



canadianavalancheassociation



Diversity, Inclusion and Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding

Industry in Canada

FULL REPORT



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Executive Summary

Introduction & Background

This report details findings from a 2019 study that inquired into the experiences of guides and avalanche workers in Canada, as they related to diversity, inclusion, and mental health in their workplaces and in industry association courses and exams. This study was undertaken as a collaborative effort by the Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA), the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG), and the Canadian Ski Guides Association (CSGA). It was conducted by Lotus Mountain Consulting Inc., a Canadian-based research consulting firm that specializes in diversity, leadership and mental health in mountain-based professions, on behalf of the CAA, ACMG, and CSGA. The suicide rate in the profession is approximately six times the national average (CAA, 2016); and, research in other related professions have found that diversity and inclusion issues may negatively impact worker wellbeing (AFE, 2016; Reimer & Eriksen, 2018).

Summary of Findings

DIVERSITY and INCLUSION

- **46% of females reported experiencing gender discrimination**; the most significant factor was perceptions of females as less competent than males.
- **27% of females reported experiencing sexual harassment**; of these, 27% were touched inappropriately. Client or guest-initiated sexual harassment is 40% of total sexual harassment; **60% is initiated by peers or supervisors**.
- **Nine incidents of sexual harassment** described in this study were **initiated by supervisor, examiner, instructor, or mentor**.
- **14.6% choose to report** experiences of sexual harassment.

MENTAL HEALTH

- **57% experience mental health challenges** in their professional roles.
- 1 out of 4 visible minorities have experienced suicide attempts or thoughts; 1 out of 3 non-binary genders have experienced suicide attempts or thoughts.
- Females experience mental health challenges 6% more than males in the industry.

- **18% of guides and avalanche workers report no access to mental health supports.**

DESIRE FOR CHANGE

- Guides and avalanche workers indicated a desire for increased minority representation; increased involvement from associations to provide support, education and awareness, and accountability for gender discrimination and sexual harassment issues.
- Guides and avalanche workers indicated a desire for increased access to mental health supports, greater skills and capacity building, and re-structuring of the industry to prevent mental health crises.

Conclusion: Respect and Resilience

The avalanche and guiding profession in Canada is poised for significant cultural change. A diverse, inclusive, respectful and resilient future in the profession is possible with timely and sustained commitment to continued collaboration with mutual accountability across the industry amongst professional associations and employers. Based on the findings in this study, strategic action steps should focus on: 1) Supporting members who are experiencing discrimination, harassment, and mental health challenges; 2) Education and awareness about harmful behaviours and beliefs, including cultivating shared values around diversity, inclusion, respect, and resilience; and, 3) Accountability mechanisms for all professional members.

Report Outline

This report begins with an outline of the research process and methods used to collect the data, including the scope and limitations. Secondly, it shares findings from the study in three sub-headings: 1) Culture; 2) Diversity and Inclusion; and, 3) Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession. Third, study conclusions are shared in the context of other related research and industry norms. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations for action, based on participant feedback and a summary of known best practices for organizational cultural change.

About Lotus Mountain Consulting, Inc.

Rachel D. Reimer (MA, PhD candidate), lead researcher and CEO at Lotus Mountain, began her work on leadership and organizational change with the United Nations in Lebanon over a decade ago. Gender, leadership, and conflict resolution were the primary foci of her

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early career. She transitioned into emergency response in Canada with the British Columbia Wildfire Service in 2012, and while working as a fire crew leader, conducted a provincial study into gender, leadership and culture. Her study, *The Wildfire Within* (2018), was nominated for the Nelson Mandela Award and the Governor General Gold Medal Award of Canada, and was a catalyst for cultural change in the profession.

Lotus Mountain's research-based method for investigating leadership, diversity, and effects on wellbeing have been shared with clients and academic institutions worldwide to support and guide organizational cultural change. The Lotus Mountain team brings together expertise from Rachel's networks in the non-profit, military, professional, and academic communities worldwide, using an innovative approach to organizational cultural change. Rachel's deep operational experience in militarized contexts, wildland fire, guiding, and avalanche work bring a practical and grounded approach to her consulting practice.

Introduction: Focus and Framing

Background

This national-level inquiry into issues of diversity, inclusion and mental health in the avalanche and guiding industry in Canada emerged organically. The industry has a history of discussion focused on ‘human factors’ (McClung, 2002), a concept that refers to human perception, bias, and heuristics (Canadian Avalanche Association, 2017; McClung & Shaerer, 2006). Notably, the focus on decision-making in the snow sciences has included increased calls for more attention to group formation (Zwiefel & Haegeli, 2014). In 2016, a team of 21 practitioners and researchers recommended an increase in behavioural science research in the avalanche and guiding industry (Gale *et al.*, 2016).

In a natural progression from these calls for increased focus on human behaviour, a province-wide study into leadership and gender in a similarly mountain-based profession was shared at the 2017 CAA Spring Meetings in Penticton, British Columbia. The British Columbia Wildfire Service study (Reimer, 2017) shared how cultural norms valued femininity, and female leaders as ‘less than’ masculinity, and male leaders (Reimer & Eriksen, 2018). Notably, this study highlighted how men also experience negative impacts to their wellbeing from having to perform a more ‘macho’ masculinity than came naturally to them (Reimer & Eriksen, 2018). In other research, links have been made between hyper masculinity in traditionally male-dominated workplaces, with increased mental health risks for leaders practicing non-hyper-masculine leadership (Gardiner & Tiggeman, 1999). Performance of certain ‘macho’ types of masculinity among leaders of all genders have been linked to decreased wellbeing (Courtney, 2000), and gendered cultural norms have been shown to contribute to workplace-induced PTSD (AFE, 2016). In the preface to the wildfire study presentation, CAA Executive Director Joe Obad shared that, according to unofficial estimates, the Canadian avalanche and guiding industry had approximately six times Canada’s national suicide rate (Obad, 2017).

The avalanche and guiding industry shared predominantly white male demographic norms with the wildland fire workforce, including a focus on physical strength based skill sets (Reimer, 2017). These academic insights resonated deeply with practitioners who attended the conference, and questions were raised about whether similar cultural values existed within the

avalanche and guiding industry. Concerns were also expressed about what the possible effects may be on both male and female worker wellbeing amongst guides and avalanche workers. One month following the 2017 CAA Spring Meetings, on June 5, 2017, Dean Flick, “a quiet and modest, but gifted leader” and ACMG rock guide and Apprentice Alpine guide, died by suicide at age 49 (Beglinger, 2018, p. 8). As coworkers and the guiding and avalanche community grieved his loss, questions about mental health and worker wellbeing subsequently emerged in industry literature (Jones, 2018) with a new openness and candor.

In the fall of 2017, as a follow-up to the spring 2017 session, the ACMG and CAA hosted Continuing Professional Development workshops, *Leading with Excellence on Diverse Teams* in Canmore, Alberta, Revelstoke, and British Columbia that further explored the issues raised at the CAA Spring Meetings (Reimer, 2017 October; 2017 November). The small group sessions in Canmore and Revelstoke with guides and avalanche workers confirmed anecdotally that issues related to cultural norms valuing masculinity as strength, and femininity as weakness, had negative effects for both leader effectiveness and on wellbeing for workers who were striving to ‘fit in’ to what appeared to be an exclusive culture—at perhaps great personal cost. These internal discussions within the industry were to be mirrored in Canadian society.

The emergence of the #MeToo movement in October 2017 brought the conversation about workplace and public sexual harassment and discrimination to the international stage (Keplinger et al., 2018). The #MeToo movement became “the largest social movement in history” as men and women across the world tagged #MeToo on their social media posts in acknowledgement of having shared experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination. While this movement has had arguably mixed outcomes, one result in the initial stages was a shift away from stigma and shame amongst victims, towards solidarity, with 12 million posts to social media within the first 48 hours of the movement’s inception (Keplinger et al., 2018). Across the world, inquiry into the cause-and-effect of discrimination and harassment revealed damaging cultural norms in many industries.

The global and local effects of these early conversations about harassment, discrimination, and mental health spurred additional reflection within the avalanche and guiding industry in Canada. Given the synchronous events of the wildland fire study; mental

health concerns related to suicide; and, the emergence of a lively national and international debate about harassment and discrimination and workplace norms; a commitment to further investigation was consolidated amongst leaders in the avalanche and guiding profession. In the spring and summer of 2018, plans were made to inquire into the nature of the systemic cultural norms within the avalanche and guiding industry related to diversity, inclusion and mental health and wellbeing.

This study was the first national collaboration across multiple industry associations on these issues to date in the avalanche and guiding profession. It represented a significant undertaking both in collaborative leadership, and in mutual accountability. Consistent meetings took place with the lead researcher and industry leaders over the time span from spring 2017 to the project's inception in fall 2018.

