly, after missions with negative outcomes, both male and female rescuers reported highly unpleasant emotions, which usually hit them once they got home and were alone. At times, these feelings rushed forward uncontrollably, taking rescuers over the edge into emotional disorder and chaos. One source of upset feelings was recurring visual memories of emotionally disturbing scenes, which are common when people, such as medical students (Smith and Kleinman 1989), first see dead bodies. Not only did Peak's rescuers report being bothered by intrusive images of the graphic things they had seen but also by the things they experienced through their sense of hearing and of touch. One member told me that when he assisted in the body recovery of a fallen rock climber, he didn't sleep for three weeks because his mind kept replaying the crackling sound of the victim's legs as rescuers tried to fit him in the body bag. Another rescuer remembered feeling the weight of a dead body she helped carry out from the four-passenger van rollover: "I just remember how *heavy* it was. You know, they say 'dead weight'? That was one of the most memorable [missions]. That one lived with me for a while."

These upsetting flashbacks could be compounded when the rescue hit too close to home, and subsequently, members' confrontation with the stressful emotions was more intense. For example, Tyler told me that on one mission, he, Nick, and Shorty volunteered to travel to another county to extract the body of a kayaker from the middle of a rushing river. The kayaker was killed when the front of his kayak got sucked under the water and pinned between two rocks. The force of the water behind him pushed the back of his kayak up into the air and then folded it over on top of him, snapping both of his legs backwards and trapping him in his kayak. The victims' friends were unable to reach him, and he drowned. Nick found that

particular mission more difficult to deal with than others, causing him several disturbing flashbacks. He told me that for days afterward he could not shake these strong, negative feelings:

> *Nick:* It was really messing with my head. I mean, every time I looked at a river or just thought about rafting or kayaking or whatever, I would just focus on the way the body looked. . . . I didn't think it was gonna be that beat up. It was only in the river for a day before we got to it, but it was pretty beat up.
> *Jen:* How do you feel when you see stuff like that?
> *Nick:* A little nauseous. Nervous about getting hurt in that situation, you know, dying in that same situation that the person was in. Especially since the week before I checked into kayaking lessons! [laughs]
> *Jen:* And did you follow up on that?
> *Nick:* No.

Thus, the negative effects of "failed" missions could make members feel vulnerable—like they could encounter the same fate—which diluted the emotional charge they got from edgework. As a result, both female and male rescuers tried to manage the uncontrolled flow of conflicting emotions in the immediate postmission period. In the most intense cases, they reported feeling overwhelmed with emotion, unable to control it and needing to release it in some way.

There were two ways in which members released these feelings, and these management techniques appeared to be highly related to gender. Women tended to cry. I talked to Elena, the four-year member who initially felt unqualified for search and rescue, shortly after her first (and only) dead-body recovery. She told me that she thought she was "okay" until she got home and was in the shower, where she started to cry. She felt that this initial release was enough to reduce the backlog of feelings that had piled up while she was suppressing them during the mission. It allowed her to regain her composure, reducing her stress and anxiety to manageable levels. In essence, she lost and regained her self-reflexivity, much like the battered wives Mills and Kleinman (1988) analyzed. Other women, too, reported that they sometimes "needed" to cry in the wake of a stressful mission, precisely to release "pent-up stress." Men, however, never reported crying as a means of dealing with the emotional turmoil of missions. Although it is possible that men and women did cry with equal frequency and masculinity norms prevented men from reporting it, it was more likely that women saw this as a more acceptable emotion management technique and coped in this way more often than men (see Gove, Geerken, and Hughes 1979; King et al. 1996; Mirowsky and Ross 1995; Roehling, Koelbel, and Rutgers 1996; Thoits 1995).