One factor that influenced, and perhaps drove, this process was the lead researcher's past research history in gender, leadership, and organizational cultural change, concurrent with her own gender identity as a young female, and, her work operationally in the field as a guide and avalanche worker. These dual roles as avalanche worker, guide, and researcher created an intersection of academic and operational experience that offered a unique opportunity for insight into the diversity, inclusion and mental health issues in the industry. On the whole, leaders responded to an invitation to further engage with these complex issues with curiosity, openness, and a willingness to lean in.

It is also important to note that given the diversity of perspectives present amongst the team on this project, successful collaboration towards a commitment to inquire into the cultural norms within the profession was achieved in part by cultivating shared values. These values were guideposts that helped shape both the process of collaboration, and the content of the inquiry itself.

Shared Values

- Non-judgemental;
- Blame and shame-free dialogue amongst all perspectives on the issues; and,
- A commitment to use the research-based inquiry to make an informed decision about the necessity for, and effectiveness of, cultural change in the industry.

Future inquiry into complex issues that require collaborative leadership would do well to focus on cultivating shared values as the first step in any change process.

Research Methods

This study utilized social science research to inquire into the beliefs, actions, behaviours, and values of guides and avalanche workers during a specific timeframe. In particular, this study used a specific social science approach to gathering data for the purpose of supporting organizational learning, known as Action Research (AR). AR supports organizational cultural change by a three-part cycle of: look, think, act (Stringer, 2014). The AR process has been proven as an effective research tool for leadership in organizations and industrial applications when the goal is to investigate a collective challenge, with the aim of transforming that challenge into an opportunity for growth and organizational learning. The purpose of AR is to facilitate a collaborative problem-solving process with built-in pauses for reflection and feedback. The result is effective collaboration to address complex cultural challenges within organizations and industries, enhanced ownership of change efforts, and therefore enhanced possibilities for consistent positive change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Reitsma-Street & Brown, 2004; Stringer, 2014).

This particular study did not follow the traditional three-part cycle, in that it *recommends* action steps based on the data, but stopped short of facilitating or directing action steps. This built-in pause is strategic, with two goals: 1) To protect the autonomy of all industry associations; and, 2) To protect the ethical imperatives related to researcher responsibility when/if harassment and discrimination issues are revealed. It created a clear start and end to this project, leaving the choice to act on recommendations, or not, in the hands of industry leaders.

This study thus used a moderated form of the AR process, which involved only the first two steps of the traditionally three-part cycle—*look*, and *think*—in what is known as the Action Research Engagement model (Rowe et al., 2013). This moderated form of the AR process has been used with success via Royal Roads University's graduate school of Leadership Studies. The end goal of this social science engagement is ultimately that leaders are well equipped with the information they need about the beliefs, actions, behaviours, and values of industry members, so that leadership choices on complex issues can be made with confidence based on findings in the data.

Ethics

Ethical imperatives in social science research were followed closely, as per the Canadian national academic guidelines for research involving humans (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, 2014). This study followed the Tri-Council ethics guidelines by providing a consent statement at the beginning of the survey, including the scope and limitations of the project, and how data is stored for future study, as a mandatory step prior to completing the study. Participants could withdraw at any time and their data would be destroyed. Participant anonymity was protected, and any instances where participants named other individuals, employers, or specific organizational circumstances, were not disclosed in any way.

Validity in the process of data analysis and arriving at findings was achieved by inquiring broadly into challenges, and recommended solutions from participants, with the goal of arriving at “more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604) facing guides and avalanche workers. As stated in the background section of this report, initial anecdotal findings arrived at during the *Leading with Excellence on Diverse Teams* Continuing Professional Development training courses were built upon to ensure that the study engaged an appropriate diversity of perspectives and was relevant to the lived experience of guides and avalanche workers. Survey questions were thoroughly vetted through two rounds of edits, with opportunity for feedback from a select group of guides and avalanche workers with diverse gender, ethnic, racial, and generational identities, as well as from industry leaders.

In order to mitigate researcher bias due to ‘insider’ status in the industry as both a guide and avalanche worker, and researcher, an external research reviewer was employed to review the data and findings (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). In addition, the lead researcher’s past experiences in gender research within male-dominated fields in the wildland fire industry, while simultaneously holding membership in that profession as a fire crew leader and certified tree faller, have built a robust series of critical self-reflection tools that are used during insider research to mitigate researcher bias, known as ‘self-reflexivity’ (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Yost & Chmielewski, 2013). These include keeping a process journal during research; daily meditation and mindfulness; and, consistent therapeutic support to process and resolve any

psychological responses within the researcher to disclosures of sexual harassment, mental health challenges, or other trauma from amongst participants.

Scope and Limitations

This study was limited in scope to active and professional members of the three sponsoring organizations: the CAA, ACMG, and CSGA. 'Active and professional membership' were defined by each organizations' own standards and criteria, including but not limited to: paying annual membership dues, maintaining accurate contact information via online member databases, and completing required Continuing Professional Development hours and/or exams as per the professional standards of each organization. The lead researcher at no time held the contact information for, or had access to, members' personal information. Survey link invitations and follow-ups were shared via each organizations' own confidential and secure mailing list (see Appendix B for survey questions). This meant that retired, non-active, and/or aspiring members of each association were not included in this study. In addition, the study was limited by a timeframe within the winter of 2019 to ensure seasonal relevancy, encourage participation, and capture experiences as close to their point of origin in time as possible.

The scope and limitations as outlined above may have affected study findings in any number of ways, including but not limited to:

- Reducing insights into barriers to entry experienced by minorities who are aspiring guides and avalanche workers.
- Reducing insights into experiences of forms of generational discrimination experienced by retired members who may feel they were 'aged out' of their roles.
- Reducing insights into experiences of industry members who—for whatever reason—may have been unable to continue remaining a professional or active member.

Anecdotal evidence over the course of this study indicated that some of those excluded may offer important insights into how motherhood or parenting has compromised workers' abilities to maintain active or professional membership in industry associations; and, how females and other minorities amongst the aspiring guides and avalanche worker cohort may be experiencing additional barriers to entry due to their gender or other identity factors.

This study, by nature of the scope and limitations, will miss these important insights, which should be considered in future studies. Future research design may take into account the existing methods of contact that industry associations have with both aspiring, retired, or non-active members. It is important to note that there still remain voices that are unheard, and that holding an active or professional membership is in itself a position of privilege vis-à-vis those who do not.

In addition, within the body of research on gender, harassment, and discrimination, it has been noted that white males may self-exclude from participating in research on these topics, due to perceiving participation as a 'threat' to their value system (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001), or due to perceiving themselves as exempt from the topics (Kimmel, 2010). This may have meant that some men self-selected to not participate. Similarly, some women in traditionally male-dominated workplaces may create a workplace persona of toughness or masculinity, which may in turn cause them to view openly discussing issues related to gender identity as a threat (Eriksen, 2014; Reimer & Eriksen, 2018).

Finally, given the small size of the industry, though anonymity of participants was protected and thoroughly communicated throughout the process, there were fears expressed by some participants that they felt 'unsafe' sharing their experiences. The power of stigma in preventing participants from sharing even in anonymous, online research environments is a factor. It is possible that those with deeply traumatizing experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination in the industry may have self-selected to not participate, due to lack of trust and sense of safety. The courage of those who chose to participate, and who continue to engage openly in cultivating greater understanding through public roles, should be recognized and celebrated.

While this study is a strong start at understanding diversity, inclusion, and mental health experiences shared by guides and avalanche workers, these are complex issues that will require careful study in the years ahead.

Findings

This section contains the findings from the study. It begins with an overview of the participants, including total responses, demographics, and a short qualitative analysis. It then shares findings under three broad headings: 1) Culture; 2) Diversity and Inclusion; and, 3) Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession.

Findings were arrived at using a process of data analysis that ‘codes’ the data based on participants’ own words. For example, in the case of culture in the avalanche and guiding profession, the word ‘exclusive’ was used with the highest frequency out of any other word, phrase, or concept. The findings thus summarize which words and concepts participants are using, based on the most frequent, or ‘strongest’, in the data. Any differentiation, nuances, or complexity are explained further in each section. Participant quotes have been carefully selected to include those most representative of the strongest themes in the data.

Study Demographics

An online survey was sent out to all three organizations’ active and professional member email lists. The survey was anonymous; participants were able to edit their responses (only one chose to do so); and data was stored on Canadian servers via SurveyMonkey™. The survey was open from January until the end of March, 2019 for a total of three months during the height of the backcountry skiing, winter alpine guiding, and avalanche work season.

A total of 514 guides and avalanche workers completed the survey out of approximately 1400 guides and avalanche workers in the industry total. Overall, unofficial averages put the industry at approximately 15–20% female (K. Anthony-Malone, personal communication, CAA, 2019; P. Tucker, personal communication, ACMG, 2019). The survey responses came from 70% male, and 27.9% female respondents. This means that survey findings are relatively representative of the industry, given the high percentage of males who completed the survey.

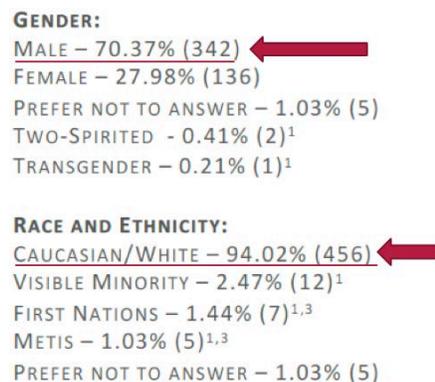


Figure 1 Gender, race & ethnicity

The data displayed in Figure 2 describes the membership affiliations of participants, and shows significant overlapping membership. This is important to note when considering action steps, including mutual accountability between industry associations. The data displayed in Figure 3 shows that the highest concentration of participants were those between the ages of 35–44, and between 10–20 years of tenure in their guiding and avalanche work careers. In Figure 1, the data shows that males participated most. It also shows that most participants identified as binary genders (e.g. *either male or female*), with only three individuals identifying as either transgendered or ‘Two-Spirited’—a uniquely First Nations gender identity. It is a term that emerged into English in 1990 from the Ojibwe term “*niizh manidoowag* (two spirits)”, and is common across the Mi’kmaq, Cree and Haida. In many Native Canadian traditions “the Two Spirit was looked on as having the ability to walk in two worlds, physical and spiritual, thereby

CAA – 74.64% (365)
PROFESSIONAL – (216)
ACTIVE – (135)
OTHER - (9)¹

ACMG – 60.33%: (295)
HIKE AND CLIMB – (103)
ALPINE AND ROCK – (36)
SKI AND MOUNTAIN- (189)
OTHER – (7)¹

CSGA – 15.75% (77)
ANY LEVEL
OTHER CSGA

Figure 2 Membership representation

AGE:
18-24 – 2.26% (11)¹
25-34 – 24.07% (117)
35-44 – 36.01% (175)
45-54 – 19.75% (96)
55-64 – 13.99% (68)
65+ - 3.91% (19)²

EXPERIENCE:
LESS THAN 1 YEAR - 3.1% (15)
1-3 YEARS - 14.67% (71)
4-10 YEARS – 27.69% (134)
10-20 YEARS - 29.55% (143)
20+ YEARS – 25% (121)

Figure 2 Age and experience

having the ability to move between the worlds to learn and teach about balance” (Robinson, 2014, p. 23). The identity was considered both spiritual, and also gendered or sexual, with subtle shifts happening over an individuals’ lifetime.

It is difficult to assess

where the Canadian avalanche and guiding industry sits amongst other populations in terms of gender fluidity, diversity, and inclusion. There is considerable disagreement in the data globally on the prevalence of gender fluidity within populations, because what constitutes ‘gender fluidity’ is inconsistent. However, the national average of those who identify as transgender within the United States hovers around 0.6% of the total population (Flores et al., 2016). Canadian statistics are unavailable. With a total population of 1400 in the guiding and avalanche community, to be on par with current available gender fluidity statistics, we could expect between eight to nine gender fluid individuals to identify as transgendered or gender

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fluid, as opposed to the one who identified in this study as transgender, with two identifying as Two-Spirited.

The next section addresses the findings: 1) Culture; 2) Diversity and Inclusion; and, 3) Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession.

1. Culture

Workplace culture means the shared patterns of behavior, and shared basic assumptions, that are learned by a group as they experience the day-to-day problem-solving required in order to perform their work objectives (Schein, 2010). These patterns of behavior have been called many terms in organizational cultural research, including ‘mental models’ (Senge, 2006), or frames, lenses, perspectives, and so on (Boleman & Deal, 2013), all of them more or less interchangeable. Culture can be difficult to define, and often shows itself in subtle behaviours that are challenging to identify in the moment, and may be more obvious in hindsight reflection.

What is the avalanche and guiding industry culture?

The guiding and avalanche professional culture was defined, in order of strongest in the data, as: 1) Exclusive; 2) Professional; 3) Safety-oriented; and, 4) Learning and evolving. The words most frequently used to explain ‘exclusive’ were ‘bro-culture’, ‘male-dominated,’ and ‘old boys club.’

Exclusive Culture

‘Exclusive’ was described in many ways by guides and avalanche workers, and was used in complex ways both negatively and positively:

“Proud, highly technical, high standards, good governance. Also–ego driven, not self-aware, male dominated, bro culture.”

“Sometimes very ‘jock’ ‘football’ mentality. Very focused on how good someone appears to be on a skill level but less as a human.”

“A mountain culture that started as against the norm 100 years ago now seems very closed minded to difference.”

“Safety is used as an excuse to retain male-dominance.”

“It is a culture that has prized individual accomplishment. It has generally allowed people with dominating personalities and large egos to shape the industry from the top.”

The commentary on what ‘exclusivity’ means from amongst guides and avalanche workers points to a connection between perceptions of competence and performing a certain type of masculinity, associated with ‘bro’ or ‘male-dominated’ behaviours. There appear to be fears that opening up the culture to become more inclusive may require a reduction in safety, competence, or high performance. In this way, exclusivity seems to be seen as perhaps a necessary, but unwanted (by some) part of the culture of avalanche work and guiding. These behaviours and values focused on exclusivity are both individual and *collective values*, due to the strength of this theme in the data. This link between being an exclusive culture (certain types of masculinity ‘win’ over others) and fostering a culture of effectiveness or competence, are typical of male-dominated workplaces with physically strenuous job requirements.

Other research has shown that these patterns of exclusivity based on performing a certain type of masculine behaviour are deeply entrenched over time not only by a dominant few, but because these individual behaviours are sustained by organizational behaviours that reward those who ‘win’ over other men or women (Ely & Kimmel, 2018). There are four measures that take into account masculinity in male-dominated workplaces that show how exclusivity is fostered and maintains a stronghold—even despite written policies that may support inclusivity. These four measures are summarized in the form of cultural norms that are present:

1. Show no weakness;
2. Strength and stamina;
3. Put work first; and
4. ‘Dog eat dog’ (Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Glick, Berdahl, Alonso, 2018).

These types of beliefs originated in childhood behaviours of ‘one-upmanship’ through showing physical strength in the playground—games that most often involved only boys, or a few girl ‘tomboys’. The ‘proving ground’ of one’s toughness and masculinity shifts as men age from the playground to the workplace, and these beliefs are especially likely to form in traditionally

male-dominated workplaces (Glick *et al.*, 2018). These types of beliefs and associated behaviours are correlated with having “toxic leaders, a heterosexist culture, lower psychological team safety, and less support for work–life balance”, and were correlated with sexual harassment, bullying, and sabotaging other workers (Glick *et al.*, 2018, p. 466). Interestingly, this study (which examined four different workplaces) also found that these types of beliefs created negative experiences for both men and women in these workplaces, which aligns with both this data set from the avalanche and guiding industry in Canada, and the BC Wildfire study (Glick *et al.*, 2018; Reimer & Eriksen, 2018; Reimer, 2019). When the cultural norms in a workplace focus on exclusivity, maintained through competition, the more negative aspects of masculinity rise to the surface, rather than cooperative elements present within masculinity (Glick *et al.*, 2018).

Behaviours that challenge workplace cultural norms around exclusivity based on competition and hyper masculinity are possible. The Glick *et al.* study (2018) recommended that:

1. *Show no weakness* can be mitigated by leaders showing humility;
2. Valorizing *strength and stamina* could be mitigated by embracing those who offer safety concerns, and ask for help as ‘courageous’;
3. *Put work first* could be mitigated by rewarding workers who expressed work–life balance boundaries; and,
4. *Dog eat dog* competition could be mitigated by carefully examining existing reward and punishment practices, including (and especially) ‘social rewards’ for behaviours within groups.

These findings mirror requests from workers in both the BC Wildfire study, and from amongst guides and avalanche workers in this data set, for increased openness and engagement with damaging cultural norms, for the purpose of increasing psychological safety and wellbeing for all workers regardless of gender identity or ability to ‘perform’ masculinity (Reimer & Eriksen, 2018; Reimer, 2019).

Professional Culture

‘Professional’ was described by guides and avalanche workers as primarily neutral or positive:

“Like-minded people with a shared connection to the mountains.”

“The purpose of our industry is serving risk management for others in the mountain environment. Our technical practices and language are well developed to serve this. There does exist variations of attitude and approach to professionalism that are resemblance of personal style.”

“A group of mutually inspired persons who love the outdoors and want to share their passion for the outdoors and foster environmental stewardship, at the same time promoting professionalism and safety in activities we are guiding.”