After the most traumatic missions, such as one occasion when members extricated the charred remains of several forest firefighters caught in a "fire storm" (an extremely hot, quick-moving, and dangerous type of forest fire), the group provided a professionally run "critical incident debriefing" session where they could talk about their feelings after the mission. While these sessions encouraged men (who were the ones most often involved in such intense missions) to express their

feelings, there were only two of these sessions offered in my five and one-half years with Peak. As a general rule, Peak's culture did not encourage men to express their feelings after emotionally taxing rescues. For example, neither female nor male rescuers asked men how they felt after such events. Women, however, were accorded much more displayed concern after disturbing missions. I regularly witnessed both women and men asking women how they felt and touching them supportively, for example, by sympathetically rubbing their back or hugging them. These observations do not suggest that rescuers were not concerned about the men, however; in fact, they were often so concerned that they made sure to phone male rescuers a few days after a disturbing event and ask them "how things were going," an indirect way of checking up on them and reaching out to them emotionally.

That Peak's culture did not encourage men to display their emotions is not surprising, given that toughness and emotional stoicism are central features of many cultural conceptions of masculinity (Connell 1987; Kimmel 1996; Messner 1992). Instead, Peak's men coped with their anxiety and unpleasant feelings by drinking alcohol after negative-outcome missions, such as dead-body recoveries. After Tyler, Nick, and Shorty recovered the trapped kayaker's body in another county, Tyler told me that they bought a 12-pack of beer for Nick and Shorty to drink while Tyler drove them home. In the three-hour drive, Shorty drank 2 of the beers, and Nick drank the remaining 10. When I asked Nick about this, he told me that he drank beer after missions to try to

> calm down, to relax.... [I was tense] because I didn't think the body was gonna be that beat up. It's kinda like if you had a rough day at work, you drink a couple beers.... I think [it's] just part of releasing any tension, even if it's just adrenaline that you have stored up.

In this way, members used "bodily deep acting," manipulating their physiological state to change their emotional state (Hochschild 1990), by relaxing themselves with alcohol in an effort to dampen the chaos of their surfacing feelings.

Men coped in this way more than women. Although women went drinking with the men after intense and upsetting missions, they drank substantially less alcohol (averaging one to two drinks) than the men (who frequently drank five or more) and left the bar much earlier to go home. In her 10 years with Peak, Maddie had concluded that men used alcohol to cope with emotional upset because of gender socialization:

> *Maddie:* I think the guys hide [their upset] a lot better [than the women]. And deal with it by going and drinking beers. I mean, that has always been the way they deal with it—for years. And I don't think that's good. Because [of] this post-traumatic stress [disorder], I mean, you can see it in a lot of our guys after a big, heavy-duty mission. You know, just going to the bar and drinking beers doesn't release it always. And then it starts to come out in their personal lives, and I don't think that's healthy at all. I think you need to do a little more than that.
> *Jen:* Like counseling?

Maddie: Yeah, but then our guys think they're too cool to do that stuff.
Jen: Have you ever seen any women dealing with their feelings by drinking alcohol?
Maddie: No. Not at all.

Maddie explained men's higher alcohol consumption rate over women's with cultural expectations for them to hide their feelings and appear to remain emotionally unaffected, an observation supported by social research (Mirowsky and Ross 1995; Thoits 1995). In this way, male rescuers lived up to the emotionally stoic male stereotype by engaging in this phase of edgework in a distinctly "masculine" way. Maddie and other women, however, believed that this "masculine" coping strategy was a distinctly ineffective, and thus inferior, way of dealing with unpleasant feelings, an observation that has received inconclusive support in coping research (e.g., Patterson and McCubbin 1984; Robinson and Johnson 1997; Roehling, Koelbel, and Rutgers 1996; Sigmon, Stanton, and Snyder 1995).

Extending the Edge: Redefining Feelings

In the long term, positive-outcome missions allowed rescuers to extend the edge; members' success served as evidence that they could push their limits further next time. Negative outcomes, however, threatened to compress the edge, leaving rescuers wondering if they were capable and unsure of the risk they were willing to assume in the future. The fourth stage of edgework, then, was marked by members' ability to regain control of these negative feelings by cognitively processing and redefining their experiences, a process Kitsuse (1962) termed "retrospective interpretation." In this way, rescuers employed another type of "deep acting" where they "visualiz[ed] a substantial portion of reality in a different way" (Hochschild 1990, 121), which transformed their feelings about it. This helped them maximize their future edgework ability.