The descriptions of culture as professional closely mirrored the organizational and industry mission statements, and were primarily focused on technical risk management and safety. This seemed to indicate that professionalism is a process of decision-making, and a set of associated behaviours, which was perceived as being neutral, or ‘rational’. Males aged 45+ tended to hold this perspective of the culture as primarily focused on a neutral/rational form of professionalism. The perceived neutrality of ‘professionalism’ is interesting to note in the data, and will be discussed in tandem with ‘safety-focused’, the third strongest theme in the data on guiding and avalanche culture, below.

Safety-Focused

Similar to professionalism, participants described ‘safety’ in neutral or positive terms. Since there was a stronger use of the word ‘professionalism’ in the data, as distinguished from ‘safety’, the two were separated into two distinct categories. Among participants explanations, professionalism seemed to denote an array of behaviours, while safety was seen as an outcome:

“Minimizing risks, always being aware of the potential consequences of the decisions you make.”

“Keeping people safe in the mountains.”

“Guiding culture has a purpose to work towards safety of guests and co-workers, while providing exceptional outdoor experiences for clients via risk assessment/management, logistics and clear communications with co-workers and similar organizations.”

Professionalism and risk management are decision-making processes that provide for an ideal outcome—safety of those involved in mountain travel. The perceived neutrality of ‘professionalism’ and ‘safety’ amongst guides and avalanche workers who shared in this study is worth questioning here.

Given that the primary cultural norm is ‘exclusive’, and, as one participant explained, “safety is used as an excuse to retain male dominance”—how could ‘professionalism’ and ‘safety’ as cultural norms be used to reinforce male-dominance?

‘Rational’ has been a traditionally associated with linear, systematic thinking, as opposed to ‘intuitive’, which is associated with holistic and experiential ways of knowing (Dane *et al*, 2011). There are strong associations that link rational decision-making with masculinity, and intuitive decision-making with femininity, with rational/masculine being valued as more ‘accurate’ or representative of ‘reality’ than intuitive/feminine ways of knowing (Nelson, 2010). In addition, professionalism vis-à-vis risk tolerance and risk management is not perceived as ‘neutral’. There are perceptions that males take more risks than females—or that females have less risk tolerance—both in business and in the mountain guiding profession (Maxfield *et al*, 2010; Walker & Latosuo, 2015). In both a study of business leaders (Maxfield *et al*, 2010) and in a recent study of mountain guides and decision-making during the 2014 Denali guiding season (Walker & Latosuo, 2015), female leaders and mountain guides were perceived as taking less risks by their peers, while statistically there were no actual differences. It is important to note that while respondents in this current study shared ‘professional’ as a neutral/rational aspect of culture due to historical ideals, the concept of professionalism may be gendered – meaning,

associated with the rational/masculine, and exclusive of intuitive/feminine. This may mean that 'professional' and 'safe' are more easily associated with male guides and avalanche workers than with female guides and avalanche workers.

In addition, participants' own working definitions and explanations of what 'professionalism' meant implied that there are actions and behaviours which are *not* 'professional.' There is an unanswered question about *who decides* which behaviours, and individuals, are 'professional', and which behaviours or individuals are not. In the case of cultural norms, this could be reflective of in-group favouritism (we 'like' those who act in ways that align with our own values, in this case, 'our' group's definition of 'professionalism') and out-group bias (we don't like those who don't align with 'our' group's definition of 'professionalism'). This may explain how, for some guides and avalanche workers, 'safety' or 'professionalism' are not experienced as neutral concepts, but are used by a group, workplace, or perhaps an entire profession, to facilitate in-group favouritism and out-group bias.

Learning and Evolving

'Learning and evolving' was the fourth strongest cultural norm shared by participants. This indicated that the value placed on cultural change was high for many, and that perceptions of change are shared amongst a diverse group. 'Learning and evolving' was often shared in statements that mixed a critical assessment of the culture with positive hope for different outcomes in the future:

"Overall I find it to be a healthy industry of individuals who are dedicated to growth and moving away from a patriarchal system to an inclusive environment. I personally feel the culture still has a lot of changing to do but is moving rapidly in the right direction."

"Quite open to new concepts directly relevant to work in the field. Fairly open to new ideas around teamwork and group management. Still generally heavily dependent on alcohol and other stimulants to balance the stress/responsibility of the job. A very male-oriented culture that has significant focus on maintaining its overtly masculine perspectives."

Creating a learning culture, or becoming a learning organization, requires an ongoing commitment to examine beliefs, behaviours, and mental patterns with a critical eye and a willingness to change and grow into new, innovative, beliefs, behaviours and mental patterns (Senge, 2006). Perceptions of positive change that were expressed in this study are difficult to ground in concise data, given how new the introduction of social science research is within the avalanche and guiding industry. The complex ways guides and avalanche workers explained their perceptions of change in this study also raise questions about whether framing their negative experiences (e.g. patriarchy, male domination, alcohol reliance) as 'changing' is a coping mechanism that enables them to stay committed to a career that they would otherwise need to reconsider, and perhaps leave, if unwanted cultural norms were perceived as stagnant and resistant to change.

In addition, the identity of those who feel change needs to happen most may affect their perceptions. Males under 44 years of age shared most in ways that were critical of the culture as needing to change. It is possible that identity (gender, ethnic, racial, and/or mental health status) and the interrelated issues of stigma may cause some to be more sensitive to change, and thus willing to be early adopters of change, or even change agents in their own workplaces. In the same way, identity factors may cause others to resist, obstruct, or stigmatize those who initiate change.

There is a shortage of longitudinal studies (those that measure changes over time) in the profession that would indicate more objectively if indeed positive change is occurring, and if identity factors are correlated with early adoption of change and/or innovation. The intersection of social and behavioural sciences into the avalanche and guiding profession is still emerging. More research in regular cycles is needed to provide an adequate sense of the changes happening in the workplace culture on diversity, inclusion and mental health.

[Avalanche and Guiding Culture Summary](#)

Guides and avalanche workers shared their perceptions of the workplace and organizational cultures they interact within as: 1) Exclusive; 2) Professional; 3) Safety-oriented; and, 4) Learning and evolving. Cultural norms are formed in subtle and overt ways, and often may not be obvious to those in the midst of the working or instructional group. The complex

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ways participants shared about their experiences of culture point to how perceptions of neutrality around 'professional' and 'safety-focused' may in fact, be hiding in-group favouritism and out-group bias. This is especially likely given that males over age 45 tended to hold more neutral-positive perceptions, while younger males and females were more critical. Perceptions surrounding risk management, leader effectiveness, and in-group favouritism/out-group bias are ripe for engagement should the industry aim to move towards more inclusive cultural norms in the future.

The subsequent sections of the findings addresses: 2) Diversity and Inclusion; and, 3) Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession.

2. Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity can be understood in this study as both ‘surface level’ visible differences in identity, as well as the ‘deep level’ differences that may be invisible (Nkomo *et al*, 2019).

Gender, racial, or ethnic identity would factor as both surface and deep level diversity, while mental health and sexual orientation would factor as deep level diversity.

Inclusion can be understood in this study as ‘institutional inclusion’, which is equal access to resources within an organization, and also ‘social inclusion’, which is equal treatment by others (Caivano, 2016).

This section begins by engaging with perceptions of diversity and inclusion amongst guides and avalanche workers, and then explores findings around gender differences, experiences of gender discrimination and sexual harassment shared by guides and avalanche workers, and reporting rates and outcomes.

Is the avalanche and guiding profession diverse?

Guides and avalanche workers were given a Statistics Canada definition for ‘diversity’, and asked if, by this general definition, the profession was diverse:

*A diverse workplace is defined as one where workers have an array of identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives and experiences that are representative of Canada’s current and evolving population.
(Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Canadian Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, 2017).*

Within this study, 60.8% said no, 28.2% said yes, and 5.5% said both. There were a handful of outliers who described the profession as ‘very diverse’, and focus primarily on diversity of skillset or previous career history. All those who identified the profession as ‘very diverse’ were male.

Demographics are not readily available for the industry itself to correlate with the perceptions of diversity amongst guides and avalanche workers in this study. The Canadian Avalanche Association data in the spring of 2019 put total membership at 15% female (K. Anthony-Malone, personal communication, 2019). By comparison, oil, gas and mining in

Canada is between 2.8–4.2% of the total workforce according to 2016 data (Catalyst, 2019). Perception of a lack of diversity may be a factor in the sense of belonging amongst minorities currently in the profession, and may also hinder aspirant guides and avalanche workers. Conversely, given the prevalence of white males in the profession, white males may feel an increased sense of belonging both amongst those currently in the profession and amongst aspirants, as industry leaders may be drawn to those who are ‘like them’, and vice versa (Van Knippenberg, 2011).

Is the avalanche and guiding profession inclusive?

Guides and avalanche workers were given the Canadian Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion’s definition for ‘inclusion’, and asked if, by this general definition, the profession was inclusive:

An inclusive workplace is defined as being fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful. It recognizes, values, and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences, and perspectives (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Canadian Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, 2017).

Within this study, 68.6% said yes, 23.4% said no, and 5.1% said both. This reveals that there is a perception that the profession is inclusive, even with the strongest cultural norm being identified as ‘exclusive’, and when directly asked, participants indicated that the profession is ‘not diverse’. Participants explained their answers:

“Yes, but really we are quite similar people in general so it’s pretty easy to be inclusive to like-minded people.”

“No. I think they think they are because they believe themselves to be open and easy going but due to many barriers to entry, there are not a lot of non-white, non-male professionals in our industry. If there were, and these places were faced with more diverse resumes, I think they would have trouble putting their bias aside.”

It appears strictly from the statistical analysis that guides and avalanche workers believe that they are acting in inclusive ways towards their coworkers, and that they hold shared values of inclusivity as per the Canadian Task Force's definition provided. It is plausible that the behaviours of inclusion would not necessarily guarantee that the guiding and avalanche profession be 'diverse' in the sense of accurately representing the diversity statistics as present in Canadian society, given the competitive entrance requirements into the profession that are based on physical strength, mental toughness, and so on.

However, it is also worth remembering here that the cultural value placed on 'professionalism' and 'safety-focused' were perceived as neutral or positive by some, and exclusionary by others. It is more likely that the disconnect between diversity and inclusion in these two findings is based on a lack of clarity around what constitutes inclusive behaviour, and what constitutes exclusive behaviour. The complex positive and negative ways that participants shared about culture may indicate that an **unconscious exclusivity** is at play, functioning through shared values that appear 'neutral', but in fact are not. What one individual or workplace believes to be a 'neutral shared value' may be seen by another individual or workplace as exclusive 'boys club' behaviour. A higher proportion of females respondents to this question articulated the feeling that they had to 'break in' to the exclusive culture, especially leadership roles.

Gender and Discrimination

In this study, 59.9% said that gender makes a difference in how people are treated in the avalanche and guiding profession, where 30.8% said that it doesn't make a difference. Guides and avalanche workers shared that differences in perceptions of competence were the primary reason, which aligns with the findings in the 2014 Denali study of mountain guides and decision-making (Walker & Latosuo, 2015). Females are seen on the whole as less competent than their male peers.

"As a white male, I am the sought after 'ideal' of a guide and I am treated as such."

“Yes, there is a huge assumption of competence if you are male. The opposite is present if you are female at our workplace. I have personally heard the one more senior female state that the only reason the guys like her at work is because she hardly talks.”

“Yes. If you are not white male, you better be ultra-competent and strong. Women going on maternity leave is an annoyance.”

Using the Canadian Human Rights Commission definition, this study defined gender discrimination as being treated differently based on gender (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2019). As depicted in Figure 4 below, the outer circle represents male experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination and the inner circle is female experiences. Both males and females aged 45+ were less likely to experience sexual harassment. This may show that guides and avalanche workers are not sharing historical (e.g. early career) experiences, but



Figure 3 Gender Imbalance of Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination

instead are sharing more recent experiences from the last 15 years or so, given the age spread amongst those who indicated that they have harassment and discrimination experiences.

From the data, experiences of gender discrimination were focused and placed in order of strongest or most frequent, to least strong or least frequent, as stated below:

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1. Females assumed less competent.
2. Family–work balance and motherhood.
3. Traditional gender roles.
4. Hostile, sexualized work environments.

We've explored the issues surrounding perceptions of competence thus far, and this ranking aligns with findings in other research both in mountain-based professions and in business leadership (Reimer & Eriksen, 2018; Maxfield *et al*, 2010; Walker & Latosuo, 2015).

Guiding and avalanche worker mothers were treated as if motherhood compromised their risk management abilities, which is a more overt experience of discrimination based on competence than non-mother females experience. Traditional gender roles were explained as females expected to be 'soft' or 'emotional' and take less physical tasks on, and engage in less risk in general. For males, there were expectations of being 'hard', 'unemotional' and take on more physical tasks and greater risk:

"I have seen expectations of males to buck up and hide their emotional trauma where women were embraced to show their emotions."

These findings also align with other studies in mountain-based professions, significantly, the negative effects on males who may have a tender side that is disallowed from full expression in a 'macho' workplace culture (Reimer & Eriksen, 2018). A hostile, sexualized environment was described as negative for many reasons:

"I am transgender. I am not 'out' to my coworkers. I fear that I would not be treated equally due to the comments and jokes I hear on a daily basis."

"I've been told by a male co-worker that my breasts are why guests like me. I've sat in a guides meeting where my physical attributes were discussed. I've been groped by male guides and clients."

Sexual Harassment

In the avalanche and guiding profession, sexual harassment was experienced by 27.2% of females in this study, and 4.1% of males. In ranked order of experiences shared most frequently, or factoring the strongest in the data, to those less frequent:

1. Hostile, sexualized work environment.
2. Unwanted touching.

In total, 27% of sexual harassment included unwanted touching. **There were nine incidents of sexual harassment shared that were initiated by a supervisor, mentor, examiner, or instructor. All industry associations were named in various incidents.** Guest-initiated sexual harassment makes up approximately 40% of sexual harassment incidents shared in this study.

60% of sexual harassment shared in this study was initiated by other guides and avalanche workers.

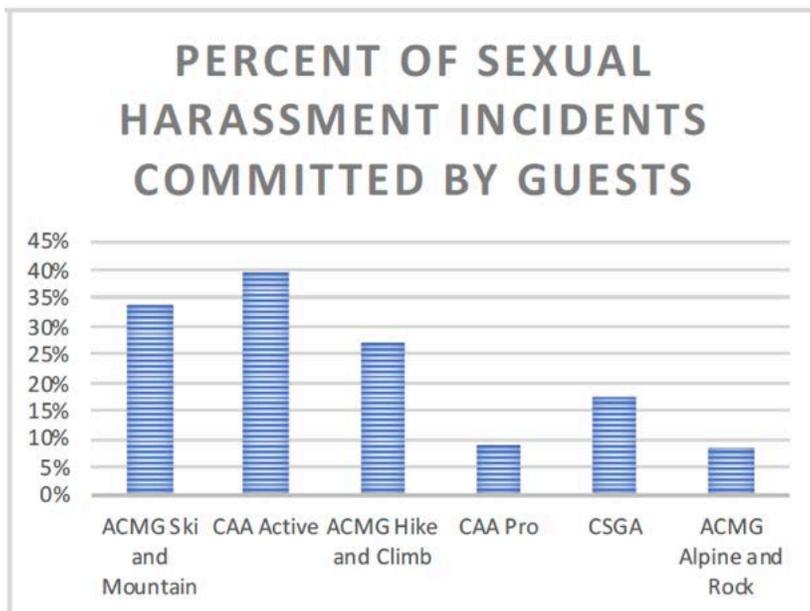
“A guiding mentor who puts his hands on me (and other females) in inappropriate places when he is intoxicated. I haven’t raised the issue because

of worries about

jeopardizing an otherwise valuable mentorship opportunity.”

“Male supervisors attempting to use their position to gain sexual favours.”

“A person abusing their power with intimidation and ultimately sexual advances



when I was a young guide. Guests walking into my room late at night. Guests

groping while drinking. People making jokes or sizing you up because of my gender happens every work shift.”

“Lodge staff, lodge girls are objects of guide/guest leerings.”

Comparative Statistics on Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

The Canadian Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion surveyed 12,000 public service workers across the nation and found that the key barriers to diversity and inclusion in the workplace were: 1) Bias–70%, 2) Discrimination–60%, and 3) Harassment–38% (Treasury Board of Canada, 2017).

Reporting discrimination in Canada is challenging. The Status of Women Canada report reveals that workplace-based discrimination focusing on wage inequality had women earning 83 cents to every man’s dollar (Status of Women Canada, 2012, p. 16). In the wildland fire industry, 44% of respondents to a 2016 survey experienced gender discrimination (AFE, 2016). Discrimination, or the belief that others are ‘less than’, enables other damaging workplace behaviours, such as sexual harassment.