Women and men shared the same emotions and management techniques in this stage of edgework. For example, guilt was a stressful emotion for both male and female rescuers in the wake of unsuccessful missions because they could feel personally responsible for the outcome, for example, if they failed to save a victim. On one occasion, rescuers felt bothered by a mission where a kayaker died in a river race. Many of Peak's members were at the race, volunteering to act as safety agents on the river banks, throwing lines to any kayakers in trouble. One racer's kayak flipped upside down, and he was unable to right himself. Although many tried to reach him—fellow racers chased him down, people standing on the banks threw safety lines—no one could get to him until he floated through the finish line four minutes later. Many bystanders speculated that he must have been knocked unconscious while he was inverted and subsequently drowned. Jim told me that he went over and over the incident in his mind that night, trying to think of something he and the team could have done to reach the boater more quickly. He could find no flaws in the team's response yet found it difficult to accept that the boater was killed. Kevin,

a 10-year member in his mid-40s, echoed Jim's feelings when he told me that he felt compelled to return to the scene in search of an answer:

> It bothered me that I wasn't able to do *something*. And I went back that night to stand by the river, to look at it, to reevaluate, and I came to the same conclusion: There was nothing I could've done, other than create a worse situation.

This incident was particularly troublesome for group members because they saw the accident and were so close by; standing there on the river bank they felt helpless while the kayaker drowned. Two days later, the local newspaper reported that the kayaker had died when, due to a genetic defect, his heart "exploded." Many members were relieved by this news because it confirmed the conclusions they had come to through their careful reanalysis: They could not have saved him.

One way in which members neutralized their guilt was by redefining their part in missions. One technique was "denying responsibility" (Sykes and Matza 1957) for the victim's fate, which could take the form of blaming the victims themselves. Cyndi told me how she reconciled her conflicting feelings about a dead victim she helped recover. He had taken his brand-new pickup truck up a narrow, steep hiking trail to see how well the four-wheel drive worked and was killed when he rolled it off the trail into a ravine. Cyndi said she kept trying to remember that he did something "really stupid." Not only did members dodge guilt using these rationalizations, but they sidestepped vulnerability too. The victim's stupidity was the cause of death, and rescuers, who considered themselves much smarter, could avoid such a fate. Through these methods, both men and women were able to temper their feelings of guilt and vulnerability, which in turn helped them to maintain a positive self-image as well as to reassure themselves about their own ability to survive edgework.

Another technique both female and male rescuers used to counter the stress of emotionally taxing missions in the long term was to weight the successes more than the failures. Although they took great pains to separate themselves personally from failed missions, denying responsibility and downplaying meaning in those situations, members actively sought a personal connection with the successful missions, acknowledging their role in them and allowing their participation to be meaningful and important reflections of their self. This bias in self-perception is a common way people may "bolster their self-esteem, their affect, and . . . their public image" (Eisenberg 1986, 79). Personally accepting credit for successes protected rescuers by increasing their confidence and making them feel that they had control over risky conditions, a phenomenon found among other edgeworkers (Lyng 1990).

Several members reported that saving someone's life was the ultimate reward of search and rescue and was unlike any other feeling they had ever had. One search for a 68-year-old hiker lasted five days. The team had scoured the mountainside where she had last been seen, finding no clues, and becoming less optimistic that she would be found alive, if she were found at all. The mission coordinator sent

Martin, a five-year member in his early 50s, and two other rescuers up in a search helicopter for one last sweep of the area before calling off the search. Martin told me that it was by "a miracle" that he spotted something red peeking out from underneath a boulder and directed the helicopter closer to investigate it. There they found the missing woman, severely dehydrated and weak, but alive. He told me how his part in the mission made him feel:

> The whole experience of finding her was the kind of feeling you want to get out of search and rescue. I mean, we saved somebody, there's no question in my mind, that really meant the difference between her being dead or alive. And it was so good a feeling. . . . I feel good when we help people, but this was just so *different* because I honestly think we saved somebody's life. You know, we made a huge difference, and *I* made a big difference. I was the one that saw her. I was very involved in it. In my mind, "I found her." I can't deny it. I really felt good about myself. I felt that the time that I've put into the group, for all the good times we have and the bad times we have, it was worth it for that one thing. . . . That was probably the biggest kick I ever got in my life! I can't tell you how good I felt about that!