Based on 2014 census data in Canada, sexual assault is listed as a ‘gendered crime’ meaning that it affects women more than men; women between the ages of 15–24 are most likely to be affected (71 out of 1000 women); and the Canadian national average is 37 per 1000 women based on reported incidences, or 3.7% (Canada Department of Justice, 2017). Since reporting rates are so low, the Canadian average is typically vastly underrepresented in census and police report data – 83% of incidents are not reported (Canada Department of Justice, 2017). Carleton University cites sexual violence prevalence at 1 in 3 women (which mirrors this study’s finding of 27.2%), and 1 in 6 men (Carleton University, 2019). In Canada, workplace sexual harassment data based on the 2016 census found that 4% of females experience sexual harassment in their workplace, compared to 1% of men (Hango & Moyser, 2018). More generally, the 2016 data showed that ‘harassment’ in the workplace, which includes “objectionable or unwelcome conduct, comments, or actions by an individual, at any event or location related to work, which can reasonably be expected to offend, intimidate, humiliate or degrade”, affected 19% of women and 13% of men in Canadian workplaces (Hango & Moyser,

2018, p. 1). It is also worth noting that gender-based violence, including sexual violence, is higher amongst transgender and LGBTQ2S individuals (Hango & Moyser, 2018).

The Association for Fire Ecology did an international study amongst fire professionals, which is a similar mountain-based profession, and found that 24% of their respondents had experienced sexual harassment (AFE, 2016). The Ontario Human Rights Commission lists male-dominated professions such as policing, military, mining, and firefighting as particularly prone to sexual harassment, though no numbers are cited (OHRC, 2019). See Figure 5 for comparative data.

Organization/Entity	Sexual Harassment Rates
<i>(Statistics Canada) National Average</i>	Female: 3.7%, or 7.1% for ages 15–24
<i>Canadian Workplace National Average</i>	Female: 4% Male: 1%
<i>Carleton University National Average</i>	Female: 33% Male: 16.7%
<i>Association for Fire Ecology, Wildfire</i>	Average: 24%
<i>Canadian Avalanche and Guiding Study</i>	Female: 27.2% Male: 4.1%

Figure 5

Reporting rates within the avalanche and guiding profession were 14.6% for those directly experiencing sexual harassment. Number are higher for those observing behaviours towards others (see Figure 6 below). The Canadian average is 17% (Canada Department of Justice, 2017).

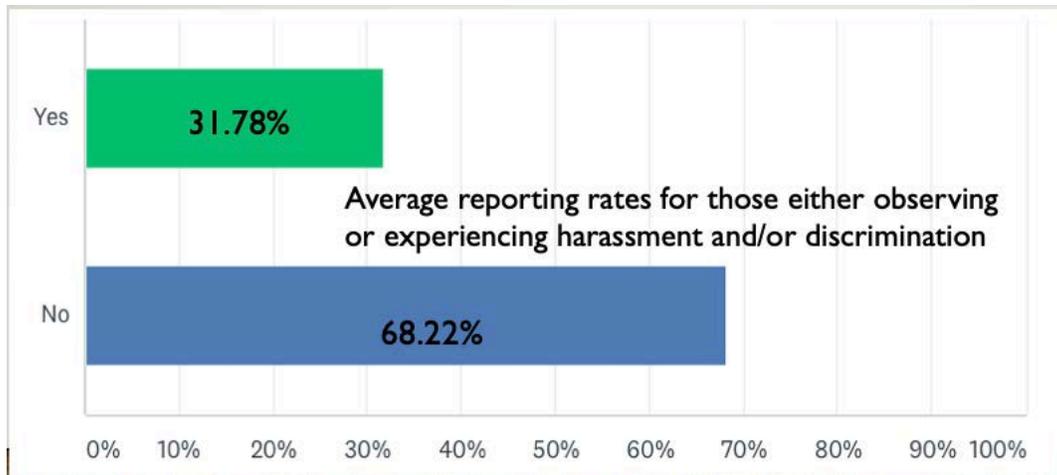


Figure 4 Average reporting rates for those either observing or experiencing harassment and/or discrimination

Response to Harassment Reporting



- Wasn't Resolved
- Open Discussion or Policy Change
- Confrontation of Offender
- No Safe Place to Report
- Guest Banned
- Written or Verbal Reprimand
- Termination of Offender

Figure 5 Response to Harassment Reporting

When guides and avalanche workers did report sexual harassment or discrimination, the responses were ranked in order, displayed in Figure 7. In wildland fire, reporting rates are higher, with approximately 37% for sexual harassment, and 40% for gender discrimination (AFE, 2016).

Effects on Worker Wellbeing

In ranked order of strongest in the data, the effects of the harassment and discrimination rates on workers were: 1) Anger; 2) Reduced trust; and, 3) Empathy from males towards females in the workplace. Males were more likely to indicate 'no negative effect' on their wellbeing due to harassment and discrimination.

Female guides and avalanche workers shared their perspectives:

"Mis-trust, insecurity, feelings of being undervalued. Depression, withdrawal, serious eating disorder, insomnia, stress."

"Some events were really quite traumatizing and took years to overcome. There's still a part of me that is

angry about it.”

“I’m generally quite guarded with men in the workplace. I have not pursued work in the industry further, because I don’t want to deal with it.”

Male guides and avalanche workers shared their perspectives:

“Horrible feeling. Embarrassment for the male kind.”

“Felt helpless to change the situation.”

“It was disappointing. I felt like women in the operation felt like they were unsafe. It was really upsetting to operations.”

Diversity and Inclusion Summary

Avalanche workers and guides in Canada experience challenges with inclusion and diversity that appear to be ubiquitous across Canadian society. Harassment and discrimination rates are higher than Canadian national averages, and roughly on par with other mountain-based traditionally male-dominated industries. In a report on the global cost of inequity at work, there is an average cost of \$23,620 per individual woman who would otherwise achieve income parity with her male colleagues (Wodon & De la Briere, 2018). The economic impacts of fostering inclusion and diversity for the avalanche and guiding industry, and for the rural Canadian economies that house them, are worth considering, employee turnover notwithstanding. The human cost in terms of worker wellbeing is inestimable.

The subsequent section of the findings explores: 3) Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession.

3. Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession

Mental health is “the state of your psychological and emotional wellbeing” (Government of Canada, 2018). In this study, guides and avalanche workers self-reported on their mental health mid-season during the winter months.

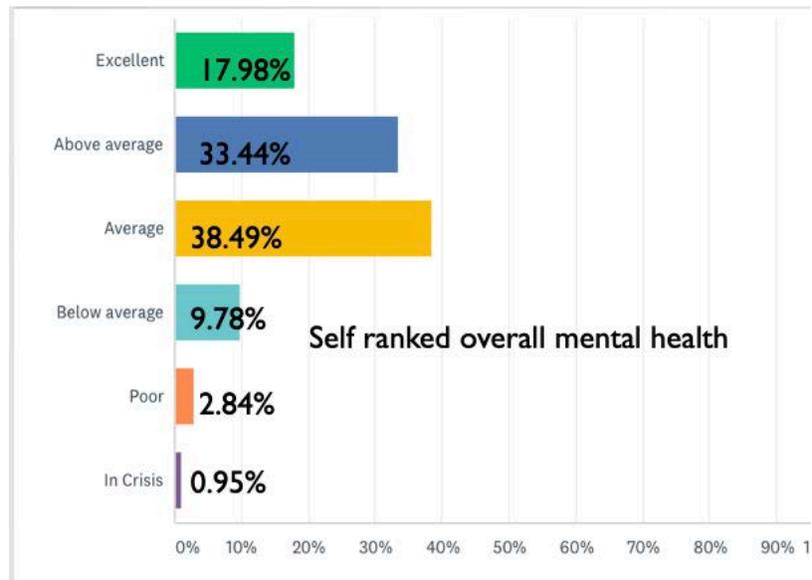


Figure 6 Self ranked overall mental health

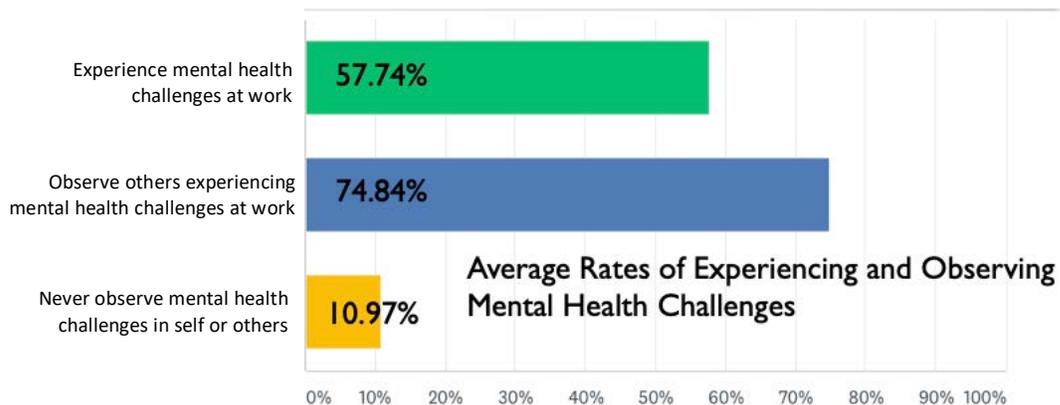


Figure 7 Average rates of experiencing and observing mental health challenges

Overall, mental health was highly ranked. When asked about ‘mental health challenges’, 57.74% of guides and avalanche workers indicated that they experience mental health challenges at work. A higher number, 74.84% indicated observing others experiencing mental health challenges at work; and 10.97% indicated never having observed mental health challenges in self or others (see Figure 9).

The types of mental health challenges associated with workplace experiences were ranked in strength. The top three were: 1) Physical or mental fatigue at 93.46%; 2) Prolonged

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exposure to high levels of workplace stress at 63.4%; and, 3) Exposure to critical incidents in the workplace, including fatalities at 61.44% (see Figure 10). Alcohol or other substance use did not factor strongly, though 2 out of 5 people indicated they used other substances and/or alcohol to mitigate stress.

Physical or mental fatigue	93.46%
Prolonged exposure to high levels of workplace stress	63.40%
Exposure to critical incidents in the workplace, including fatalities	61.44%
Loss of a friend, colleague or family member to suicide	37.25%
Social isolation	32.68%
No previous support from counsellor or doctor	26.80%
History of mental health challenges in self or family	26.80%

Figure 8 Types of mental health challenges

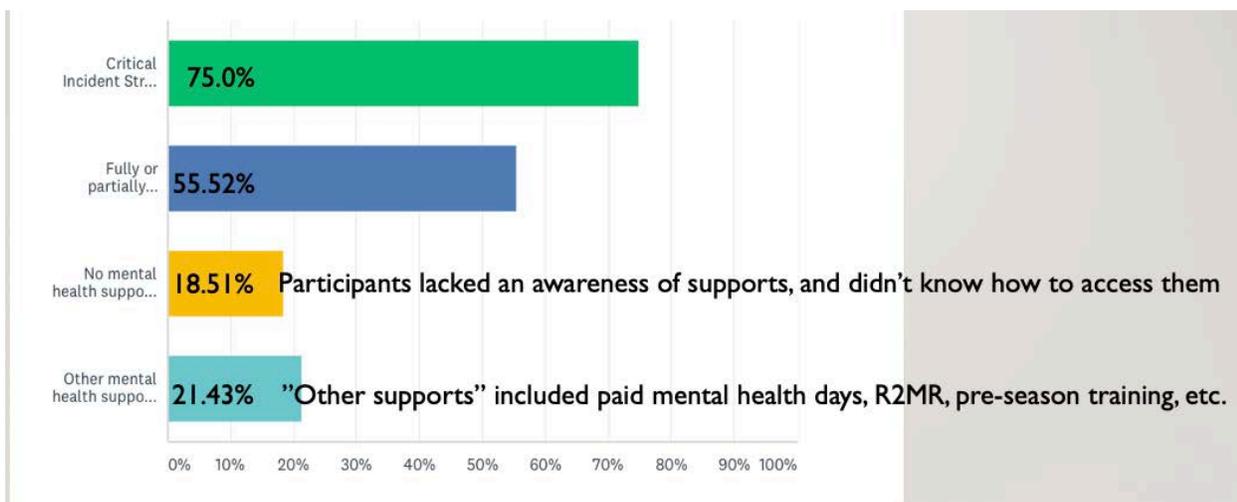


Figure 9 Mental health supports

Accessing Supports

Accessing mental health supports was spread between: 1) Critical Incident Stress Management; 2) Fully or partially funded mental health support; 3) No mental health supports, or 4) Other mental health supports (see Figure 11). Guides and avalanche workers indicated that barriers to mental health supports were an over-reliance on informal supports, such as peer-led debriefs with alcohol, and, cultural barriers within the profession. Participants explained:

“[Debriefs] led by people who don’t have appropriate training or background.”

“On paper-however I have rarely ever seen used...I think it’s more lip service and that after an event it’s usually us having multiple beers together in an informal debriefing.”

“Older guides I believe can have more impact, as are stereotyped as being emotional and have not been affected by these problems. By opening up about their struggles, older guides can be role models for younger ACMG members and other outdoor professionals.”

“I think many people do resort to drinking in this industry to deal with the stress and traumatic experience in the workplace as there is such a drinking culture in place so it would be pretty easy to disguise it as just ‘social drinking’.”

Mental health amongst minorities in the avalanche and guiding profession in Canada was markedly more negative. Previous suicidal thoughts/attempts were disclosed by 1 in 4 First Nations/Metis avalanche workers and guides, and by 1 in 3 non-binary genders. Females experience mental health challenges 6% more than males (see Appendix D: Percent of Demographic Experiencing Mental Health Challenges). Visible minorities; ACMG Ski and Mountain Guides; and, those aged 55–65 reported using alcohol more heavily than other demographics.

Comparative Statistics on Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession

Workplaces with access to high workplace stress (including trauma, and dangerous working conditions); inconsistent work schedule (shift work and disruption of family routine); isolation in the workplace; and, stressors related to gender imbalance are all listed as contributors to higher suicide rates per occupation (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2019). In Canada, 70% of all suicide deaths are amongst those between the ages of 30–64, and males are especially at risk in traditionally male-dominated professions (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2019). These findings are consistent with this study.

The connection between men’s employment and their mental health has been explored in depth over a span of 18 separate studies, and there are strong links between workplace stress, competition amongst males, and linking high performance to masculinity, which have consistently negative impacts on male mental health at work (Boettcher *et al*, 2019). Accessing mental health supports at work is also particularly challenging for men, as the vulnerabilities associated with ‘asking for help’ can be overwhelming, in particular in male-dominated work environments where social behaviours may reinforce stigma and shame (Seaton *et al*, 2018).

For women and other minorities in traditionally male-dominated workplaces, experiences of gender discrimination and harassment are more frequent, and there are links to higher prevalence of these experiences with workplace-induced PTSD (AFE, 2016). Researchers at Indiana University have found that ongoing exposure to the types of social behaviours associated with traditionally male-dominated workplaces lead to increased mental health challenges and other physical health concerns for women (Manago & Taylor, 2015). Suicide rates are also highly correlated with gender-based isolation at work (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2019).

Mental Health in the Avalanche and Guiding Profession Summary

There are known stressors present in the avalanche and guiding profession that are correlated with a higher prevalence of suicide and mental health challenges, consistent with other research findings (Centre for Suicide Prevention 2019; Boettcher *et al*, 2019; Seaton *et al*, 2018). The negative effects on women and non-gender conforming or gender fluid individuals

due to sexual harassment and gender discrimination compound which increases the stress load on already vulnerable individuals due to gender identity, who experience social isolation and increased stigma as a result of harassment and discrimination (Manago & Taylor, 2015). The cultural norms within the avalanche and guiding profession are similar to those in other research that have been shown to be persistent and effective barriers to facilitating a safe culture for requesting support for mental health challenges (Boettcher *et al*, 2019; Seaton *et al*, 2018).

The subsequent section explores recommendations for future action based on avalanche and guides recommendations for positive change in the avalanche and guiding profession.

Rising to the Challenge: Resilience and Wellbeing in the Guiding and Avalanche Profession

This section summarizes the recommendations made by guides and avalanche workers in this study towards positive change in the profession. Study participants themselves were invited to reflect and provide their ideal future, and action steps they recommend to achieve this ideal future. The power of leveraging collective imagination can transform stubborn organizational challenges, as the 'wisdom of the group' are invited to the table via collaborative problem-solving process facilitated by an Action Research process (Oinas-Kukkonen, 2008). Following the description of guide and avalanche worker recommendations, this study concludes with next steps based on lessons learned in organizational cultural change projects with traditionally male-dominated industries.

Insights from Guides and Avalanche Workers Towards a Resilient Future

Guides and avalanche workers shared their future goals for the profession. Diversity and inclusion goals, ranked from strongest in the data, were: 1) Equality of opportunity; 2) Inclusive and diverse culture; and, 3) Respectful work environment.

Equality of opportunity was explained as fostering an equal and barrier-free institutional, organizational, and social culture within the profession so as to allow merit-based competition for entry to the profession free from other bias, conscious or unconscious. Inclusive and diverse culture was explained as both fostering the beliefs, behaviours, and values of inclusivity, while also achieving diversity amongst industry leaders, mentors and senior guides. Respectful work environment was described as a health balance of appropriate humour and companionship, with a deep mutual respect for one another.

Guides and avalanche workers indicated that these goals were to be achieved following these recommended action steps:

1. More active mentorship and leadership from amongst minorities.
2. Active organizational and employer engagement via awareness raising, education and policy change.
3. Generational shift within industry leadership.

Interestingly, all demographics agreed that greater minority representation in leadership would benefit the profession as a whole. Male guides and avalanche workers tended to rely on top-down action to initiate change.

Goals for positive change related to mental health were, with strongest in the data first: 1) Open discussion about mental health in the profession; 2) Relevant and skilled support is readily available; and, 3) Structure the industry to prevent mental health crises.