Clearly, Martin's experience was an emotionally rewarding one. He welcomed these feelings and openly expressed them. He noted that he did not want to deny his personal part in the mission—he *couldn't* deny it—he needed to identify personally with such a life-saving event. He allowed these feelings to significantly enhance how he felt about himself. When I asked him how long these feelings lasted, he said, "I was high for days! I still felt good, I was still floating on a high. Just from saving her." He had been able to draw on this experience repeatedly to help him counteract his negative feelings in previous and subsequent missions, steadfastly holding to the idea that all his rescue experiences were "worth it for that one thing." Many female and male rescuers used this technique: They defined their overall participation in search and rescue as valuable and thus were able to extend the edge—risk more emotionally and physically—because the rewards outweighed the costs. The gender similarities in these data suggest that in this stage of edgework, how rescuers accomplished gender did not conflict with how they redefined their feelings.

CONCLUSION

Peak's critical missions required members to pass through four stages of edgework. These stages were marked both by the flow of rescue events and the corresponding emotions they evoked. Rescuers risked both their physical and emotional well-being before, during, and after the missions, and maintaining a sense of order was a key concern in each stage. Because each of these four stages was characterized by different emotions that threatened their sense of order, members used several types of emotion management strategies as they prepared for, performed on, exceeded, and redefined the edge. Moreover, these feelings and management techniques varied by gender. The men in the group tended to feel confident and excited

on missions and, although sometimes quite upset, tended to display emotional stoicism at negative outcomes. Conversely, the women tended to feel trepidacious and fearful on the critical missions and to express their upset feelings in their aftermath. Thus, the dynamics of edgework, emotions, and gender converged to create the distinct model of emotional culture presented here.

The emotions Peak's members experienced during certain stages of a mission, as well as the consequences of these emotions, prompted members to recognize their importance and to attach meaning to them. They developed beliefs about which emotions were useful or appropriate in each stage and constructed norms to help them achieve these desired emotional states. For example, they believed that emotions such as uncertainty, urgency, fear, upset, vulnerability, and guilt were undesirable because these powerful feelings were potentially disruptive. They could interfere with members' performance, causing them to sacrifice the efficiency of the mission as well as the safety of other rescuers and the victims. Working off this assumption—that during missions almost all emotions were dangerous obstacles to be overcome—Peak's members constructed an emotional culture that prioritized suppressing all emotions during missions and releasing them only after the crisis ended (see Irvine [1999] and Stearns [1994] for analyses of similar emotional patterns).

Peak's women and men shared this emotional culture, agreeing on the potentially disruptive nature of emotions as well as the corresponding need to suppress them and remain cool during crises. They also agreed on the need to release these pent-up feelings after crisis situations. But Peak's men and women differed in the steps they took to bring themselves in line with these cultural beliefs. Thus, the abstract assumptions about emotions were shared, but the norms instituted to achieve them differed along gender lines.

These two ways of accomplishing edgework constitute two distinct "emotion lines," which Hochschild (1990, 123) has called a "series of emotional reactions [resulting from] . . . a series of instigating events." For example, women and men in Peak tended to interpret missions' "instigating events" differently, which set off a chain of feelings and management techniques unique to each gendered emotion line. The masculine emotion line was constructed around the interpretation of edgework as exciting. The men in the group tended to be confident in their abilities even before they knew what a mission might require of them and often held the belief that the more demanding the mission, the better. In general, they looked forward to being challenged by very difficult situations, and their vocabulary reflected this as they referred affectionately to these situations as on the verge of "going to shit" and to themselves as being "put in the hot seat." They thrived on excitement during the missions, interpreting their heightened arousal as urgency, and continued to expect that they would succeed. When missions ended unfavorably, they did not release the built-up tension all at once but let it leak out slowly, referring to it with telling metaphors such as "unwinding." Later, they neutralized their failure with emotional "justifying ideologies" (Cancian and Gordon 1988) that helped them maintain a positive self-image. Thus, it appears that the men tended to

approach and engage in edgework with positive feelings (perhaps already suppressing negative feelings) and in the event of failure released these pent-up emotions slowly: They followed an "excitement/slow leak" emotion line of failed edgework.

The feminine emotion line was based on the idea of edgework as anxiety producing. Peak's women tended to be unsure of their ability to engage in edgework and were often anxious in anticipation of many physically and emotionally challenging situations. Many women openly questioned their potential for physical competence and emotional self-control. During critical missions, they generally remained anxious, often interpreting their heightened arousal as fear, and constantly worrying that they might fail. When missions ended unfavorably, they released their emotions abruptly by bursting into tears. They later used emotional justifying ideologies, like the men did, to reconceptualize their actions, which neutralized potentially damaging definitions of the self. Thus, it appears that the women in the group tended to enact an "anxiety/outburst" emotion line of failed edgework.

To negotiate the often conflicting demands of edgework and gender, Peak's men and women devised these distinct but gender-appropriate emotion lines. These two emotion lines, however, were not equally respected ways of enacting edgework. In fact, it was the distinction between the two that stratified the group members, creating a hierarchy of emotional competence for edgework, with men at the top. When members evaluated the gendered ways of preparing for and enacting edgework, both men and women recognized the superiority of masculine "excitement" over feminine "anxiety." Although most women reported managing their anxiety in a relatively effective way (i.e., they performed edgework competently), they viewed themselves as "emotional deviants" (Thoits 1990) when it came to the first two stages: preparing for and acting in crisis. (Recall how they tended to consider their lack of confidence as problematic, to decline tasks they thought might overwhelm them emotionally, and to interpret their adrenaline as fear.)

Thoits (1990) has hypothesized that people who are marginalized in a subculture may recognize their own emotional deviance more frequently than nonmarginal members because their own emotions often conflict with those dominant in the subculture. By virtue of their fringe status, marginal subcultural members might, for example, feel pulled between two different emotional subcultures: the one in which they are marginal, and another with different norms and values, in which they better fit. Most women in Peak accepted their status as emotional deviants: They rarely challenged the low expectations others had for them and often held low expectations for themselves, generally believing that their feelings and management techniques were inferior to men's. They readily admitted that they might not be able to handle the emotional demands of a mission, often deferring to others, usually men, who displayed no reservations about entering potentially challenging, upsetting, or gruesome situations. Clark (1990, 314) has suggested that when it comes to emotions and status, "[h]aving no place, or feeling 'out of place,' can be more painful even than having an inferior place." Thus, Peak's women tended to validate their membership by volunteering to do less challenging tasks. In this way, they used

inferior "place claims" (Clark 1990) to accept and reinforce their emotional place—subordinate though it was—in Peak's missions.

In the period after the missions, however, Peak's women generally did not feel that their norm of "outburst" was inferior to men's slow-leak method of ventilating emotions. In fact, they viewed their method as superior to men's and disparaged the slow-leak norm, because they believed that it caused negative emotions to become trapped and to fester. In this way, women made superior place claims in the group, insisting that the men were too constrained by strict gender roles to display their negative feelings through an emotional outburst. Yet, women's superior emotional place claims went unacknowledged. Most of Peak's men did not accept an inferior status when it came to their slow-leak method of releasing emotions. (Recall they were "too cool" to attend counseling.) They paid no attention to the women's denigration of their management technique and thus ignored the women's place claim to superiority in the emotional ventilation arena. Thus, the third phase of edgework, releasing emotions, was contested gender terrain; both women and men vied for the right to define normative ventilation methods.