These goals included a nuanced and gentle approach to dismantling stigma around mental health issues in the profession, and breaking the silence and shame surrounding fears of being seen as weak, or 'less than'. Relevant and skilled support was described as certified counselors or other mental health professionals, with access in a timely manner. Explanations showed a nuanced understanding that while current supports were well-intentioned, new and increasingly skilled supports were required to address participants concerns. Structuring the industry to prevent mental health crises was described in terms of policy changes, with some changes aligning more consistently across the data set. These are summarized in action steps, below.

Guides and avalanche workers indicated that these goals were to be achieved following these recommended action steps:

1. Reducing stigma by creating open dialogue about mental health.
2. Increase available mental health supports, especially in smaller operations.
 - a. Suggestions included facilitating more peer-to-peer supports; and, easier access to professional help.
3. Structural changes and policy change to prevent mental health crises from occurring.
 - a. Policy changes included fatigue management; reducing the use of alcohol at 'debriefs', and addressing the socialization of alcohol as a coping mechanism.

Guide and avalanche worker recommendations indicate where and how change will be most readily received within the industry. These indicate points of leverage, where the reflection process initiated by this study has resonated most amongst members. The ranked data provides key insights into how the most effective change could be achieved based on what behaviours and values are naturally ready to be transformed.

Study Recommendations Towards a Resilient Future

Cultural change related to diversity, inclusion and mental health is inherently challenging due to the complex adaptation of the web of beliefs, behaviours, and values that support it (Shanker, *et al*, 2015). These study recommendations are based on related research, guide and avalanche worker insights into desired future goals and actions, and, careful consideration of what industry association leadership may achieve.

As stated in Focus and Framing of this report, these recommendations are the point of departure from which industry association leadership retains autonomy for action or inaction, and researcher accountability for steering action or outcomes is foreclosed. This is to serve two goals: 1) To protect the autonomy of all industry associations; and, 2) To protect the ethical imperatives related to researcher responsibility when/if harassment and discrimination issues are revealed. It created a clear start and end to this project, leaving the choice to act on recommendations in the hands of industry leaders.

Based on findings in this study, the imperative to act to create cultural change is present. Diversity and inclusion challenges with exclusive cultural norms; sexual harassment and gender discrimination; and, known stressors that contribute to persistent mental health challenges, including suicide, amongst workers, all point to the need for intentional and timely action steps to facilitate cultural change.

This study recommends the following action steps, in sequential order, or concurrent:

1. Accept the existence of cultural norms that are creating measurable unintended negative outcomes for guides and avalanche workers related to diversity, inclusion and mental health. Fact-check as needed. Delay as little as possible.
2. Formalize a commitment to continued collaboration, inquiry, and mutual accountability across all industry associations relevant to these topics.
 - a. Consider issuing an industry-wide statement or declaration that summarizes this commitment, is consistent with brand messaging, and invites public accountability (see AFE, 2016; AMGA, 2019 in Appendix C).
3. Strategic planning to support collaborative, mutually accountable leadership.

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- a. Invite innovation by fostering an attitude of experimentation and willingness to discard outdated mental models.
- b. Consider a three-part approach to strategic planning:
 - i. **Support:** An external reporting structure to allow confidential reporting and mental health support for victims of discrimination, harassment, and those with acute mental health challenges (see Canadian Armed Forces).
 - ii. **Education and Awareness:** Commit to reforming industry training programs immediately to provide an intentional and insightful engagement with cultural norms that are causing measurable damage to worker wellbeing. Commit to training staff, instructors, and examiners.
Integrate these training concepts:
 - 1) Consent
 - 2) Unconscious bias
 - 3) Privilege (in all forms)
 - 4) Intersectionality
 - 5) Bystander effect
 - 6) Allyship
 - 7) Queen Bee / Tokenism
 - iii. **Accountability:** Consistent follow-through is key to continued buy-in and successful change. Introduce accountability mechanisms to support guides, avalanche workers, and employers.
 - 1) Consider revising the Standards of Conduct; Conduct Review process; and requisite Continuing Professional Development processes to capture these points of leverage for meaningful engagement on these issues.
 - 2) Consider specific accountability mechanisms for supervisors, instructors, examiners, and mentors engaged in formal mentorship programs.

4. Invite additional resources and extend industry networks to support innovation and change. This includes forming new relationships, and reforming existing relationships.
 - a. Consider international cooperation with like-minded organizations (see the AMGA's outline for action in Appendix C).
 - b. Consider WorkSafeBC; government and non-governmental organization sources of expertise.
 - c. Be humble. Asking for help acknowledges that this is a collective societal challenge, and recruits additional support.
5. Implement action steps incrementally, with ample opportunity for systematic feedback.
 - a. Consider consistent feedback mechanisms (e.g. surveys) in tandem with one-on-one conversations. Focus on measurable effects of action steps based on data.
6. Begin to keep consistent industry demographics, including reporting rates for harassment and discrimination. Commit to continuous improvement, and progress checks with mutual accountability.
 - a. Consider publishing the industry statistics annually on member-only sites.
7. Prevent burnout and compassion fatigue by consistent check-ins with other industry leaders. Consider engaging a leadership coach or mentor; and, seek out preventative mental health supports. Leading cultural change on these issues is complex, and often requires deep presence with members who may disclose trauma.
 - a. Consider creating a steering committee, and/or representative on each industry associations' Board of Directors, that is tasked specifically with diversity and inclusion issues to assist leaders in making informed and insightful leadership choices.

Conclusion

The Canadian avalanche and guiding profession is at a transformative stage in its cultural evolution. In this history and lifespan of organizations, there are very few moments as ripe for change as this present moment. Canadian social norms are rapidly transforming around diversity, inclusion and mental health. It is no longer an 'if', but a 'when' and 'how.' Our goal is that this report, and this data, equips you—the reader—with the information you need to make an informed, courageous, and compassionate leadership choice. The likelihood for successful cultural change within this industry in previously deep-rooted beliefs is strong.

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Appendix A

CONTRACT AGREEMENT

Pursuant to the contracting agreement, both parties agreed to be bound by the following terms and conditions.

NON-DISCLOSURE

In connection with the provision of the scope of work, each party, including sub-parties (the “Receiving Party”) acknowledges that, in the performance of this Agreement, it may come into possession of confidential and proprietary information of the other party (the “Disclosing Party”) and its clients. The Receiving Party will hold such confidential information in strictest confidence and agrees not to release it to any individual or entity, whether employee, subcontractor or subcontractor’s employee without prior consent from the Disclosing Party, save and except as may be required by law, in the pursuit of this Agreement, or regulatory requirements. As used herein, “confidential information” means all data, reports, financial statements, interpretations, forecasts, agreements and records and all other information, whether written, oral or otherwise, containing or otherwise reflecting information concerning the ACMG, CSGA, AND CAA, its affiliates and subsidiaries, which is not available to the general public.

Each party acknowledges and agrees that it shall only use the confidential information for the purposes for which it was provided under this Agreement and for no other purpose.

Each party shall be responsible for maintaining the security of such confidential information and for complying with all relevant legislation, regulations and laws, including the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) and/or applicable provincial privacy legislation.

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All original materials, data, computer code, specifications, discs and programs, either in written or in magnetic or electronic form, which are provided by Lotus Mountain Consulting Inc. to the Receiving Party or which are prepared or produced by Lotus Mountain Consulting Inc. specifically for and paid for by the Receiving Party under an order or under this Agreement shall be or become the sole property of the Customer. Except as provided in this paragraph, all other

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The Receiving Party will not, during the term of this Agreement and for a period of twelve (12) months after the termination of all statements of work, directly or indirectly solicit for employment or directly or indirectly employ any person who is an employee of Lotus Mountain Consulting Inc. or its permitted subcontractors and assignees.

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY

Except for gross negligence, either party will be liable to the other for any special, indirect, incidental or consequential damages of any type, including but not limited to lost profits or lost data, arising out of or in connection with this Agreement or the services, or arising out of the results or operation of any system resulting from implementation of any recommended plan or design, even if one or the other of us have been advised of the possibility of the damage, and even if one of us asserts or establishes a failure of essential purpose of any limited remedy provided in this Agreement. Except for gross negligence, under no circumstances will Lotus

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Mountain Consulting Inc. be liable to you for any amount in excess of the services fee under the applicable statement of work for the twelve-month period immediately preceding the action that gives rise to your claim. This limitation of liability applies to all types of legal theories, including contract, tort, professional liability, product liability, warranty, or anything else. Both parties agree to indemnify and save harmless the other only from losses suffered or incurred by either party as a result of or arising directly or indirectly out of or in connection with intentional misrepresentation, gross negligence or intentional misconduct by the other party or its subcontractors.

Appendix B

2019 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION SURVEY QUESTIONS

Appendix C

AMGA WEBSITE



Appendix D