It is possible that many women in the group perceived their position as inferior when it came to accomplishing edgework because they often felt as though it was a masculine domain, as much high-risk taking tends to be (Harrell 1986). After the danger had passed, however, when it came to dealing directly with emotions, women may have considered themselves the "emotional specialists." In her landmark study of a male-dominated corporation, Kanter (1977) identified this common stereotype of women, noting that both genders assumed women to be better equipped "naturally" to deal with emotional issues. More recently, other scholars have found evidence of this pervasive stereotype in more contemporary male-dominated settings as well (see Hochschild 1983; Pierce 1995), which suggests that specializing in emotional issues is still a core feature of "doing femininity" (West and Zimmerman 1987). Given this powerful belief, on one hand, it is easy to see why Peak's women felt justified in asserting the superiority of their "outburst" norm; by the same token, however, it is puzzling that women's place claims in the emotional realm were given little credibility by Peak's men.

One explanation for this phenomenon might be that norms of masculinity, including the norm of masculine emotional stoicism (Connell 1987; Kimmel 1996; Messner 1992), were so strongly entrenched and intricately connected to the edgework subculture that it gave men the "means of emotional culture production" (Cancian and Gordon 1988): They controlled the standards by which edgeworkers were judged. Furthermore, if emotions were the main avenue through which men distinguished themselves from women before, during, and after edgework, they may have felt that their appropriate gender performance—their very masculinity—would be threatened if they were to display emotions associated with a feminized edgework performance. This interpretation resonates with Connell's (1987) conception of "hegemonic masculinity," which is sustained because it dominates over other gendered forms, such as alternative masculinities held by gay men or nurturing fathers, and any kind of femininity.

These data show that there can be contested emotional terrain within one emotional culture. Although Cancian and Gordon's (1988) analysis of shifting love and anger norms in women's magazines demonstrated emotional culture contradictions, their work was only able to focus on the messages being sent to women about their emotions; it was unable to assess how individual women received these conflicting cultural messages. My research uncovers this aspect of an emotional culture. It shows how Peak's women evaluated themselves in terms of these discrepant cultural messages and how these self-interpretations guided their future action. In some cases, they acted to resist their subordinate position, drawing from the larger emotional culture to bolster their claims to a more respected place in the group. In other cases, they drew on gendered emotion norms to reinforce their subordinate status. Similarly, the men in the group accepted women's place claims in some cases yet denied them in others. By examining how women and men reacted to gendered cultural messages about emotions, these data reveal how gender may be constructed selectively by relying on culturally specific (and occasionally contradictory) emotion norms.

NOTES

1. Because membership fluctuated greatly in the course of five and one-half years, I am only able to estimate the number of members who possessed certain attributes at any given time.

2. There were very few exceptions to this pattern, and they were extreme cases. For example, when Patrick overestimated his skiing ability and created a dangerous situation (discussed later), he became more humble, but only after the board of directors formally disciplined him and group members overtly and harshly criticized him. His error was so egregious that members teased him for several years following the event. Perhaps Patrick was humbled by this situation because of the extraordinary pressure the group put on him; in almost all other cases, however, male rescuers maintained their confidence even after performing poorly.

3. There were some objective differences between women's and men's performance, which Peak's women realized. For the most part, this difference was physical. As Brooke noted, on the whole, the men in the group were stronger than the women, especially for the type of tasks required of rescue work, which can require a great deal of upper body strength. For example, the women were physically less able than the men to haul a rope, to carry the stretcher down a steep trail, or to ride a snowmobile (increased body mass greatly aids steering and control, as does upper body strength). Of course, there were women in Peak who were young and fit, and there were men who were old and out of shape. However, I never witnessed a situation where a woman outperformed a man when it came to upper body strength. Peak's women's physical strength lay in their endurance and in their legs. Thus, I observed many times when some women could outhike some men and even carry heavier packs. Yet, overall, Peak's men physically outperformed the women.

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